

OUTSIDES AND INSIDES: REIMAGINING AMERICAN CAPITALISM

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I

The writer is Ernest Hemingway; the characters are Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton, Americans in Europe. Jake and Bill have been sleeping off the effects of two bottles of wine.

“I had a lovely dream,” Bill said. “I don’t remember what it was about, but it was a lovely dream.”

“I don’t think I dreamt.”

“You ought to dream,” Bill said. “All our biggest business men have been dreamers. Look at Ford. Look at President Coolidge. Look at Rockefeller. . . .” (Hemingway 1926, 124)

The episode is a typical Hemingway control device. If readers are tempted to deny all sympathy to his drunken, feckless, ostensibly unambitious characters, he can control the unfavorable response by contrasting them with people even less worthy of sympathy—people, in this case, like Henry Ford, Calvin Coolidge, and John D. Rockefeller.

This particular control device involves a contest of perspectives, a contest of inside versus outside views. Would you prefer to see America from the point of view of an insider who shares the nation’s traditional dreams of capitalist success? You are free to do so, if you wish. You are free to idolize the alleged visionaries of big business, and business-friendly government. But if the image of Ford the dreamer fails to excite your own dreams, perhaps you’d rather stand on the outside, with Hemingway’s Americans abroad. These are people who, whatever their flaws, can detect the layer of cheap paint on the heartland’s idols. Jake may not admit to “dreams,” but he and Bill do share a vision, a vision of America. It is America seen for what it is, because it is America seen from the proper

vantage point—as far away as possible.

Even in 1926, when Hemingway's novel was published, the contest of perspectives was already a contest of clichés. The conception of Ford, Coolidge, and Rockefeller as American visionaries was so obviously a cliché that Hemingway could get his ironic effect just by quoting it. To be scorned, the conception had only to be introduced. But the outsider's scorn for capitalism's big "dreams" was also a cliché, also something that Hemingway, that master of rhetorical efficiency, knew his readers would immediately assimilate. All intelligent people knew what to think about American business. Anyone who paused over Bill's sarcasm at the expense of American business would not be the kind of reader whom this book wants.

The message is obvious, the irony too easy to require elaboration: the real outsiders are the benighted souls still locked inside America's characteristically capitalist illusions; the real insiders are the people who enjoy the greatest spiritual distance from all that. Anybody who cannot see things from the viewpoint of the intellectual insiders should be embarrassed to admit it.

And what I have just written is a cliché, too—a cliché of literary history. Nobody needs to be told that a distinctive feature of twentieth-century American literature is its virtually complete refusal of the capitalist vision that is popularly identified with the American dream. Compared to other American writers, Stephen Vincent Benét was extraordinarily even-handed when he described the capitalist industrial system as both "the monster and the sleeping queen" and advised people to say neither

"It is a deadly magic and accursed,"

Nor "It is blest," but only "It is here." (Benét 1928, 377)

Few twentieth-century American authors have been so charitable to capitalism or any of its manifestations.

Literary escape routes from capitalism are also too familiar to require much exemplification. Capitalism can be dismissed, as Bill Gorton dismisses it, as a bad or boring dream; or it can be studied, in an attempt to understand and (if possible) to exorcise its evil. Such study has tended to be dominated by an interest either in broad moral problems or in immediate social issues; it has seldom been informed by a sound or even a coherent vision of basic economic processes. As economist Donald McCloskey (1994) observes, intellectuals of the past 100 years have

seldom "been ashamed to be ignorant about the economy or economics" (190). Fearing mental assimilation by a system from which they have often benefited in a material way, literary intellectuals in particular have preserved their spiritual distance either by reading no economics at all or by reading only the kind that puts capitalism in a remote and unflattering light.

The hostile literary inspection of capitalism has produced some powerful (though peculiar) imagery, much of it variations on "a deadly magic and accursed." Capitalism is represented as deadly in its power to exploit, accursed in its power to degrade, magical in its ability to combine apparent contradictions. There is something weirdly paradoxical about it. From the point of view of the American literary imagination (and imaginative social science, such as that of the renowned Thorstein Veblen¹), capitalism is an anarchic system that is also oppressively controlling.

Here is another fragment of conversation from an American novel. Once again, the judgment expressed is assumed to require no argument. But now the speaker is a businessman:

"You know, my business isn't distributing roofing—it's principally keeping my competitors from distributing roofing. Same with you. All we do is cut each other's throats and make the public pay for it!"

Make no mistake—these throat-cutters are not gangsters; they are small-town merchants and pillars of their communities. If capitalist society is a jungle, it is a mighty dull one: the passage that I just quoted is from *Babbitt*, Sinclair Lewis's satire of heartland conformity (Lewis 1922, 64).²

The image of capitalism as an uncanny combination of the desperate and the dull has dominated American literature and literary criticism for well over a century, unfazed by the growth of economic knowledge or the wholesale collapse of noncapitalist economic systems. The outlines of the image have changed remarkably little, whatever literary method has been used to communicate them. From William Dean Howells to Thomas Pynchon, Upton Sinclair to Allen Ginsberg, Henry James to the latest academic essay on "cultural studies," the rumor of a deadly magic has survived, as indispensable to American intellectuals' celebration of their own spiritual life as a jack-o'-lantern is to Hallowe'en.

The task of the few literary intellectuals who have favored free

enterprise has been to reimagine the system in a fundamental way, reversing a perspective that has already been reversed. When America's intellectual insiders view American capitalism from a hostile distance, seeing its dreams as nightmares, a radically revised conception can be expected to come only from the viewpoint of the intellectual outsiders.

Outsiders, of course, are often best equipped to see a familiar object freshly and intensely. During the 1930's and early 1940's, when sympathy for economic and social individualism reached its lowest ebb with American intellectuals, its most vigorous defenders—such people as Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Isabel Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane, Albert Jay Nock, and Ayn Rand—were all, in some important respect, outsiders.

Of the six people just mentioned, all of whom published important defenses of individualism during the second world war, only two (Nock and Lane) began life in the United States (one, Hayek, had yet to take up residence here); none was part of any fashionable, let alone official, stratum of American society; none was by profession a businessman or corporate officer; none was a politician; only two (Hayek and Mises) were economists.³ The rest were literary folk—critics, novelists, essayists. Five of the six were extreme individualists, in their lives as well as their works. None felt any temptation to defend free enterprise by adopting the perspective of any of the popularly mythologized exponents of “business.”

Isabel Paterson's strictures on Henry Ford can stand as an example of their views (Paterson 1934, 181-82). According to her, what Ford lacked was precisely the quality of “vision.” He “would have been thoroughly in place running the local hardware store. . . . He could have got on happily with a limited stock of borrowed ideas that he did not comprehend.” Ford, as Paterson saw him, was a great industrialist whose imagination could not cope with a great industrial system. When he made money, he invested it in Greenfield Village, a recreated nineteenth-century town that gave material form to the heartland's clichés about its past: “Being what he was, he had no use for money except to buy little red school houses and old grindstones for a museum.” Paterson found it “appalling” that Ford's mind should be linked to the nation's great capitalist “stream of power.” She had about as much respect as Bill Gorton for Ford's visionary qualities. From her point of view, his “vision” was backward, borrowed, an obvious cliché.⁴ But she did not think that Ford's capitalist dream was defective because of his inability to comprehend the backward nature of capitalism itself; she thought that it was defective because of his inability to come to terms with capitalism's

dynamic, revolutionary energy.

And there were “capitalists” much blinder than Ford; there were people like Vincent Astor who used the government to subsidize and “save” them, even if their salvation meant the ruin of free enterprise. “It was the non-productive rich,” Paterson charged, “who first went on the dole.” Such “capitalists” did what capitalism was always being accused of doing; they promoted a class system. They did so by using the state to exploit the producers for the benefit of the nonproducers. The important distinction was not between “capital” and “labor”; it was between a productive class, which included many “working people,” and a nonproductive, governing class, which included many “capitalists” (Paterson [1943] 1993, 231-32).⁵

This view was common among the literary defenders of capitalism in the 1930's and 1940's, people who were generally sceptical about modern capitalists' ability to distance themselves, even defensively, from the modern state. The fortunes of the Liberty League, the corporate leadership's most formidable attempt to articulate a defense against the New Deal, indicated that the scepticism was justified. The League, which began with an attempt to win endorsement from Franklin Roosevelt himself, remained vigorous for just two years, then was crushed by his triumphant reelection in 1936. In opposition to the League, Roosevelt called attention to the fact that many businessmen who were now criticizing government intervention in the economy had come running to the government for help not too many years before. Apparently, they didn't believe in laissez-faire capitalism any more than he did. The Liberty League's support was perhaps fairly broad, but it was thin. In a good year, 1935, about half its financial support came from only 14 people, with about 30% coming from one family, the du Ponts (Wolfskill 1962, 27-28, 33-34, 147, 217-18, 63). Friends of the New Deal worked to increase the distance, real and perceived, between the League and the nation's mental mainstream. Roosevelt's assistant Harry Hopkins spoke for the emerging majority of opinion-leaders when he asserted that “the League may be composed of right-thinking people but they are so far Right that no one will ever find them” (Wolfskill 1962, 33). After 1936, nobody ever did find them.

But if the Liberty League ended up on the ideological outside, what shall we say of a handful of literary intellectuals whose defense of individualism was still more determinedly individual? And the most pronounced outsider of all was Ayn Rand.

II

This intransigent exponent of American free enterprise—and, as some have called it, the American Protestant ethic—was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, the atheist daughter of a Jewish family. In 1926, when she was 21 years old, she arrived on this continent alone and nearly penniless. She tried to write for the movies. She held a succession of menial jobs—waitress, envelope stuffer, (unsuccessful) saleswoman, movie extra, wardrobe clerk. Fearful of being thrown out of the United States when her temporary visa expired, she married an American citizen, an unsuccessful actor (Branden 1986, 93).⁶ In 1936, she published a commercially unsuccessful novel, *We the Living*, a study of life in Soviet Russia. In late 1942, she was eating 45-cent meals in a cafeteria on Lexington Avenue (183) while struggling to finish a second long novel, a novel for which she had great difficulty getting and keeping a contract.

A couple of years before, she had been delivering a political speech when a heckler asked, "Who the hell are you to talk about America? You're a foreigner!" She replied, "That's right. I *chose* to be an American. What did *you* do, besides having been born?" (161). America was best appreciated from the point of view of an outsider who could choose or reject it. But it took a long time for Rand to determine if she was as welcome to America as America was welcome to her. Hard times helped her to retain the outsider's perspective.

But they weren't the only reason why she retained it. Another reason was her passionate concern with perspective itself. She loved the artist's ability to make life look interesting by changing the point of view from which it is seen. She loved antithesis, irony, paradox, parody, reversal. She loved the freedom that a spiritual outsider has to explore what happens when normal perspectives are inverted.

In 1940, she wrote a short story called "The Simplest Thing in the World," which is about the problems of a literary outsider like herself; the story (naturally) remained unpublished for many years. Its protagonist, Henry Dorn, is a commercially unsuccessful novelist who is trying to force himself to write the kind of clichés that might make him some money. He can't. His mind keeps wanting to make things interesting. He keeps coming up with story ideas, only to discard them because he thinks they are too interesting to sell. This story about the problems of story-telling is important in several ways, but what I want to notice here is Rand's emphasis on the reversal of perspectives. Dorn starts with clichés, but he stands them on their heads and shakes them until they start to look interesting. A better way to put this might be to say that every story he

invents-proposes to stand its *readers* on their heads until they begin to see a more interesting vision of the world. His final idea is a mystery story in which a man is murdered by a blackmailer for threatening to expose him, but both the blackmail and the murder are fully justified—when seen from an unorthodox standpoint. The villains of this story would be "nice people, pillars of society, liked, admired and respected"; while "the hero—no, the murderer—no, the *hero*" is "just a hard, lonely kind of outcast." Writing from the outcast's point of view, Dorn would be able to show that there is good reason for his "crimes." "Oh, what a story!" But Dorn gives up on it; it could never be "a good commercial story" (Rand 1969, 190, 178).⁷

Dorn's problem with reaching the popular audience was not always to be Ayn Rand's. The novel for which she finally secured a contract—*The Fountainhead*—was published in 1943, and it became immensely successful.

The Fountainhead, as everyone knows, is the story of Howard Roark, an architect who refuses to compromise the individuality of his imagination despite all the threats and temptations of fashionable and official American society. The book is an attack on much that American society "liked, admired and respected," but it is an argument in fervent support of that society's capitalist framework. The argument is not allowed to remain implicit. The novel's climax is a speech in which Roark defends American free enterprise as the only system congenial to individual freedom and "the only pattern for proper co-operation among men" (Rand 1943, 740). *The Fountainhead* does more than defend the American system; it re-envisioned it, leaving no cliché or conventional perspective unreversed.

One of the great clichés of American literature is the idea that capitalism induces conformity. It is a cliché derived from capitalism's long, though imprecise, association with many kinds of quasi-official cultural practices and values. In small-town America, it is never an insult to say that someone is "businesslike"; the local banker is also, very probably, a deacon in the church, a trustee of the old folks' home, and a member of every other cultural conservancy and moral dictatorship. At least that's the way American folkways are traditionally made to look in novels. But Rand inverts the cliché of capitalist conformity. She reimagines capitalism as a set of ideas and practices best understood by such eccentric people as Roark, a free enterpriser who cares nothing whatever about small-town morality or (to climb a few rungs up on the social ladder) about what is oxymoronically called "the corporate culture." As Rand sees him, Roark

the “outsider” is the essence of the capitalist system. The true outsiders are the people who never take advantage of capitalism’s open invitation to a creative, if eccentric, life—people who prefer to replace its loose pattern of cooperation with systems of dominance based on force or status or servile public opinion.

In *The Fountainhead*, the insider-outsider conflict is not political in the narrow sense. It is intellectual and cultural; it is a matter of conflicting visions. Roark is a visionary artist, and his major opposition comes from would-be cultural authorities, not government officials. His opponents are artists, critics, journalists, advocates of social and moral causes, and, of course, status- or power-seeking businessmen, whose failure of vision manifested itself all too clearly to Rand and the other radical individualists of her generation.

Rand summarizes these alleged capitalists in the grotesque figure of Mitchell Layton, who “had inherited a quarter of a billion dollars and had spent the thirty-three years of his life trying to make amends for it” (599). Layton “could not forgive his country” because it had given him money

and then refused to grant him an equal amount of reverence. People would not take his views on art, literature, history, biology, sociology and metaphysics as they took his checks. He complained that people identified him with his money too much; he hated them because they did not identify him enough. (602)

As a result, she says, Layton “pouted with his whole body” (599).

People like Layton are clearly *in* the marketplace—including the marketplace of “views”—but they are not *of* it. These apparent insiders are embarrassingly out of place amid the market’s varied and spontaneous judgments of value; they offer intellectual commodities that people have to be forced (or, in an amusing reversal of the customary relationship between buyer and seller, *paid*) to buy.

But Roark, the apparent outsider, is quite comfortable with market mechanisms, despite the scorn he has to endure from the cultural authorities who influence most of the big architectural commissions. His own commissions come “from different states, from unexpected parts of the country,” from individuals of modest means who happen to have seen his buildings and have had the imagination to appreciate them. The market for his products is “unpredictable” but reasonably efficient (549). It is

neither conformist nor predatory. It allows even an eccentric individualist like Roark to succeed. Roark does not command his market, but neither is he coerced by it.

Artists and critics have often accepted the Marxist (but by no means wholly Marxist) cliché of “commodification,” the idea that capitalism necessarily distorts artistic values by turning them into commodities. Roark inverts the cliché, and cancels it, by showing that artists can use “commodification” for their own purposes. If they have the personal integrity to pursue those purposes, capitalism will provide the framework in which they can succeed. “I don’t intend to build in order to have clients,” Roark says. “I intend to have clients in order to build” (20). He accomplishes his intention. His life is not without difficulty, to say the least. But even personal integrity can have an economic value. By refusing to pander to his clients’ tastes, he preserves the artistic vision that differentiates him from his competitors and gives him an edge with the appropriate audience. He doesn’t need everyone in the world to appreciate his vision; he needs only a few clients who are willing to pay the price of exercising their own judgment and indulging their own taste. The people who are willing to pay this price are well able to distinguish Roark’s work in the marketplace, and he reciprocates by accepting even small commissions, on his way to receiving great ones. He and the clients who understand him are the real insiders of the capitalist system; they get what they want, at a price they are willing to pay. And they never pout.

The shift of perspective from apparent outside to real inside, and the reversal of ideas that accompanies this shift, is essential to Rand’s vision of America. The shift of perspective affects how most things in *The Fountainhead* look and feel. It gives Rand a way of making Manhattan, the economic center of the nation, look like a scene of meaningful choice and conflict and not, as various clichés would have it, like an anarchy of meaningless competition.

The fundamental conflict is not about dollars and cents, material things; it is a conflict between two visions of life, each of which has its characteristic material symbols and embodiments. What you see first, on Rand’s Manhattan skyline, is the embodiment of a vision of status and control. That skyline, as she imagines it, is dominated by something called the Frink National Bank Building, the symbolic capitol of the social and financial insiders. It towers above the shums, an image of oppressive social stratification if you ever saw one:

The Frink National Bank Building rose over Lower Manhattan, and its long shadow moved, as the sun traveled over the sky, like a huge clock hand across grimy tenements. (39)

The Frink Building is a work of sheer ostentation, designed to give those who view it from afar a firm impression of the superiority of those who had it built. Its commercial efficiency (if any) does not invite inspection. And it is probably not by inadvertence that Rand makes it a *national bank* building. Here commerce is associated with the authority of the state, and the artistic style is predictably imperial. It is the style of the Roman empire: heavy, external, preoccupied with power. What is "artistic" about the Frink National Bank Building is the status-conscious ornaments on its outside walls, which display

the entire history of Roman art in well-chosen specimens; for a long time it had been considered the best building of the city, because no other structure could boast a single Classical item which it did not possess. (39)

The Frink Building projects a pathological fear of everything original and individual. From Rand's point of view, and Roark's, its hollow classicism is utterly out of place in twentieth-century, capitalist America.⁸ It is the alien style of a governing class.

But hidden away in the working heart of the financial district is the Dana Building, the production of Roark's mentor Henry Cameron, an eccentric and despised architectural outsider. The Dana Building is

some stories lower and without any prestige whatever. . . . It had no . . . ornament to offer. It displayed nothing but the precision of its sharp angles, the modeling of its planes, the long streaks of its windows like streams of ice running down from the roof to the pavements. . . . The tenants of the Dana Building said that they would not exchange it for any structure on earth; they appreciated the light, the air, the beautiful logic of the plan in their halls and offices. But the tenants of the Dana Building were not numerous; no prominent man wished his business to be located in a

building that looked "like a warehouse." (39)

The Dana Building is resented because it reminds people of economic activity; it looks like a warehouse. It means business, unlike the Frink Building, which culminates in a replica of Hadrian's Mausoleum—ancient, kingly, aggressively uneconomic. To the man of "business" who stands at his own imagined pinnacle of social prominence, the Dana Building is an unwelcome reminder of the merely capitalist way of life.

Rand's readers are invited to choose between these buildings. When they do so, they choose not just an architectural but a social vision. The architectural contrast insinuates the class theory that Rand shared with the other individualist thinkers of her time. They believed that alliances of commerce with power result in the fixed social stratification that Rand embodies in the arrogance of the Frink National Bank. They believed that a really individualist economy tended to assist social mobility and repress the spirit of class. In the metaphor of the Dana Building, such an economy has "no ornament to offer."

Notice what Rand does with visual perspective in these passages. The reader is first invited to view Manhattan from the outside and above, then to view it from the inside and below, from the business end of the city. The eye leaves Hadrian's Mausoleum, drops "some stories lower" to take in the Dana Building, then finds itself at street level, where a stranger to the city, a literal outsider, would probably encounter that structure. From the point of view of such an outsider, the Dana Building's economically functional appearance can be enjoyed as a kind of miracle:

New Yorkers seldom looked at the Dana Building. Sometimes, a rare country visitor would come upon it unexpectedly in the moonlight and stop and wonder from what dream that vision had come. But such visitors were rare. (39)

The country visitor finds his way inside the apparent jumble of buildings and achieves an organizing vision, instinct with values.

Rand's central, favorably presented characters are all outsiders who travel, in roughly this way, to the real inside of things. Roark is a young man who comes from the country, from "somewhere in Ohio," and "work[s] his way east, to the great cities" (20). Roark's friend Gail

Wynand works his way up from Hell's Kitchen, the social outside of Manhattan itself, and creates a communications empire that is part of the city's central nervous system. Dominique Francon is a psychological outsider, alienated from her origins in a social elite that is without substantial values; when she joins Roark as his lover and accomplice, she works her way out of alienation and into a connection with society's real creative force.

These characters retain an intellectually distanced point of view. But distance gives them the capacity to see organizing principles and patterns that lifelong social insiders cannot discern, such patterns as Roark elucidates in his climactic speech. At a still more distant vantage point stands the author who sees and moves these characters. Her goal is to make them self-conscious insiders of the capitalist system so that she can use their eyes to reveal both the principles on which it operates and the imaginative deficiencies of "insiders" like Mitchell Layton.

Rand is well aware of the ironies involved in this shift of perspective. She heightens the sense of irony by choosing Ellsworth Toohey as her greatest representative of the anticapitalist mentality. Toohey is a fashionable intellectual, a confidant both of the plutocrats and of the radicals who would like to expropriate their wealth. Those groups are not mutually exclusive; Toohey's war against economic individualism is supported by some of the very people who profit from the system—spiritual Frink Buildings all: "Billy Shultz of Vimo Flakes, Bud Harper of Toddler Togs, and . . . hell, you know them all, they're all your friends, our bunch, the liberal businessmen" (605). Toohey's ability to prey on their guilt, their vanity, their desire for power, or their sheer complacency exposes the weaknesses of prestige "capitalism."

Just as that kind of "capitalism" parodies the real thing, so Toohey's intellectual enterprise parodies Rand's. He shares her taste for irony and paradox; he enjoys reversing clichés (406); he specializes in reversing perspectives. Like his creator, he is a psychological outsider who offers an alternative vision of society and of the artist's social role. Speaking, like Rand, as a critic of architecture, he calls on builders to "pause and to redefine [their] position in society." He incites them to a "new, broader, higher perspective." He challenges them to "organize . . . a nobler dream" (262). He is distinguished, like his creator, by his perspective and perceptions. "I *must* be what I am," he tells Dominique, "precisely because of what I see" (281).

Toohey observes the world from a point of view that is distant enough to let him know how interesting, and how crucial, one's point of

view can be. His ambition as a writer is to change other people's points of view and, in so doing, to change the values that they impute to facts. What is important, he explains, is the production of a collectivist perspective:

When the fact that one is a total nonentity who's done nothing more outstanding than eating, sleeping and chatting with neighbors becomes a fact worthy of pride, of announcement to the world and of diligent study by millions of readers—the fact that one has built a cathedral becomes unrecordable and unannounceable. (504-5)

It's all, he continues in this postmodern vein, "a matter of perspectives and relativity" (505). Of course, Rand does not believe that reality itself is a matter of "relativity," or that all perspectives are created equal. But Toohey's parody of his author derives much of its vitality from the fact that she, like Toohey, understands the intellectual impact of a changed perspective.

In the marketplace of ideas, perspectives themselves are objects of choice, as Toohey remarks to Dominique while they stand looking out over the lights of New York. One can choose, he says, to regard the "sublime achievement" of the city's builders either as a source of "gratitude and brotherhood" or as a source of self-hatred and envy (300). He has chosen the second perspective. The "dream" that he hopes to "organize" is that of an America in which there are no more sublime achievements and no more markets for ideas—or anything else.

Toohey tries to realize this dream by means of a parody of market activity. He tells a complacent businessman, "I . . . play the stock market of the spirit. And I sell short" (323). The market, as Rand sees it, is protected by essentially spiritual conceptions of the individual and his or her rights. No one *has* to buy these conceptions; no one *has* to recognize their value. In a time of changing perspectives, values fluctuate, and Toohey is prepared to profit from their fluctuation, using the market of ideas to destroy the idea of freedom and individuality that is essential to all markets. Implicit in his metaphor of "the stock market of the spirit" is the ancient conception of the buying and selling, not of material goods, but of souls.

Most of the people whom Toohey encounters, including the "smug, boorish businessman" into whose ear he pours the stock-market metaphor, are too imaginatively deficient to see such sinister implications.

They live inside the capitalist system, but they understand neither the marketplace nor Toohey's peculiar market operations. They cannot see that his mission is to subvert the productive society that he envies and hates.

A brief episode places the reader at the heart of this problem. After an evening spent at Mitchell Layton's, chummily discussing "the brute competition of our capitalistic system," Toohey goes for a walk. He wanders, like a country visitor, through Manhattan, the densely meaningful center of the system. He inspects its architecture, which represents to him the near-suicidal naiveté of a capitalist society that has become complacently conservative:

The streets of the city lay gravely empty around him, and the dark masses of the buildings rose to the sky, confident and unprotected. . . .

He stopped in the middle of a silent street, threw his head back and laughed aloud, looking at the tops of skyscrapers.

A policeman tapped him on the shoulder, asking: "Well, Mister?"

Toohey saw buttons and blue cloth tight over a broad chest, a stolid face, hard and patient; a man as set and dependable as the buildings around them.

"Doing your duty, officer?" Toohey asked, the echoes of laughter like jerks in his voice. "Protecting law and order and decency and human lives?" The policeman scratched the back of his head. "You ought to arrest me, officer."

Naturally, the cop just tells Toohey to "run along" (606-7). Readers, too, would be inclined to dismiss him in just that way, if Rand had not enabled them to follow him into the heart of the capitalist order and to grasp the ironic significance of his position there.⁹ He is an outsider who understands and even appreciates the system, and he is working from the inside to destroy it.

Rand's other strong outsiders are meant to view matters from her point of view, not Toohey's. There is no question of their permanently mistaking a parody of vision for the reality. But they do not see as far into the heart of things as she does, at least not right away.

Dominique sees the world as a spiritual marketplace where

people will ultimately choose Toohey's ideas over Roark's—cheap goods over costly. Without liking the idea for a moment, she believes that individualism is doomed by history and human weakness. Gail Wynand imagines that America is run by power and by money used as a tool of power. He believes that individual choice can always be coerced or subverted. Like Toohey, he parodies market mechanisms by trying to buy and sell the individual spirit. Wynand is by no means a collectivist, but his contempt for other people's weaknesses leads him to embrace an essentially collectivist belief in the calculability and malleability of individual choice.

Rand's goal is to change the perspective of these characters and move them toward the inside of her own intellectual world. The example of Roark provides the other characters with a vehicle for change. Roark's friends learn from him that individuality is not, finally, subject to power, and that individuals of integrity can find support in the diverse judgments represented in an open market. This is a surprise to Wynand, who wonders at the fact that Roark relies on the marketplace and refuses to seek power. His own "judgment and experience," he tells Roark, lead him to believe that with this attitude Roark should never have been able to achieve anything. "You should have remained in the gutter. But you haven't" (593).

Roark's friends learn something from Toohey, also. They discover the exact relationship between complacent capitalism and the internal forces that endanger it. Wynand's capitalistic enterprise, the New York *Banner*, is the principal outlet for Toohey's attacks on capitalism. But when Dominique suggests to Wynand that Toohey represents "the core of evil" and that he should be fired, Wynand scoffs at the idea; he lacks the perspective to see what she claims is "glaringly evident" (537). He has never taken the supposedly powerless Toohey seriously. He has run Toohey's collectivist musings in his newspaper because, as he believes, Toohey is "the kind that makes money for me" (536). But Toohey's ideas, though false, prove stronger than Wynand's political and economic power; they destroy Wynand's control over his own paper. In the end, Wynand is forced to recognize that he has been Toohey's unwitting ally. The cynical businessman fails, while Roark, the supposedly impractical idealist, survives and prospers.

Still, even Roark takes a long time to imagine the nature and significance of his opposition. He does not understand the kind of anti-individualist sentiment that could embody itself in Toohey's

destructiveness. He has too much "innocence" to understand it. "It's something I wonder about once in a while," he says (352-53). Not until the speech that he delivers 20 pages from the end of the novel does he elaborate his political and economic principles and contrast them with those represented by Toohey.

When he begins to speak, Roark seems more remote than ever from the inside of American society. He is on trial in a court of law. He is charged with the commission of a bizarre crime against state property—the destruction of a (not yet occupied) housing project for which he himself had drawn the plans. The facts are clear; Roark dynamited Cortlandt Homes. But he offers his jury the opportunity to choose a new perspective on the facts. He explains his motives so that his audience can see him from the inside and know him as (properly regarded) an insider. He emphasizes the importance of the fact that his contract to design Cortlandt was violated and that the project itself was ruined by collectively produced revisions of his work. He argues that his decision to destroy Cortlandt can be justified by individualist principles that are rooted in the American tradition. He explains the economic and political implications of those principles.

The jury, randomly selected from the populace at large, reacts by acquitting him—although he has practically dared it to convict. At the start of his speech, Roark associates himself with a long line of individualist outsiders who suffered fatal conflicts of perspective with their fellow men:

Thousands of years ago, the first man discovered how to make fire. He was probably burned at the stake he had taught his brothers to light. (736)

Roark's jury has the chance to repeat that episode. Instead, it decides to operate inside the American tradition that he has identified. The jury frees him, and it does so without even a pretense of deliberation. The verdict is the spontaneous reimagination—the spontaneous intellectual order, neither anarchic nor controlled—that results when twelve individuals visit the marketplace of ideas and decide to lay in fresh supplies of ideological individualism. The verdict confirms the idea that economic and political liberty still has value for Americans, that Roark is not alone in his individualism.

A verdict of this kind is an appropriate prelude to *The Fountainhead's* final scene, which presents a more expansive image of order achieved in liberty. In that scene, the skyline of lower Manhattan,

formerly dominated by the Frink National Bank, reorganizes itself around the Wynand Building, Roark's imaginative construction, and around the figure of Roark himself, who stands at the top of the unfinished building, directing its completion. This last scene in the novel parallels the first. There also Roark stood poised in the center of a landscape, which seemed to organize itself around him. He stood at the edge of a cliff, getting ready to leap into the water of a lake below; the water mirrored the sky, and "the world seemed suspended in space, an island floating on nothing, anchored to the feet of the man on the cliff" (9). Here at the start Rand prepares for the novel's vertiginous end, where the reader, having arrived at the top of the Wynand Building, sees "only the ocean and the sky and the figure of Howard Roark" (754). In the first scene, Roark too prepares for the last. He looks around the landscape, imagining the ways in which he can use its resources to build a structure that will rise "against the sky." Then he jumps from the cliff, diving "down into the sky below." It is as if he had already risen above the world—and he has, by means of his imagination (10). In both scenes, Rand frees her visual images from normal perspective, dramatizing Roark's own startling freedom from normal perspective.

But something changes. At the end of the book, Roark is no longer a seemingly isolated young man, alone with his thoughts in the depths of the countryside. He is just as individual as he was at the beginning, but now he stands at the heart of his country's economic life, building its most conspicuous symbol, with the glad permission of his fellow citizens. Of the many inversions of perspective and expectation that are suggested by Roark's dive into the sky, this is one of the most remarkable.

III

Unquestionably, *The Fountainhead* is a strong reimagination of the role of the individual in the capitalist system. It is interesting, however, that Rand's focus in this novel is more on the psychology than on the economics of individualism, more on the daring of Roark's dive than on the varied features of the surrounding landscape. *The Fountainhead's* most explicit and exact image of a free economy is probably its comparison between the backing that Roark gets from his spontaneously attracted clients and "an underground stream flow[ing] through the country and [breaking] out in sudden springs that shot to the surface at random, in unpredictable places" (549). This is what economic choices look like from

Roark's distanced point of view. He sees them as hidden and mysterious, though ultimately explicable once their pattern is grasped.

Rand presents a more elaborately economic reimagination of America in *Atlas Shrugged*, which she began soon after publication of *The Fountainhead*. During the early 1940's, she had become involved in political action on behalf of capitalism. She campaigned for Wendell Willkie (whom she did not consider a perfect presidential candidate, but much better than Roosevelt), and afterwards she attempted to organize a group of intellectual activists to support the capitalist cause. She also became a close friend of Isabel Paterson, who was devoting her efforts to defining and defending the American capitalist system.¹⁰ This all seems to have contributed to the deepening and broadening of Rand's literary concern with the economic aspects of individualism.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, the salient image of economic process is not an underground stream but the great system of railroads that visibly unites the country. Taggart Transcontinental, the country's leading railroad, is America's central mechanism of production and exchange, the means by which America's millions of daily economic decisions are implemented and related. In one passage in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand (1957) characterizes a physical scene as the "visual form" of an intellectual principle (1096). Taggart Transcontinental is the visual form of Rand's whole argument about free enterprise as a "pattern for co-operation." The leading characters of *Atlas Shrugged* are all implicated, in one way or another, in the railroad's operations; as long as it lasts, it is a pattern for their cooperation.

America is now seen through the eyes of people who are emphatically insiders by occupation, the people who run the businesses that are central and integral to the nation. Their imaginations are fully engaged by the economic system. The outsiders—intellectual "reformers," government officials, businessmen who are much more comfortable with lobbying for government favors than with trying to market a product, and a public that puts up with all of the above—cannot even see the system:

From the slopes of Colorado, freight trains rolled down the track of the Phoenix-Durango, north to Wyoming and the main line of Taggart Transcontinental, south to New Mexico and the main line of the Atlantic Southern. Strings of tank cars went radiating in all directions from the Wyatt oil fields to industries in distant states. No one spoke about them. To the knowledge of the public,

the tank trains moved as silently as rays and, as rays, they were noticed only when they became the light of electric lamps, the heat of furnaces, the movement of motors; but as such, they were not noticed, they were taken for granted. (227)

The imaginative difference between insiders and outsiders seems plain. But Rand's interest in the perspective of the insiders allows her to make a more unsettling argument of perspectives than she made in *The Fountainhead*. The conflict faced by the insiders in *Atlas* results from their temptation to step outside their accustomed roles and reimagine the system in which they have been working. John Galt, "the son of a gas-station mechanic" (786), a physicist and renegade inventor of electrical machinery, invites them all to stop supporting the rest of the country and let its economic system smash on the collectivist rocks toward which it has long been drifting. One by one, the insiders accept his invitation. They leave their jobs, they head for the outside, and in so doing they turn the economic life of the nation inside out.

The rationale for Galt's proposal involves an inversion and cancellation of the familiar assumption that capitalists live on profits extorted from the workers. This cliché originates in the time-hallowed labor theory of value, which long predated its familiar Marxist formulation. The economic theory to which Rand adheres, a theory that is basic to any real understanding of the capitalist system, is much more modern than the labor theory of value, so modern, in fact, that it remains news to most literary intellectuals.¹¹ It emphasizes the fact that labor is ordinarily valueless without such factors as investment, invention, and accurate understanding of the marketplace—the factors that Rand's central characters contribute to the American economy. Without the capitalists' perspective, and the capitalists' profits, the workers' labor would have very little value to be "exploited."

Such ideas are certainly no news to Rand's heroes. But they have a hard time yielding to the suggestion that they act on the implications of those ideas. To act on them means the destruction of everything that the capitalists have devoted their lives to building. Galt's proposal can become attractive to them only if they "attain a wider field of vision," if they penetrate their "optical illusion" and reimagine their situation in the world (860, 960). They must understand and see that their enterprise gives the "sanction of the victim" to a regime of collectivist exploitation, and that

there is nothing they can do to change things by working within the system. In other words, they must start to reimagine themselves as outsiders.

The perspectives of the central characters change, and the function of Rand's central image and plot device, the railroad, also changes. The railroad stops providing evidence of the success of capitalism and starts providing encyclopedic proof of its replacement by something else. Taggart Transcontinental has been the medium by which producers and consumers communicate with one another, continuously resolving issues of supply and demand. Now the railroad registers the continuous pressure of collectivist values, expressed in the restrictive regulations and strange "investment" schemes of the governing class, a collection of power-hungry politicians and subsidy-hungry businessmen. These values are alien to the commercial system, but the evidence that emerges in the daily operation of the railroad indicates that they are penetrating the system's core. As the economy degenerates, the new collectivist system is discovered to possess in reality all the detestable features that the capitalist system possessed in imagination; it is by turns anarchic and dictatorial, and it is dreary all the time.

Rand views the process of degeneration through the eyes of Dagny Taggart, the railroad's increasingly alienated chief administrator. Dagny sees the collapse of the nation's price system reflected in the collapse of its communications system; and she watches her own costs of operation, as measured in money, energy, time, and talent, soar to impossible heights in response to the demands of politicians and parasitic "businessmen" scrambling for profits from coerced markets. Long before she decides to accept Galt's invitation and abandon her job, Dagny can see that these people, spiritual outsiders of the American economy, have become the literal insiders.

This reversal can be seen through the eyes of other characters, too, even when they do not fully understand what they are watching. The perceptive reader sees it in the novel's first few pages, gathering the clues from a sequence of visual and mental images that impress themselves on Dagny's assistant, Eddie Willers.

Eddie is on his way to the office when he is disturbed, first by a bum demanding a handout and then by a memory from his youth of a handsome but rotten oak whose fall revealed the "nothing" at its heart. The connection between Eddie's conversation with the bum and his memory of the fallen tree is clarified when he arrives at the headquarters of Taggart Transcontinental and makes for "the heart of the building," the office of the President, Dagny's brother Jim. Jim, we discover, is the rot

at the heart of the railroad's oak. He is yet another of Rand's human Frink Buildings, whose function is to insist on their wholly unearned eminence. When Eddie tries to give him some advice about making money, Jim observes that money "is not the standard . . . by which one gauges a man's value to society." He then nastily reminds Eddie (a childhood friend) of their difference in social "rank" (3-11). It's easy to see why Eddie was disturbed by his encounter with the bum: it reminded him unconsciously of the biggest bums he knows, the ones at the alleged top of the social hierarchy.

It's also easy to see why the railroad workers refer sarcastically to Jim Taggart—a "whining, sniveling, speech-making deadhead"—as "Jimmy the President" (880). Jimmy the President is, just as one might expect, on his way to becoming "one of the most powerful men in Washington": "He seemed unusually skillful at obtaining favors from the Legislature" (390, 52). He is part of the governing class; he *is* the governing class. With people like Jim hanging around the Taggart Building, it's no wonder that Eddie prefers to eat in the employees' cafeteria instead of the restaurant frequented by executives. The underground cafeteria seems more like "part of the railroad," part of the capitalist system—and less like that antithesis of productive endeavor, the government at Washington (62).¹²

The railroad, however, is going the way of the rest of the country, which is the way of the politicians and the business bureaucrats. Dagny recognizes the evidence of withering and displacement among the country's internal organs. She tries to fight the process by extending her railroad's access to productive power. She wants to save Taggart Transcontinental by completing a branch line to the new Colorado oilfields, a potentially profitable market for the railroad's services. Thus far, she has not talked with Galt; she doesn't even know that he exists. She understands his name as nothing more than a cliché that expresses the futility and hopelessness of the permanent outsider: "Who is John Galt?"

Hoping to triumph over futility by inverting the meaning of that cliché, she ironically names her project the John Galt Line. The irony is lost on her brother and the other businessmen who solemnly identify themselves with the governing class. These are the men who, instead of producing, have always "relied for their security upon keeping their faces blank, their words inconclusive and their clothes impeccable" (501). In order to save Taggart Transcontinental, Dagny finds that she has to "exile" herself from its corporate structure (220, 273).

She gets support from ordinary people, from the intellectual and social hinterland. To make her line profitable, she invests in new materials and engineering methods; this makes prominent businessmen, and other timid creatures, fear that disaster will strike the first train she runs. But some people are not afraid. "Freight was rolling in and orders for cars were piling up—for the first train to run on the John Galt Line." Ordinary businessmen from every part of the country are willing to take the risk (227-30). When Dagny calls for volunteers to drive the first train, every available engineer shows up. Every man has decided to invest in the possibility of her success. The workers' decision resembles the verdict of Roark's jury. Dagny acknowledges it, indeed, as a "verdict" both on her and on the world around her (232). Like the shipping orders—those silent, virtually unnoticed indices of economic choice—the workers' verdict demonstrates that there are rational people who can see that salvation depends on investment and production, not on subsidies and regulations. As Dagny's train rushes down the tracks on its inaugural run, she sees a multitude of her fellow-citizens surrounding her, cheering her accomplishment. This is a world that, at least for the moment, shares her perspective. For a moment, the John Galt Line is the central feature of the American social and economic landscape.

But the evidence that Dagny gathers on subsequent trips is not so inspiring. During her second run on the John Galt Line, her train halts suddenly in the midst of a horrified crowd; in the distance, an oil field is burning, set ablaze in protest over a ruinous tax (335-36). When she arrives for a third trip on the line, Dagny sees it dying from the disease of government policies. Preparing to board her train at a station that is about to be closed, she is surrounded by a mob of would-be passengers. Some are begging for help; more are denouncing capitalists like her as the cause of their problems. In the moment before her train recedes from the platform, she looks at the people remaining "as one looks at those who watch the departure of the last lifeboat" (520). On a subsequent journey, she finds it more convenient to travel by plane. No longer at the center of any kind of crowd, she looks at America passing below her and "not[e]s that the sense of detachment one feels when looking at the earth from a plane was the same sense she felt when looking at people: only her distance from people seemed longer" (832).

Her distance is temporal as well as spatial. Her personal imaginative perspective is suggested to her by what she knows of an earlier America, the America of her nineteenth-century ancestor, railroad pioneer Nat Taggart. Images of nineteenth-century America suggest, in turn, the

America of the early republic and the principles of limited government that encouraged the growth of capitalism. Seeing America from the perspective of its past, Dagny (and Rand) can imagine good prospects for its future. What happened once could happen again, and happen better, if her generation's reimagining of free enterprise as decadent and dangerous is replaced by her own opposing reimagining of its possibilities. At present, however, Nat Taggart is considered a mere robber baron, and the ideals of George Washington (one of the very few historical personalities to whom *Atlas Shrugged* alludes) are dismissed as "out of date" in the city that bears his name (534).

The fate of twentieth-century capitalism is symbolically represented by what Dagny discovers about a certain company in Wisconsin, a company where, as she eventually learns, Galt once worked as an inventor. The enterprise was destroyed by the ridiculous social and economic conceptions of the people who controlled it. They were typical "business" people of the governing class—an industrialist's utopian-socialist heirs, a congressman's incompetent grandson, a "banker with a heart" who moved on to a job in Washington, a small-town politician, a People's Mortgage outfit (292-96, 309-24). The enterprise that they destroyed was the Twentieth Century Motor Company. Rand cunningly abbreviates the name. "Well," someone tells Dagny, "it was sold out—the Twentieth Century, I mean" (292). The symbolism requires no explication. This is "the Twentieth Century" that John Galt "quit" (960).¹³

When Dagny, Galt, and the other members of the central group of characters decide to go "on strike" and leave twentieth-century America exactly where it is, in the lurch, they are not becoming outsiders in any simple sense. The irony is that they are abandoning America in order to preserve what they regard as its essential economic and political values. They are abandoning what the machine age has become in order to preserve its "motive power." And they don't just run off somewhere, each by himself; they reestablish capitalism's "pattern for cooperation" in a hidden community where America can continue to function in microcosm. They are hiding, but their hiding place is located in the geographical heart of the continent. They are far outside America, and far inside.

IV

In *Atlas Shrugged*, no literal jury assembles to weigh the claims of individualism and climactically decide, on behalf of America, just who should be considered an American insider. Individuals continue to make

decisions, as they must, reacting to the impending economic catastrophe; but their decisions lack the formal weight of the jury decision in *The Fountainhead*. This is realistic; the marketplace, even the marketplace of ideas, is a lot messier than anybody's trial by jury. But where Rand comes closest to including something like a jury, the results do not augur particularly well for the future of individualism.

One episode presents, at some length, an actual trial. Dagny's friend Hank Rearden, an inventor and industrialist, is tried for violating the government's absurd economic regulations. There is no regular jury; there is only a panel of judges; and, in keeping with modern America's new, more "informal and democratic" idea of a justice system, the charges are read by "one of the judges, acting as prosecutor." Rearden befuddles the court by refusing to admit its competence and asserting the existence of absolute rights. The court convicts him, but suspends the sentence; the government would rather intimidate him into "co-operation" than punish him in a more traditional way—and the government itself is still capable of being intimidated, for a while. The more important trial takes place in the reactions of the spectators. They start as jaded curiosity-seekers, but they end by laughing at the government and applauding Rearden. This audience correctly identifies its enemy as a group of "capitalists" that has corrupted itself into a governing class: "Listen, Mr. Rearden . . . it's the rich who're selling us down the river." Yet not all of the jurylike audience feels this way. Some remain sullenly hostile. And as Rearden looks at the people cheering him, he thinks that "tomorrow" they, too, will demand new regulations and handouts, having been taught to do so by their alleged superiors. It probably goes without saying that Rearden's fellow-businessmen either keep quiet or complain that he went "to extremes" in defending his rights (475-85).

But the most interesting example of jurylike decision-making in *Atlas Shrugged* is Rand's account of the strange events leading to the destruction of Taggart Transcontinental's tunnel at Winston, Colorado (588-607).

The tunnel is eight miles long, too long to be traversed by trains drawn by steam locomotives. If such a train attempted to traverse it, everyone on board would die of suffocation. The fact is known. Everyone understands that diesels must be used, and diesels only. Yet a steam locomotive is sent into the tunnel with a train full of passengers, and they suffocate. Rand's account of this event attributes responsibility to the decisions of virtually everyone who has anything to do with it. The disaster results from a systematic failure of the popular imagination,

examples of which are found in every band of the social spectrum.

One of the passengers on the doomed Taggart Comet is a politician, a member of the group that has regulated Taggart Transcontinental nearly out of existence. He and his friends are responsible for the fact that the diesel engine that pulled the train out to Colorado has destroyed itself on a section of bad track. They are also responsible for the fact that no other diesel is on hand to get the Comet through the tunnel. The politician cannot imagine that these basic economic conditions necessarily prevent him from arriving quickly and safely on the tunnel's other side. He thinks that he can get there if he makes enough political threats. He insists that the train go forward; he has a big rally scheduled in San Francisco.

By this point in history, Taggart Transcontinental's executives are thoroughly acclimated to the new America and its parodic version of market exchange, in which the commodities to be "traded" are power, privilege, and protection (590). The executives are also used to reaping the supposed profits of state economic management, which allows an initially gratifying suppression of competitors. They know how to pass the costs of their political deals to their underlings and customers. When the problem of the politician and the locomotive arises to vex them, they leave to their subordinates the unwelcome task of mollifying the political authority—a task, in this case, to be accomplished by ordering up a steam locomotive that will pull a train into the Taggart Tunnel and kill everyone on board.

One by one, the subordinates follow their bosses' lead. The engine is prepared, and a drunken engineer, who has been kept on his job as a reward for political services, agrees to drive it; he wants to illustrate the fact that he's not "yellow." Like Jimmy the President, he has a weakling's deranged ambition to assert his power. The train enters the tunnel. The people who sent it are aware—evasively aware, but still aware—of what they're doing.

But these are not the only responsible parties. The train is full of passengers who helped to create the conditions for their own catastrophe. There is a businessman who profited from the government's destructive schemes; another businessman who entertains the charming theory that people have to be forced to work "by means of lies, robbery and murder, which must be made the exclusive privilege of the rulers"; a worker who believes that he has "a right" to a job, "whether he's good enough to be hired for one or not; a lecturer who preaches "that, as a consumer, she

ha[s] ‘a right’ to transportation, whether the railroad people wished to provide it or not”; a schoolteacher who makes a career of urging her students to abdicate individual responsibility in obedience to the majority will; and an intellectual who considers it scandalous that America “is the only country on earth backward enough to permit private ownership of railroads” (605-6, 587). The dramatis personae of the tunnel episode are, in effect, a jury that Rand empanels to consider the fate of political and economic individualism. The jury renders its decision, and it condemns itself.

The moment at which the Comet slides away from the siding at Winston, Colorado, and heads into the Taggart Tunnel is one of the eeriest moments in the literature of the machine age, which has more than its share of eerie moments. The eeriness comes partly from the contrast between the frightful nature of the event and the calmly analytical way in which Rand describes every step that leads up to it. Eerier still is the fact that from the very beginning of the twenty-page episode, the reader is able to guess exactly what is going to happen: the train will enter the tunnel, regardless of the fact that its entrance is the one thing that everyone agrees must never, never happen. From an immense distance, the reader looks down at Rand’s representatives of the human situation and sees that they are all utterly incapable of averting disaster. Seldom have an author and her readers shared so strong a sense of isolation.

Rand herself sometimes found the sense of isolation troublesome. A prophet is always at odds with the leaders of the people—that’s the point of being a prophet—but Rand received especially rough treatment from America’s intellectual insiders, who abused her in every possible way. Hers was the one form of literary eccentricity that they could not abide. This treatment disappointed and distressed her. Much the same can be said about the experience of the other radical individualists. But Rand enjoyed one compensation that they did not: an astonishing success with general readers, who in her case seemed not to care very much about the advice of the intellectual elite.

Of course, this success was much more astonishing to Rand’s opponents than it was to her. In a way, she had predicted it. The underground stream of support had found her, just as it found Howard Roark. It was a real-life vindication of the market system’s ability to support even the most radical of its proponents, and support her very well, thank you. And Rand could not have been very surprised to discover that her ideas meant more to cultural outsiders than they did to cultural insiders. She had seen this happen before, when she worked as a speaker

in the Willkie campaign in 1940. At that time, she thought that the most intelligent responses to what she said came from the working-class audience in a theater near Union Square. But the election was lost—lost, as she thought, by the candidate’s failure to make effective arguments for individualism (Branden 1986, 161). Willkie, after all, was an insider—a “thinker” and a prominent man of business—who had no perspective on the large issues of life that seemed so obvious to her.

In a strict sense, however, none of this was predictable, any more than the places where Roark’s “sudden springs” broke out had been predictable to him. Like other exponents of radical individualism,¹⁴ Rand did not believe that choices could be conclusively predicted, as if there were such a thing as economic determinism. On the last page of *Atlas*, Galt declares that he and his friends are “going back to the world”; the secret insiders are now ready to reclaim the great outside (1168). Rand undoubtedly intends this to signify her optimism about the endurance and eventual public triumph of individualist ideas: “The world you desired can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it’s yours” (1069). “But,” the text continues, “to win it requires” . . . a decision to adopt those ideas (1069). And the ideas themselves prohibit real-world certainty about people’s decisions.

In a novel in which every major concept is constantly enforced by symbol, characterization, action, and just plain argument, the treatment of America’s final response to Atlas’s great shrug is distinctly sketchy. Some people vanish, perhaps heeding Galt’s encouragement to form “hidden outposts” that will help reclaim the country (1067). Other people attach themselves to crackpot political movements. Some “come to sudden life” and attack politicians (1079). A woman screams “You goddamn cannibals!” in the darkness of a movie theater, “and the audience show[s] no sign of astonishment, as if she were screaming for them all” (1079-80). But many people simply escape “into the underground of their minds,” and it is not clear, even from the author’s perspective, whether this underground contains reimaginative forces like Roark’s secret stream or whether it is simply an “emptiness never to be filled” (1080). Whatever it is, it is too far underground to communicate itself. “No man can predict the time when others will choose to return to reason” (771). The central group of super-rational characters has a hard enough time deciding whether or not to go with Galt. As for everybody else: the necessities of a railroad are clear enough, but the Comet was still switched into the Taggart Tunnel.

Rand's voluntaristic economic principles allow her to imagine what will happen if individualist ideas fail in the marketplace of political and economic perspectives, but they do not allow her to imagine an America where individualism will inevitably prevail. She will not pretend that they do. She called her literary method "romantic realism," and she is being realistic.

Seven years after *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand published an essay called "Is Atlas Shrugging?"—a question that she views from two perspectives. She is happy to see evidence tending to confirm her theories about America's gradual depletion of brains, but she hopes that there are still enough brains left to heed a timely warning. She recalls that she made a rule for herself in writing *Atlas*:

The purpose of this book is to prevent itself from becoming prophetic.

One of the reasons why she cannot claim to predict the future is the unpredictable potential of *Atlas* itself. It is a factor in the marketplace, like railroads and investments. She does not regret the openness of American history; it is an effect of the principle of individual choice that is essential to the marketplace.

Since men have free will, no one can predict with certainty the outcome of an *ideological* conflict nor how long such a conflict will last. It is too early to tell which choice this country will make. (Rand 1966, 149, 165)

But the openness of human choices means that her own perspective—no matter how far outside the mainstream it may currently appear—is always capable of working its way to the center.

NOTES

1. In Veblen's writing, which was very influential on American intellectuals in the late 1920's and 1930's, readers could discover that industrial output might easily be increased by 300% to 1200%, if "the captains of industry" did not "plan [a] strategy of mutual defeat and derangement," producing "an ever increasing insecurity of work and output." Veblen held the capitalists' own imagination responsible for their failure; to him, "the whole fabric of

credit and corporation finance [was] a tissue of make-believe" (Veblen 1921, 70-71, 118, 75).

2. Lewis does not think it necessary to explain why cut-throat competition makes the public pay more.

3. The fact that effective exponents of individualism tended to be women who were professionally uninvolved in business and economics is emphasized by Chamberlain (1982, 135-36).

4. The views are those of a character in Paterson's novel who clearly speaks for Paterson.

5. On fixed classes as a result of government power, and social mobility as a result of capitalism, see also Mises 1944, esp. 11-15, 97-103. On the state "as a device for maintaining the stratification of society permanently into two classes," see Nock, "Anarchist's Progress" (1991, 46). Ayn Rand's views on the question appear at large in her novels; a concise summary appears in a contribution by Nathaniel Branden, then associated with Rand, to one of her collections of essays: "It is a *mixed* economy—such as the semi-socialist or semi-fascist variety we have today—that protects the non-productive rich by freezing a society on a given level of development, by freezing people into classes and castes and making it increasingly more difficult for men to rise or fall. . . . It is significant how many heirs of great industrial fortunes . . . are welfare statist, clamoring for more and more controls" ("Common Fallacies about Capitalism," in Rand 1966, 86-87).

6. This appears to have been the immediate reason for the marriage; it does not, however, indicate a lack of love in the relationship.

7. Rand first published "The Simplest Thing in the World" in 1967, then reprinted it in the source just cited. Of course, the story as a whole is a cliché made interesting through a change of perspective. It's the old idea of a writer who can't think of anything good to write, told from the perspective of a writer who is constantly generating too many good ideas. Merrill (1991, 18, 38, 57) also finds "cliché-reversal" "typical" of Rand, and sees it in the plot of this story.

8. See Rand's comments on the "plague" of modern classical architecture (Rand 1943, 40-41).

9. "Do you notice that all the wrong people are on the wrong sides?" Toohey asks. "[T]he college professors, the newspaper editors, the respectable mothers and the Chambers of Commerce should have come flying to the defense of Howard Roark—if they value their own lives. But they didn't" (Rand 1943, 369).

10. See Cox 1993, esp. xix-xx, xxiv-xxviii, 1-li.

11. Rand is an important exception to Emily Stipes Watts's generalization that American writers of the mid- and late twentieth century "do not deal directly with economic theory"

(Watts 1982, 151). But Watts's book remains a good survey of its subject.

12. In the cafeteria, Eddie talks with a workman who turns out to be John Galt, thus completing the circle of perspectives that leads from those of the spiritual insiders (Eddie, Dagny) to those of the literal insiders (Jim and his cronies) and back to that of the spiritual insider (Galt) who seems as far removed as a person can possibly be from any power and influence that insiders normally have. Eddie speaks with Galt about "motive power," which is "the heart of everything," not knowing that Galt embodies the American economy's motive power, just as Jimmy the President, up in his office, embodies its drag and friction (63).

13. In *The Fountainhead*, Dominique remarks that Peter Keating, a mediocre and parasitic architect, is "the man of the century—our century" (300). This isn't just sarcasm; it projects Rand's view of herself as one of the century's outsiders. She told Barbara Branden (1986, 19) that the Russian Revolution in February, 1917, the revolution against the Tsar, marked "the only time [she] was synchronized with history. It was almost like fiction taking place in reality."

14. See, for example, Paterson 1937, 10; Mises 1966, 105-6, 117-18, etc.

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