

The Stylization of Mind in Ayn Rand's Fiction

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Introduction

An intriguing aspect of Ayn Rand's fiction is her manner of presenting consciousness. Although as a novelist her main focus was on the artful organization of external events—that is, on plot—this does not mean that she ignored psychology. Indeed, one of the distinctive marks of Rand's novels is precisely the way her plots move on an existential and a psychological level at the same time. Just as in her philosophy she emphasized the importance of integrating mind and body, or consciousness and existence, so in her novels she aimed to integrate events and psychology, to show us men in action while stripping their souls.

The theoretical foundation for this literary body-soul integration is expounded in her fiction-writing course,¹ where she states that:

Proper plot action is neither spirit alone nor body alone, but the integration of the two, with the physical action expressing the spiritual action involved.

To construct a proper plot, you have to be. . . on the premise of mind-body integration. If to any extent you hold the premise of a mind-body split, it will hamper your plot ability, because it will lead you to consider dramatic the mere fact that a man experiences something in his own mind, or that he moves around in some mindless physical action. (*AF* 56)

In consonance with this statement, Rand saw “the modern stream-of-consciousness novel” and “bad melodramas. . . where characters run around hectically” as equally flawed, as “two versions of the same error.” (*AF* 56) In her own fiction she sought to avoid this error. Thus, while aiming at an art that engages the characters in physical action, she also sought to reveal their inner experience, giving her narrator free license to access their intimate thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.

It is conspicuous that this psychological dimension of Rand's fiction has been largely ignored by commentators. One reason for this may be Rand's scenic mode of writing, or her preference for the method of showing over telling.² In adherence to the principle that the events of a story should be presented mainly in the form of dramatic scenes, with only minimal authorial mediation, she believed that an author had to reveal a character's inner states mainly indirectly, through the depiction of overt behavior, rather than directly, through inside views. As she wrote, “Characterization in a novel can be achieved only by two major means: *action* and *dialogue*.” Although she acknowledged that an author in his presentation of character might resort to “introspective passages dealing with a character's thoughts and feelings,” this, she claimed, could merely be an “auxiliary means” in support of “the main pillars: action and dialogue.”³ (*RM* 87) Thus, to present a character mainly by means of sustained inside views of inner experience, as commonly done in the modern psychological

¹ Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, Tore Boeckmann, ed. (New York: Plume 2000), hereafter *AF*.

² For a discussion of Rand's scenic art, see my essay “Styles of Showing: The Visual Power of Ayn Rand's Fiction,” page [**] in this volume).

³ Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* (New York: New American Library, 1975), (Signet edition) hereafter *RM*.

novel, was for Rand an inadequate means of characterization. Primarily, the character's inner activities had to be presented through his external activities.

This emphasis on physically objectified portrayals of human character does not, however, mean that Rand eschewed direct modes for presenting mental experience, confining herself to speech and action. As a look at her novels quickly reveals, she made extensive use of introspective passages in presenting consciousness, frequently giving her readers direct glimpses of her characters' inner world. In technical terms, she preferred what is traditionally referred to as the "third-person omniscient" mode of narration, using a narrator who is outside the story but has all the knowledge and information he needs about the story world, including the minds of the characters. We may, however, observe a gradual change in Rand's use of the omniscient mode of narration. While in an early work like *We the Living* she restricts the narrator's exercise of his omniscience, using a predominantly "objective" style in which the narrator stays mainly on the outside of the characters, in her two mature works, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, she gives her narrator full freedom to enter the minds of the characters. This is especially the case with the central female protagonists of these two novels, Dominique Francon and Dagny Taggart, whose inner lives are extensively portrayed through inside views; but other major characters, too, most notably Peter Keating, Gail Wynand, Hank Rearden, and Robert Stadler, are often accessed for close mental scrutiny.

Characteristic of Rand's many inside views of a character's mind is their stylized quality. As Rand herself has pointed out, the essence of her narrative style lies in a highly selective form of showing, one that by means of a careful selection of words and content aims to achieve a slanted and yet objective presentation of reality.⁴ Although this method of slanted or stylized objectivity is most evident in Rand's projection of the external world—of events, characters, and setting—it also informs her projection of a character's mind. Principally, her approach was to present the character's mental processes as unobtrusively as possible—in accordance with the way the character himself perceives, thinks, or feels in a given situation—yet in a way that highlights those details that best reveal the nature and significance of these processes, omitting everything accidental and irrelevant.

This stylized projection of the mind contrasts fundamentally with realist modes for presenting consciousness, especially as practiced by those stream-of-consciousness writers who have sought to present a character's inner world as a disordered flow of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings as they are supposed to occur in a character's mind from split second to split second, unedited and unrestrained by such "artificial" means of organization as logic, purpose, or syntax.⁵ For Rand, such disordered psychological realism was totally alien. Not only did it run counter to her emphasis on the need for stylization in art, but it also ran counter to what she saw as true realism, since it jarred with her conception of what constitutes a normal and healthy human epistemology.⁶ In her view, man's mind does not as a rule operate in a free associative flow but according to the principles of purpose and selectivity. As she stated, "All perception is selective. We are not cameras; in any given situation, no one sees everything. We see that which interests us, that which our values require us to focus on." (AF

⁴ I discuss Rand's art of stylization more fully in "Styles of Showing," in this volume, [**pp.?].

⁵ Cf. Virginia Woolf: "Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent its appearances, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness." "Modern Fiction," in *The Common Reader* first series (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925), 213.

⁶ In fact, if we turn to the discipline of psychopathology, the alogical, associative thinking characteristic of the stream-of-consciousness novel is an abnormal mode of thinking, regarded as a symptom of schizophrenia. Cf. Barclay Martin, *Abnormal Psychology: Clinical and Scientific Perspectives* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 277: "One aspect of the schizophrenic person's difficulty in thinking and speaking clearly is a tendency toward loose, disjointed expression...the person becomes distracted by irrelevant associations, cannot suppress them, and as a consequence wanders farther and farther off the subject."

97) The word “selective” here applies just as much to the character as to the author. Thus, precisely in the name of realism, Rand sought to render mental processes in a way accordant with a character’s own selective mode of thinking, structuring his mind so as to make its content and mode of operation consistent with his specific values, goals, and epistemological habits. But in addition, in commitment to her ideal of stylization in art, she gave this realistic rendering a personal slant, superimposing her own selectivity on that of the character.

The specific quality of this slant was for Rand first of all a question of what literary goals she wanted to serve when entering a given character’s mind. Seeing herself as a communicator rather than as a recorder of mental experience, her method was informed by a teleological approach, as expressed in her reformulation of Louis H. Sullivan: “Louis H. Sullivan’s famous principle of architecture, ‘Form follows function,’ can be translated into: ‘Form follows purpose.’” (*RM* 81) Thus, when she dips into a consciousness, it is always with some specific aim or purpose in mind—pertaining to plot, theme, or character—that serves as her standard of selection, determining her choice of what to include and what to omit.

In the following, I wish to examine the style and function of Rand’s presentation consciousness. My discussion will be divided into two parts. In the first, “revelation of character,” I shall be concerned with her use of inside views for the purpose of revealing character. In the second, “narrative filtration,” I shall be concerned with her use of inside views for the purpose of filtering the narrative to achieve greater richness and immediacy than an external perspective can provide.

Revelation of character

As suggested above, Rand usually relies on a combined method of revealing character, supplementing the representation of action and dialogue with inside views of the character’s mind. Sometimes, however, she chooses to remain exclusively on the outside of a character, denying her readers any direct access to the character’s inner life. Before turning to her more intimate projections of human character, therefore, we may first pause to consider some of those instances where her presentation is wholly externalized.

If we disregard the many minor characters that are presented mainly from the outside, it is conspicuous that the major characters whose minds remain closed to us are mainly of an extreme moral cast, coming across as distinctly black or white. Of special interest in this regard is Rand’s portrayal of her two major heroes, John Galt and Howard Roark, who both are presented almost exclusively from the outside, through what they say and do. This is most conspicuous in the case of Galt, who clearly reflects Rand’s desire to give her ideal man a god-like stature, to lift him to a level of heroic perfection that invites admiration rather than sympathy or understanding.⁷ Evidently, her aim with Galt was not to engage us in a study of the heroic mind but to offer the pleasure and inspiration of contemplating an image of moral perfection, expressed in action. The same may be said of Roark, but in his case we do get a few inside views designed to make his inner world more directly accessible to us. This, however, occurs chiefly in the first part of the novel, when Roark is still a young, aspiring architect. At this early stage in the presentation, Rand occasionally enters her hero’s mind, first of all to give us a direct glimpse of his creative orientation as opposed to the social orientation characteristic of a character like Peter Keating. The following passage, which occurs after Roark has had his meeting with the Dean, is a rare example:

⁷ Douglas J. Den Uyl makes a similar point when he suggests that Howard Roark appeals essentially to an “aspirational” as against a “connective” sympathy, evoking in the reader a desire to aspire to his specific virtues of integrity and perseverance rather than feelings of endearment arising from more humane qualities like friendliness, concern for others, and a sense of humor. See his *The Fountainhead: An American Novel* (New York: Twayne, 1999), 82.

He had never learned the process of thinking about other people. But he wondered at times what made them such as they were. He wondered again, thinking of the Dean. There was an important secret involved somewhere in that question, he thought. There was a principle he must discover.

But he stopped. He saw the sunlight of late afternoon, held still in the moment before it was to fade, on the gray limestone of a stringcourse running along the brick wall of the Institute building. He forgot men, the Dean and the principle behind the Dean, which he wanted to discover. He thought only of how lovely the stone looked in the fragile light and of what he could have done with that stone.⁸
(*FH* 27)

But as the story progresses, there are fewer such glimpses of Roark's mind, and he is increasingly presented from the outside, either objectively, through the narrator's perspective, or through the eyes of other characters, especially Dominique and Wynand. The result is that he becomes more removed from us as a human being, while Dominique and Wynand move into the foreground.

A similar externalized presentation of character can be observed in Rand's portrait of her most prominent villain, Ellsworth Toohey in *The Fountainhead*. In his case, the externalization serves to sharpen his diabolic semblance, to convey the impression of evil incarnate. Yet, parallel to her presentation of her ideal heroes, Rand's concern with Toohey is the projection of a moral extreme. Her aim is to give us a picture of pure evil, in the shape of a secularized devil, not an incisive study of the criminal mind. It thus seems as if a major reason why Rand chooses to stay on the outside of these characters, forbidding direct entry to their minds, is that she wants to paint them in stark moral colors, to give them a semi-divine or diabolic cast that resists close psychological scrutiny.

If we now turn our attention from these wholly externalized portraits to those characters whose minds Rand does permit us to view from the inside, it becomes evident that Rand's use of inside views is reserved for the portrayal of characters that are morally more intermediate and psychologically more complex. This is especially noticeable in her presentation of characters that experience serious inner conflicts, or undergo a process of inner growth or corruption, or are motivated by psychological traits that cannot be discerned through outer behavior alone. In these instances, she frequently lets her narrator exercise the privilege of entering the characters' minds, supplementing external representation with internal revelation when the occasion calls for it.

In so doing, she makes use of a variety of techniques that serve to reveal a wide range of mental experience. Of special relevance here is the fact that Rand based her mental projections on a hierarchical epistemology in which verbalized thought blends and fuses with what we may regard as pre- or non-verbal modes of consciousness: sense-perception, emotion, and subconscious processing. As a result, she was able to explore a rich and variegated psychological landscape, covering all levels of human awareness.

We may begin to observe this by considering her many ways of rendering sub-verbal mental states.

⁸ Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: New American Library, 1952). All references are from the Signet edition, hereafter *FH*.

Sub-verbal mental states: emotion and subconscious processes

By sub-verbal mental states I mean types of experience that occur mainly on a subliminal level of consciousness, untranslated or only vaguely and diffusely translated into words. As a result, they are difficult to render by citing the character's inner verbalization; other methods must be introduced. In Rand's case, her chief manner of revealing such states is to use *psycho-narration*. A term coined by Dorrit Cohn, "psycho-narration" designates the technique of having the narrator report in his own words what a character perceives, thinks, or feels.⁹ It is thus the most indirect mode for projecting consciousness, involving some degree of narrative mediation. Yet, Rand's use of this technique is distinguished by the fact that she tries to adapt it to her general mode of stylized showing. Whereas historically, especially in nineteenth-century writers such as George Eliot, Honoré de Balzac, and Leo Tolstoy, psycho-narration tends to take the form of overt commentary, with the narrator stepping in to analyze and evaluate the character's psychological state in what is often felt to be an intrusive manner, Rand uses this technique with a certain restraint. Thus, she seeks to make her narrator as invisible as possible, making use of a type of psycho-narration that basically relies on carefully slanted descriptions of how the character himself experiences his inner state, with only minimal narrative commentary.

This is most evident in her presentation of emotion. One technique Rand frequently uses here is to convey a direct impression of the emotion in terms of its physiological manifestation. Instead of telling the reader that a given character feels angry, or disappointed, or happy, etc., she prefers to describe the emotion exactly as it is registered by the character himself in his or her bodily sensations, yet in a way slanted so as to suggest the special quality or intensity of the emotion. One example is the following passage from *The Fountainhead*, which indicates Dominique's erotic stirrings before her first meeting with Roark:

She stretched her arms and let them drop lazily, feeling a sweet, drowsy heaviness above her elbows, as after a first drink. She was conscious of her summer dresses, she felt her knees, her thighs encountering the faint resistance of cloth when she moved, and it made her conscious not of the cloth, but of her knees and thighs.
(*FH* 204)

Rand here clearly attempts to indicate the nature of Dominique's feeling by highlighting her awareness of her own body in a very suggestive manner. Although the description conveys exactly what Dominique feels on a purely physiological level, the sexual connotations of the language are unmistakable, making it superfluous for a narrator to interfere with any overt explanation that here is a woman who experiences vague erotic longings as yet undirected toward any object. The passage speaks for itself.

Typical of Rand's use of slanted physiological description in the rendering of emotion is that she often combines it with what Cohn refers to as *psycho-analogy*, or the device of suggesting a mental state by means of a simile.¹⁰ In the above quotation, the phrase "as after a first drink" serves as such a simile, giving added weight and meaning to the preceding phrase "a sweet, drowsy heaviness above her elbows." Sometimes, however, Rand uses this technique in isolation—as in this description, also in *The Fountainhead*, of Peter Keating's

⁹ See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 14. Other terms that have been suggested are "internal analysis" and "mental report."

¹⁰ See Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 37, 41–46.

mind when he begins to grasp the evil nature hidden underneath Ellsworth Toohey's benevolent mask:

Keating's mind was a bruise. He thought it would be a bruise, because it felt as if something flat and heavy had smashed against it, and it would be black and blue and swollen later; now he felt nothing but a sweetish numbness. (*FH* 570)

Here the description does not really indicate the physiological manifestation of Keating's mental state but serves more as an analogy, as an "as if" sensation, to suggest the repressed nature of his feeling. By contrasting the sensation of "sweetish numbness" with the imagined "bruise," Rand is able to suggest, without explicitly telling her readers, the manner in which Keating's glimpsed but unadmitted knowledge tries to reach his consciousness by beating and hammering against his mind, but without gaining entrance.

In addition to describing bodily sensations, Rand also likes to convey a character's emotion by relating it to his visual perceptions, emphasizing not just what the character *senses* but what he *sees*. Again, her trick is to slant an apparently objective description, providing the precise data of what the character actually observes, but in a way that suggests his inner mood or feeling. Although Rand's rendering of a character's visual perceptions basically serves as a means of describing the outer scene of setting and other characters, as viewed from the character's perspective, it frequently also serves as a springboard for revealing his consciousness, so that his outer scene is fused with his inner scene. This is especially true when the character's awareness of his environment triggers thoughts and emotions that are essential to our interpretation of his psychological state.

An excellent example of this is provided by the following passage from *Atlas Shrugged*, which describes what Dagny Taggart sees when, after having been flown back from Galt's Gulch, she watches Galt's plane as it vanishes in the sky:

She raised her eyes to the plane. She watched the spread of its wings grow smaller in the sky, draining away in its wake the sound of its motor. It kept rising, wings first, like a long silver cross; then the curve of its motion went following the sky, dropping slowly closer to the earth; then it seemed not to move any longer, but only to shrink. She watched it like a star in the process of extinction, while it shrank from cross to dot to a burning spark which she was no longer certain of seeing. When she saw that the spread of the sky was strewn with such sparks all over, she knew that the plane was gone.¹¹ (*AS* 758)

This description is almost "impressionistic" in the sense that it presents the precise data of Dagny's vision but colored by her emotion. By a careful selection of words and images, the narrator simultaneously gives us an impression of what Dagny sees and of what she feels—her sense of unreality at returning to the world after the shining reality of Galt's Gulch and her sense of desolate emptiness at watching the last light from this reality slowly extinguish before her. Notice, for instance, the suggestive images of a "star in the process of extinction" and the "silver cross" shrinking "to a dot to a burning spark."

A rather special variant of Rand's use of slanted perception occurs when she wishes to convey the peculiar intensity of inner experience. Her technique then is to emphasize the essentials of a character's field of awareness by the specific means of explicitly naming what the character does *not* see or hear or feel. In her lecture course on fiction-writing, Rand

¹¹ Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: New American Library, 1957). All references are to the Signet edition, hereafter *AS*.

demonstrates this technique in a passage from *Atlas Shrugged* where she wants to emphasize the peculiar intensity of Dagny's love for John Galt. A brief excerpt will give the idea:

She kept seeing his figure in her mind—his figure as he had stood at the door of the structure—she felt *nothing* else, *no* wish, *no* hope, *no* estimate of her feeling, *no* name for it, *no* relation to herself—there was *no* entity such as herself, she was *not* a person, only a function, the function of seeing him, and the sight was its own meaning and purpose, with no further end to reach. (AS 682, emphases added)

Rand's aim here, she tells us, is to convey what she refers to as the "monomania" of Dagny's love (AF 96) by emphasizing "those touches of Dagny's experience that are *essential* to the nature of her feeling" (AF 94) and eliminating everything that is not essential to it. As she explains, "I do it partly by means of negatives; I say what it is that Dagny does *not* have. . . by concretizing the elements which are normally present in a consciousness, but which Dagny is now losing." (AF 96)

Rand's fondness for this method of "emphasis through negatives" is indicated by the fact that she also uses it to convey other forms of heightened or intensified emotional experience. In the following description, also in *Atlas*, she uses it to capture the intensity of Dagny's feeling of anger when she hears Lillian Rearden comment sarcastically on the bracelet of Rearden Metal that Rearden has given Lillian as a present for their wedding anniversary:

Dagny did *not* see the room. She did *not* hear the music. She felt the pressure of dead stillness against her eardrums. She did *not* know the moment that preceded, or the moments that were to follow. She did *not* know those involved, *neither* herself, *nor* Lillian, *nor* Rearden, *nor* the meaning of her action. It was a single instant, blasted out of context. She had heard. She was looking at the bracelet of green-blue metal. (AS 151, emphases added)

As in her own example of Dagny's love, Rand's technique here is to draw attention to what is *not* present in Dagny's mind in order to convey the violent force of her anger, its quality of a sudden, blinding, and deafening feeling. Instead of telling the reader that Dagny is overwhelmed by an anger that wipes out her awareness of time, place, and identity, she shows what this means in concrete terms by presenting the feeling from the highly restricted perspective of Dagny's own awareness, but slanted in such a way that we get a vivid impression of its peculiar intensity.

Yet another way Rand uses slanted perception to convey emotion can be observed in her technique of highlighting some trivial and inconspicuous detail that normally would be of no significance but that in the character's peculiar situation may capture the attention. An interesting example of this occurs in the scene in *Atlas Shrugged* where Dagny is waiting her turn to tell the truth about her love affair with Rearden on the Bertram Scudder Show. While Scudder introduces her, we get the following glimpse of her mind:

She stood, looking up at the white beam. Specks of dust were whirling in the beam and she noticed that one of them was alive: it was a gnat with a tiny sparkle in place of its beating wings, it was struggling with some frantic purpose of its own, and she watched it, feeling as distant from its purpose as from that of the world. (AS 790)

Rand's approach in this passage is to highlight Dagny's feeling of alienation, her sense of detachment from the situation in which she finds herself, by the brilliant touch of focusing on Dagny's perception of the tiny gnat in the light beam. It should be noted that the gnat serves Rand's purpose in a dual manner. In the first place, on the dramatic level of presentation, her accentuation of its quality as an object of perfect insignificance—that accidentally captures Dagny's wandering attention—reveals, in a very direct manner, Dagny's indifference to the sham activities taking place around her. But in addition, on the metaphorical level of presentation, her accentuation of its frantic but purposeless activity makes it an apt image that brings out, by way of analogy, the deeper reason for Dagny's indifference: her sense of distance from a world seemingly as purposeless in its activities as the tiny gnat.

In a passage like this, as in the other examples of emotional projection so far, it is enough with only minimal narrative interference to convey the point. On some occasions, however, Rand finds it necessary to resort to more overt forms of narrative mediation in her depiction of emotion, using techniques that permit the narrator not only to slant the description but also to interfere in more intrusive ways. Notable here is her device of converting the emotion into its verbal equivalent by having the narrator state in words the evaluative thought that gives rise to the emotion but that the character is not consciously verbalizing for himself. One example of this is the following brief description from *Atlas Shrugged* indicating Dagny's warm response to Cherryl Taggart when Cherryl, after having discovered the truth about her husband, comes to Dagny's apartment to apologize for her earlier behavior:

Dagny's shock of emotion, incredulous, warm, and painful, was the wordless equivalent of the sentence: What a distance to travel in less than a year . . . ! (AS 824)

The last sentence, although it has the appearance of being a direct thought quotation, involves clear narrative mediation, since the quotation is merely the narrator's verbal transcription of Dagny's emotion, rendering in words the thought that underlies what she feels but that she does not actually formulate in her mind.

Rand's most frequent use of such verbal transcriptions occurs when she wants to render emotional experience marked by a mental confusion so strong that it disrupts the character's capacity for verbalized thought. One powerful example of this can be observed in the scene in *Atlas Shrugged* where Cherryl Taggart runs through the streets of New York before she commits suicide. In one passage, the narrator tells us that the distraught girl stops before a traffic light signaling green when, suddenly unable to move on, she starts thinking about the way a traffic light functions:

That's how it works for the travel of one's body, she thought, but what have they done to the traffic of the soul? They have set the signals in reverse—and the road is safe when the lights are the red of evil—but when the lights are the green of virtue, promising that yours is the right-of-way, you venture forth and are ground by the wheels.

Rand's technique in this passage is to suggest the evaluative basis for Cherryl's despair by converting what is for Cherryl merely a perceptual concrete (the traffic light) into a telling metaphor for how she perceives the world (as a place where the moral signaling system is working in reverse, where evil is rewarded and goodness punished). At first, we are given the impression that this metaphorical conversion actually takes place in Cherryl's mind, fully

formulated as a thought, but then the narrator intrudes to tell us that these are not in fact Cheryl's words but only a verbal transcription of her feeling:

These were not the words in her mind, these were the words which would have named, had she had the power to find them, what she knew only as a sudden fury that made her beat her fists in futile horror against the iron post of the traffic light beside her. (AS 841–42)

We may thus observe three forms of narrative intrusion in this scene: metaphorical conversion of a sense object, verbal transcription of a subconscious thought, and a direct hint that the character is not speaking in her own words.

An even more marked form of narrative intrusion in Rand's rendering of emotion can be observed when she lets the narrator step in to explain, in his own words, the evaluative significance of strong passion. On such occasions, she lets some telling infiltrate the showing, but then usually in such a way that the telling throws light on the showing, serving mainly as a means to guide the reader towards a clearer understanding of the character's emotional experience. This is especially the case when she wishes to communicate those deeper layers of value judgment that give rise to the character's passion, but that the character is aware of only on a subliminal level, untranslated into conscious terms.

Rand's depiction of love scenes will illustrate this. An interesting aspect of Rand's love scenes is that they are always rendered from the woman's perspective, highlighting her experience of the sexual act as an expression of spiritual character. This, however, does not mean that Rand engages her heroines in explicit philosophizing about the spiritual dimension of their lovemaking; rather, she lets her narrator interfere to suggest the nature of this dimension. This excerpt from *Atlas Shrugged*, which gives us the love scene between Galt and Dagny in the tunnel of the Taggart Terminal, illustrates the point:

Then she was conscious of nothing but the sensations of her own body, because her body acquired the sudden power to let her know her most complex values by direct perception. Just as her eyes had the power to translate wave lengths of energy into sight, just as her ears had the powers to translate vibrations into sound, so her body had the power to translate all the energy that had moved all the choices of her life into immediate sensory perception. It was not the pressure of a hand that made her tremble but the instantaneous sum of its meaning. (AS 887–88)

This passage is focused exclusively on Dagny's experience, conveying to the readers her perspective on the love act. Yet the presentation is strongly controlled by a narrator who, by means of analytical comments as well as a reinforcing analogy, interferes to suggest that Dagny's physical pleasure is spiritual in its roots, deriving its intensity from the fact that her body has become an instrument for the direct perception of her values. Clearly, these are the narrator's reflections and not Dagny's, but they suggest what Dagny herself is registering on a more subliminal level, thus capturing the essence of her experience.

Another type of situation where Rand typically makes use of narrative intrusion to clarify emotional experience can be observed in her depiction of evasion, or a character's willful refusal to think. Her method here is to draw explicit attention to the character's habit of pushing out of his mind thoughts and feelings that represent an unwelcome threat to his self-esteem. A clear example is the following passage from *The Fountainhead*, which conveys how Peter Keating, in a scene with Dominique, represses a half-glimpsed truth:

She looked down at his face resting against her knees, and he saw pity in her eyes, and for one moment he knew what a dreadful thing true pity is, but he kept no knowledge of it, because he slammed his mind shut before the words in which he was about to preserve it. (*FH* 428)

The mental analysis in this passage is rendered in two steps: first, a direct explanation of Keating's subconscious reflection; then, an explicit statement that he himself evades any attempt to translate his thought into conceptual terms. The analysis makes it quite clear that what we have here is not failure of understanding but deliberate evasion.

In the portrayal of Robert Stadler in *Atlas Shrugged*, we find a number of passages in which the narrator similarly interferes with analytic comments to show how the character evades reality. Notable here are the many moments during the demonstration of Project X when Stadler refuses to admit into his awareness the terrible nature of this demonstration and his own moral responsibility for it:

He felt a single, sudden flash of panic, in which, as in a flash of lightning, he permitted himself to know that he felt a desperate desire to escape. But he slammed his mind shut against it. He knew that the darkest secret of the occasion—more crucial, more untouchable, more deadly than whatever was hidden in the mushroom building—was that which had made him agree to come. (*AS* 760)

He would not permit himself to know that what he felt was self-loathing; he identified the emotion but not its object; it was loathing for the men around him, he thought; it was they who were forcing him to go through this shameful performance. (*AS* 762)

In both these excerpts, the narrator describes in precise terms the defense mechanisms this brilliant but morally erring physicist uses to protect himself against a truth he finds intolerable. In the first, Stadler glimpses the truth but brushes it aside, trying to wipe it out of his mind; in the second, he registers a feeling of self-contempt but not its object, trying to rationalize it through displacement. As in the example of Keating above, we thus get a clear impression of the willful and habitual nature of Stadler's evasive practices.

To sum up, then, Rand's rendering of sub-verbal mental activity takes a variety of forms. Basically, she relies on a method of stylized showing through which the effects are achieved mainly by means of the narrator's slanted presentation of such aspects of inner life as bodily sensations and perceptions, but sometimes assisted by more intrusive forms of narrative mediation, such as psycho-analogy, metaphorical analogy, and verbal transcription. A similar approach can be observed in Rand's presentation of verbalized forms of mental experience, or her projection of states of mind that involve a level of conscious awareness that manifests itself in conscious verbal thought.

Verbalized mental states: conceptualization and self-communion

By verbalized mental states I mean types of experience that find expression in a character's silent formulations to himself, without speaking out loud. Basically, an author may render such inner verbalizations in two ways, either by *quotation* or by *narration*.¹² The first—which I shall refer to as *quoted* (or *direct*) *interior monologue*—is the most direct in that the narrator

¹² My account of these techniques for rendering verbalized thought is based on Cohn, *Transparent Minds*.

“quotes” the character’s inner statements, adopting the first-person form and the character’s style and idiom. The second is more indirect, and may take several forms. At one end, it may involve a type of psycho-narration—sometimes referred to as *reported mental speech*—in which the narrator paraphrases or summarizes the character’s unspoken words, using the third-person form and his own characteristic style. At the other end, it may involve the special type—traditionally referred to as *free indirect style*, but that I shall refer to as *narrated* (or *indirect*) *interior monologue*. This latter type really combines quotation and narration in that the narrator, while rendering the character’s thoughts in the third-person form, uses words and phrases that, except for certain differences in grammatical tense, come close to what would occur in a quoted monologue. As Cohn notes, the narrated monologue is “a character’s mental discourse in the guise of the narrator’s discourse.”¹³ Thus, the one type may easily be turned into the other by means of a simple transposition of tense and person. For example, the directly rendered thought, “I am lucky to be still alive!” (quoted monologue) may be transposed into: He was lucky to be still alive! (narrated monologue). As we shall see, these formal differences in rendering mental verbalization may entail subtle differences in meaning and effect.

In Rand, we find examples of both quotation and narration of a character’s inner verbalization, taking a wide range of different forms and variations. It is notable, however, that she reveals a marked preference for the interior monologue, whether quoted or narrated, which is the form that best lends itself to her art of showing over telling.¹⁴ More direct than the paraphrased or summarized report of internal speech, the monologue forms give her free scope to dramatize mental discourse—to convey verbal thought processes as they actually occur in a character’s mind, with only minimal narrative intrusion. As in her rendering of sub-verbal states of mind, her own mediation primarily takes the form of selective stylization, with the narration or telling serving mainly as a means of supporting or explicating the showing.

It is probable that Rand’s fondness for the interior monologue owes a great deal to the influence Feodor Dostoevsky exerted on her writing. In his novels, Dostoevsky used the interior monologue as a handy device to explore the moral psychology of his characters—for example in his many renderings of Raskolnikov’s hidden thoughts on his crime in *Crime and Punishment*.¹⁵ In Rand, we find a similar use of the interior monologue for the purpose of moral projection. Especially, she likes to use it to reveal internal moral discourse, exploiting the many possibilities it offers for the direct rendering of a character’s moral reflections as they occur in his silent self-communion.

In some instances, this moral self-communion takes the form of inner confession, with the character silently addressing an outer “you.” One example of this can be observed in the

¹³ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 14.

¹⁴ The term interior monologue is sometimes reserved for the direct citation of the disorganized thought flows typical of the stream-of-consciousness technique. But this restrictive usage ignores its use to present more coherent thought flows in pre-Joycean writers like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert, and Dostoevsky. Generally, it denotes any rendering (quoted or narrated) of a character’s inner speech that conveys the quality of the character’s own style and idiom. It is in this traditional form that it occupies a place in Rand’s novels.

¹⁵ By contrast, Victor Hugo—writing in an era when the technique of the interior monologue had not yet been fully established—used inner verbalization more sparingly, even apologizing for it. Thus, in *Les Misérables*, he introduces a monologue with the following editorial gloss: “It is certain that we do talk to ourselves; there is no thinking being who has not experienced this. . . . We talk, speak, cry out to ourselves without breaking the external silence. There is a great tumult; everything speaks within us, excepting the mouth. The realities of the soul, even if they are not visible and palpable, are nonetheless realities.” Trans. Charles E. Wilbour (New York: Modern Library) 189–90.

scene in *Atlas Shrugged* where Hank Rearden makes his silent love declaration to Dagny Taggart while they are sitting in his office. Here is a brief excerpt:

Since the first time I saw you . . . Nothing but your body, that mouth of yours, and the way your eyes would look at me, if Do you know what I am? I thought of it because it should have been unthinkable. For that degrading need, which should never touch you, I have never wanted anyone but you . . . I hadn't known what it was like, to want it, until I saw you for the first time. (AS 196, the author's ellipses)

There are good reasons to believe that this passage was inspired by Victor Hugo's rendering of the priest's confessional speech to Esmeralda about his forbidden passion in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, a speech Rand discusses at length in her fiction-writing course (AF 98–105). In Hugo's novel, however, the priest speaks out loud; here the love declaration is internalized, taking the form of silent confession rather than voiced confession. But the psychological process is essentially the same: that of declaring in explicit words a repressed sexual passion, thus bringing it to the level of conscious reality—a process Rand's narrator finds it necessary to explain in an introductory gloss: "He heard the words he had never allowed himself to form, the words he had felt, known, yet had not faced, had hoped to destroy by never letting them be said within his own mind. Now it was as sudden and shocking as if he were saying it to her." (AS 196) Note here the subtle way of suggesting Rearden's sense of self-discovery through the hint that he is not just speaking the words but is also listening to them in his own mind, as if one part of him is standing outside observing the other part. The telling, in this case, delicately serves to explain the showing, the showing to concretize the telling.

Another example of such inner confession can be observed in the following excerpt from Gail Wynand's *amor fati* reflections in *The Fountainhead*, addressed silently to an imagined judge on his day of judgment:

No, he thought, I regret nothing. There have been things I missed, but I ask no questions, because I have loved it, such as it has been, even the moments of emptiness, even the unanswered—and that I loved it, *that* is the unanswered in my life. But I loved it.

If it were true, that old legend about appearing before a supreme judge and naming one's record, I would offer, with all my pride, not any act I committed, but one thing I have never done on this earth: that I never sought an outside sanction. I would stand and say: I am Gail Wynand, the man who has committed every crime except the foremost one: that of ascribing futility to the wonderful fact of existence and seeking justification beyond myself. (FH 550)

Although the moral sentiment is different in the two examples—Rearden confessing to a feeling tinged with guilt, Wynand expressing an attitude of defiant self-justification—the technique is the same: the quotation of an internal confessional address to a (real or imaginary) figural other.

More often, however, Rand uses the interior monologue to depict a character's silent address to himself rather than to someone else. Instead of communicating with an outer "you," the character communicates with an inner "you," as if in possession of two selves, one standing outside speaking to the other.

The simplest manifestation of this occurs when a character makes some form of self-injunction or self-interrogation—as in the following glimpse from *Atlas Shrugged* of Dagny Taggart’s effort to contain her growing anger during Rearden’s wedding anniversary:

Don’t shake like this, she thought. Get out of here. This was the approach of an anger she could not control. She thought: Say nothing. Walk steadily. Get out. (AS 151)

Usually, however, Rand’s use of internal self-address takes the more sophisticated form of an interior *dialogue*, or the technique of rendering internal conflict by means of two inner voices fighting for domination in the character’s mind. This is a technique Rand (again probably under the influence of Dostoevsky) uses with particular effectiveness—as exemplified by this excerpt from an interior dialogue that dramatizes Dagny’s conflict between her desire for John Galt, hoping that he will break, and her knowledge that any such break would be a betrayal of that which makes her want him:

I’m not evading it—she thought—I’m not evading it, it’s just that I can see no way to any answer. . . . That which you want—said the voice, while she stumbled through a thickening fog—is yours for the taking, but anything less than your full acceptance, anything less than your full conviction, is a betrayal of everything he is. . . . Then let him damn me—she thought, as if the voice were now lost in the fog and would not hear her—let him damn me tomorrow. . . . I want him . . . back. . . . (AS 721, the author’s ellipses)

This is a very dramatic way of presenting inner conflict, with Dagny speaking to herself in two voices: an “I” representing forbidden desire and a “you” representing moral conscience.

A special application of the interior dialogue occurs when a character is engaging not in internal self-communion between two selves, but in an inner debate between his own voice and the internalized echo of another’s voice uttering a moral truth the character is struggling to grasp. A good example is the following passage from *Atlas Shrugged*, which gives a glimpse of Hank Rearden conducting an inner debate between himself and Francisco’s voice reverberating in his inner ear:

He was seeing a finely sculptured face held composed under the lashing of his insults, he was hearing a voice that had said to him quietly, here, in this room: “It is against the sin of forgiveness that I wanted to warn you.” You who had known it then, he thought. . . but he did not finish the sentence in his mind, he let it end in the bitter twist of his smile, because he knew what he had been about to think: You who had known it then—forgive me. (AS 903, the author’s ellipsis)

As in all the examples of the interior dialogue, this passage gives us a very direct impression of a character’s internal moral discourse. We are, as it were, invited to contemplate an inner drama.

An even stronger form of such inner drama can be observed in Rand’s technique of alternating between different modes of inner statement. Consider, for example, the following passage from the scene in *The Fountainhead* where Gail Wynand is writing an editorial while listening to the beating of the presses in the background (a passage that to be properly appreciated must be read in full):

He heard the rumble, the vibration in the walls of his office, in the floor. The presses were running off his afternoon paper, a small tabloid, the *Clarion*. He smiled at the sound. His hand went faster, as if the sound were energy pumped into his fingers.

He had dropped his usual editorial “we.” He wrote: “And if my readers or my enemies wish to laugh at me over this incident, I shall accept it and consider it the payment of a debt incurred. I have deserved it.”

He thought: It’s the heart of the building, beating—what time is it?—do I really hear it or is it my own heart?—once, a doctor put the ends of his stethoscope into my ears and let me hear my own heartbeats—it sounded just like this—he said I was a healthy animal and good for many years—for many . . . years . . .

“I have foisted upon my readers a contemptible blackguard whose spiritual stature is my only excuse. I had not reached a degree of contempt for society such as would have permitted me to consider him dangerous. I am still holding on to a respect for my fellow men sufficient to let me say that Ellsworth Toohey cannot be a menace.”

They say sound never dies, but travels on in space—what happens to a man’s heartbeats?—so many of them in fifty-six years—could they be gathered again, in some sort of condenser, and put to use once more? If they were re-broadcast, would the result be the beating of those presses?

“But I have sponsored him under the masthead of my paper, and if public penance is a strange, humiliating act to perform in our modern age, such is the punishment I impose upon myself hereby.”

Not fifty-six years of those soft little drops of sound a man never hears, each single and final, not like a comma, but like a period, a long string of periods on a page, gathered to feed those presses—not fifty-six, but thirty-one, the other twenty-five went to make me ready—I was twenty-five when I raised the new masthead over the door—Publishers don’t change the name of a paper—This one does—The New York *Banner*—Gail Wynand’s *Banner* . . .

“I ask the forgiveness of every man who has ever read this paper.”

A healthy animal—and that which comes from me is healthy—I must bring that doctor here and have him listen to those presses—he’ll grin in his good, smug satisfied way, doctors like a specimen of perfect health occasionally, it’s rare enough—I must give him a treat—the healthiest sound he ever heard—and he’ll say the *Banner* is good for many years. . . .

The door of his office opened and Ellsworth Toohey came in.

(*FH* 643–44, the author’s ellipses)

What we have here is a double but interrelated inner discourse—with quotations of Wynand’s mental speech (the words he is thinking) alternating with quotations of his editorial (the words he is writing)—played out against the backdrop of the sound from the printing presses. The result is an enormous inner intensity, as we are given entry to Wynand’s mind on several levels at the same time. As often in Rand, sense perception triggers a process of thought: while writing, the sound of the beating presses is perceived by Wynand as the sound of heartbeats, a perception that leads him to draw an explicit and sustained analogy between the presses as the heart of the building, preserving the health of his paper, and his own heart, preserving the health of his body; this analogy, in turn, leads him to reflect upon the future destiny of his life in intimate conjunction with the progress of his paper. At the same time, the contrapuntal opposition between his thoughts and his editorial highlights Wynand’s

recognition of the false course of his earlier policies, his willingness to accept public punishment for his failure to keep in check a man like Ellsworth Toohey. It is, however, a recognition that comes too late, as ironically suggested by Toohey's sudden entrance at the end. As later events make clear, Wynand's sense of health is a delusion. In actual fact, his struggle is doomed, the beating of the presses marking the progress of his paper and his own life towards final failure.

Another way Rand combines different types of discourse to enhance the inner drama of a character's mind is by inserting bits of interior monologue into passages of external dialogue. One illustration of this is the following excerpt from the scene in *The Fountainhead* where Wynand attends the meeting at which his board of directors decides to close the *Banner*:

“None of them will pull you out of this one, Gail. This isn't a road-paving deal or a little watered-stock scandal. And you ain't what you used to be.”

Wynand thought: I never used to be. I've never been here, why are you afraid to look at me? Don't you know that I'm the least among you? The half-naked women in the Sunday supplement, the babies in the rotogravure section, the editorials on park squirrels, they were your souls given expression, the straight stuff of your souls—but where was mine? . . .

“Now if it were a real issue, a political issue—but some fool dynamiter who's blown up some dump! Everybody's laughing at us. Honest, Wynand, I've tried to read your editorials and if you want my honest opinion, it's the lousiest stuff ever put in print. You'd think you were writing for college professors!”

Wynand thought: I know you—you're the one who'd give money to a pregnant slut, but not to a starving genius—I've seen your face before—I picked you and I brought you in—when in doubt about your work, remember that man's face, you're writing for him—. . . (FH 657)

In this passage, Rand creates a contrapuntal opposition between intimate thought and external drama by having Wynand retort to the comments spoken by his board members only in the privacy of his own mind, without speaking out loud. The effect is a dramatically powerful rendering of Wynand's internal recognition of his guilt in fostering the spirit of these men, with the spoken dialogue serving as cues for Wynand's silent thoughts.

As the above examples illustrate, Rand's use of the interior monologue involves a high degree of articulateness on the part of the characters. Unlike the stream-of-consciousness writer, who denies to his characters the capacity for coherent thinking, Rand usually engages her characters in thought processes that are logically and syntactically structured. Although we may here detect the ordering mind of the author, we may also assume that the characters are in fact speaking to themselves in this structured manner, in accordance with Rand's view that the normal mode of human thinking is purposeful. This is especially true when she depicts characters involved in philosophical reflections, seeking to formulate answers to fundamental problems of human existence.

Normally, Rand chooses to present a character's philosophical reflections through voiced utterances in a conversation with other people. Examples are Roark's comments to Wynand on the nature of the second-hander in *The Fountainhead* and Francisco d'Anconia's speech on the meaning of money in *Atlas Shrugged*. But on several occasions, she conveys a character's philosophical thought in scenes of lone self-communion. This is especially the case at moments when the character discovers an important error in his moral thinking. Rand's method here is first to make sure that there is a close integration between plot action and the formulation of ideas by having the character's discovery take place in connection with

a specific occurrence in his external situation and at a point in the story where it is logically supported by the general progress of events. But in addition, Rand is fond of rendering intellectual discoveries by introducing a perceptual object that, often by means of a metaphorical conversion in the character's mind, starts off a chain of thought that leads him to full conceptual understanding. The result is a stylized ordering of mental discourse very different from the disconnected inner rambling aimed at by many stream-of-consciousness writers.

A very good illustration of this is provided by the presentation in *The Fountainhead* of Gail Wynand's mind when, while walking the streets of New York, he reflects upon his guilt in having sold his soul to the masses. Here is an excerpt:

It's only a bottle cap, thought Wynand looking down at a speck of glitter under his feet; a bottle cap ground into the pavement. The pavements of New York are full of things like that—bottle caps, safety pins, campaign buttons, sink chains; sometimes—lost jewels; it's all alike now, flattened, ground in; it makes the pavements sparkle at night. The fertilizer of a city. Someone drank the bottle empty and threw the cap away. How many cars have passed over it? Could one retrieve it now? Could one kneel and dig with bare hands and tear it out again? I had no right to hope for escape. I had no right to kneel and seek redemption. Millions of years ago, when the earth was being born, there were living things like me: flies caught in resin that became amber, animals caught in ooze that became rock. I am a man of the twentieth century and I became a bit of tin in the pavements, for the trucks of New York to roll over. (*FH* 659)

With careful selectivity, Rand here lets Wynand's mind wander through different levels of thought: his perception of a concrete object (the bottle cap ground into the pavement) is converted into a telling metaphor for the state of his own soul (conceived as an object that has been similarly ground into the pavement); this metaphorical conversion then paves the way for his fully formulated recognition that he has committed the sin of selling his soul to the masses, a sin for which there is no redemption. The pattern is similar to the one we found in Cherry's case when she stops before the traffic light, but with the vital difference that Wynand's whole chain of thought takes the form of a quoted interior monologue, verbalized by himself and not by the narrator. The narrator's presence is largely suppressed, surfacing only in the brief opening description of Wynand looking down at the bottle cap. Beyond this description, what we have is Wynand speaking to himself, although in a manner clearly slanted by the narrator to convey the precise nature and meaning of his insight. Note, for example, the insertion of "lost jewels" in the list of more trivial objects ground into the pavement, which suggests the idea of Wynand's soul as not just a negligible bottle cap but as a valuable treasure that similarly is lost irretrievably in the pavement.

Another example of an internally formulated intellectual discovery can be observed in Hank Rearden's final understanding of the principle of the sanction of the victim in *Atlas Shrugged*, which reaches him as the answer to a long and tortuous quest. It is here notable that during the first stages of Rearden's quest, the narrator often intrudes to clarify for the reader what Rearden is beginning to grasp in a vaguely diffuse and as yet not fully verbalized way, but without giving it all away. The following glimpse of Rearden's brief flash of insight, occurring in a scene where Lillian tries to inflict in him a feeling of shame, will illustrate:

Somewhere outside of him and apart, as if he were reading it in a brain not his own, he observed the thought that there was some flaw in the scheme of the punishment she wanted him to bear, something wrong by its own terms, aside

from its propriety or justice, some practical miscalculation that would demolish it all if discovered. He did not attempt to discover it. The thought went by as a moment's notation, made in cold curiosity, to be brought back in some distant future. (AS 406)

By contrast, when Rearden reaches full clarity, we get a much more direct presentation of his thought processes. This occurs at the meeting for the Steel Unification Plan, where James Taggart's statement "Oh, he'll do something!" helps Rearden to finally grasp what he has been groping for:

Then—even though it was only a sentence he had heard all his life—he felt a deafening crash within him, as of a steel door dropping open at the touch of the final tumbril, the one small number completing the sum and releasing the intricate lock, the answer uniting all the pieces, the questions and the unsolved wounds of his life.

In the moment of silence after the crash, it seemed to him that he heard Francisco's voice, asking him quietly in the ballroom of this building, yet asking it also here and now: "Who is the guiltiest man in this room?" He heard his own answer of the past: "I suppose—James Taggart?" and Francisco's voice saying without reproach: "No, Mr. Rearden, it's not James Taggart,"—but here in this room and this moment, his mind answered: "I am."

He had cursed these looters for their stubborn blindness? It was he who had made it possible. From the first extortion he had accepted, from the first directive he had obeyed, he had given them cause to believe that reality was a thing to be cheated, that one could demand the irrational and someone somehow would provide it. . . . Were they illogical in believing that theirs was only to *wish*, to wish with no concern for the possible—and that *his* was to fulfill their wishes, by means they did not have to know or name? They, the impotent mystics, struggling to escape the responsibility of reason, had known that he, the rationalist, had undertaken to serve their whims. They had known that he had given them a blank check on reality—his was not to ask *why?*—theirs was not to ask *how?*—let them demand that he give them a share of his wealth, then all that he owns, then more than he owns—impossible?—no, *he'll do something!* (AS 915)

This passage renders the nature of Rearden's discovery in three stages. In the first paragraph, we get an introductory psycho-analogy, or an "as if" sensation, that conveys the special force with which the thought hits his mind, highlighting its quality of a mind-opening revelation, final and complete, that reaches him after years of struggle to grasp its nature. Then, in the next paragraph, we get a quoted interior dialogue in which Rearden admits his own guilt by reformulating an answer he had previously given to Francisco in a real dialogue. Finally, in the third paragraph, we get his own inner formulation of his discovery, fully verbalized for the first time.

It is worth noting that Rand here makes a switch from quotation to narration by rendering Rearden's formulation as a narrated monologue. That is, although the words are predominantly Rearden's, they are disguised by the narrator's voice through the use of the third person and the past perfect tense. A simple change of syntax, however, with "I have" substituted for "he had," would transpose it into a quoted monologue. The reason why Rand gives it the form of a narrated monologue instead may be that it serves to underline the fact that Rearden is partly adopting an external perspective on himself, seeing himself as the "he"

in the eyes of the exploiters, the “he” who always comes up with a solution to save their skins. But another reason may be that it serves to universalize Rearden’s discovery, leading the reader to contemplate the abstract idea he is formulating not just on a psychological but on a *philosophical* level as well. Instead of interpreting his discovery in terms of a personal “I” versus “them” conflict (as in Wynand’s case), we come to see it more broadly as a “he” versus “them” conflict—the “he” representing all the creators suffering under their error of sanctioning their own exploiters. Thus, what we are presented with is not merely Rearden’s recognition of a private error that finally sets him free, but his formulation of a principle of universal validity, explaining the martyrdom of the creators throughout civilized history and opening the way for the creators’ moral liberation.

While in this monologue there is a clear sympathetic accord between narrator and character, so that we may assume that the character’s viewpoint is one shared by the author, at other times Rand uses the narrated monologue to mark a critical distance to the character. On such occasions, however, the monologic form is more strongly clothed in the narrator’s language. The following passage from *Atlas Shrugged* provides an illustration. In it James Taggart engages in a kind of self-inquiry, trying to understand and to justify his ways by reference to his desire for money:

He tried to force himself to enjoy it: money, he thought, had been his motive, money, nothing worse. Wasn’t that a normal motive? A valid one? Wasn’t that what they were all after, the Wyatts, the Reardens, the d’Anconias? . . . He jerked his head to stop it: he felt as if his thoughts were slipping down a dangerous blind alley, the end of which he must never permit himself to see.

No—he thought bleakly, in reluctant admission—money meant nothing to him any longer. He had thrown dollars about by the hundreds—at that party he had given today, for unfinished drinks, for uneaten delicacies, for unprovoked tips and unexpected whims, [. . .], for the clammy stupor of knowing that it was easier to pay than to think. (AS 804, the author’s ellipsis)

Although the dominant voice here is that of Taggart, the narrator infiltrates his monologue in ways that signal a critical attitude, partly by slanting the words in a deflating way (“the clammy stupor”) and partly by a few intrusive hints (“he thought bleakly, in reluctant admission”) that undercut the authenticity of Taggart’s self-scrutiny. As a result, the reader is led to understand that the discovery Taggart makes about himself—that he does not really care for money—enters his mind more as an involuntary thought he can no longer escape than as a genuine answer to an earnest quest.

Nevertheless, as in all the examples of the interior monologue so far, Taggart moves here on a distinctly verbalized level of mental activity, exhibiting a certain degree of intellectual coherence. In some instances, however, Rand uses inner verbalization to render disordered states of mind, although this is relatively rare. Since such disordered states involve more or less sub-verbal thinking, they are difficult to render by means of monologic speech without a certain loss of both depth and clarity.¹⁶ As a result, Rand’s preferred mode for presenting mental disorder is, as indicated above, that of mental analysis interspersed with psycho-analogy and verbal transcription of how a character might have verbalized his largely subconscious thoughts had he been in a condition to do so.

Yet, in a few instances she makes highly effective use of a character’s own verbalizations to convey mental disorder, but then usually combined with or heavily embedded in passages of psycho-narration that suggest in more explicit ways the deeper

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of the point, see Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 56–57, 87–88.

psychological processes involved. A special example of this can be observed in the following passage from *Atlas Shrugged*, which gives a glimpse of Dr. Robert Stadler's mind when, after having decided to take over Project X, he is driving his car to its site:

His mind liquid with terror, he had felt as if he were about to be crushed between two walls advancing upon him: he had no chance, if Galt refused to surrender—and less chance, if Galt joined these men. It was then that a distant shape had come swimming forward in his mind: the image of a mushroom-domed structure in the middle of an Iowa plain.

All images had begun to fuse in his mind thereafter. Project X—he had thought, not knowing whether it was the vision of that structure or of a feudal castle commanding the countryside, that gave him the sense of an age and a world to which he belonged. . . . I'm Robert Stadler—he had thought—it's my property, it came from my discoveries, they said it was I who invented it. . . . I'll show them!—he had thought, not knowing whether he meant the man on the window sill or the others or the whole of mankind. . . . His thoughts had become like chips floating in a liquid, without connections: To seize control . . . I'll show them! . . . To seize control, to rule . . . There is no other way to live on earth. . . .

These had been the only words that named the plan in his mind. He had felt that the rest was clear to him—clear in the form of a savage emotion crying defiantly that he did not have to make it clear. He would seize control of Project X and he would rule a part of the country as his private feudal domain. The means? His emotion had answered: Somehow. The motive? His mind had repeated insistently that his motive was terror of Mr. Thompson's gang, that he was not safe among them any longer, that his plan was a practical necessity. In the depth of his liquid brain, his emotion had held another kind of terror, drowned along with the connections between his broken chips of words. (*AS* 1046, the author's ellipses)

Since in this passage Rand reveals a mind whose capacity for verbal thinking is about to break down, she relies essentially on psycho-narration, conveying to the reader the nature of Stadler's mental collapse by means of a few analytic comments strongly supported by some very evocative psycho-analogies (“his mind liquid with terror” and his feeling of being “crushed between two walls”) as well as a looming mental image (the mushroom-domed structure). But into this psycho-narration she also inserts quotations of broken thought flows, giving a concrete impression of a mind no longer capable of thinking coherently but seeking self-assurance in words spoken as repetitive formulas to fend off a mounting sense of terror. The effect is a direct yet strongly mediated rendering of a disintegrating mind.

We find, then, that Rand in her presentation of verbalized mental activity shows a marked preference for the interior monologue, both in its quoted and in its narrated variants. In both cases, she exploits a method of stylized showing that relies mainly on the principle of selectivity, though sometimes supported by narrative mediation of a more intrusive kind. As in her projection of sub-verbal mental states, however, the narrator's telling serves to explain the showing, the showing to illustrate the telling, the two being closely integrated to most effectively reveal the inner workings of a character's psychology.

Psychological revelation is, however, not the only function served by Rand's entries into a character's mind. Although such revelation usually is part of her purpose, she may also enter the minds of her characters for other ends. Of major interest here is her use of inside views to filter the narration through a character's perspective.

Narrative filtration

As many have observed, an author of a third-person novel may on occasion choose to tell his story through the eyes of one of his characters, so that the events are, as it were, filtered through the special perspective—the perceptions, feelings, memories, or values—of that character. In most novelists, such filtration occurs only intermittently, but it may also be exploited in a more sustained form. In many of Henry James's novels, for example, the narration of the whole story is limited to the perspective of either one or just a few characters, functioning as what James variously referred to as centers of consciousness, reflectors, registers, or mirrors.¹⁷ In Rand, however, we find a more sparing use of filtered narration. Preferring an omniscient (as against James's limited) third-person narrator, she typically alternates between a non-filtered and a filtered perspective. Nevertheless, filtration constitutes an important part of her narrative art, contributing in essential ways to its unique power.¹⁸

Filtration is a technique that serves as an effective means of enhancing the interest value of a scene by highlighting its particular meaning for one of the participants. Unlike non-filtered or "objective" scenes, filtered scenes can be rendered with the emotional color and intensity of someone who is actually there, taking active part in or observing the action.¹⁹ In Rand, we find a number of examples of characters that function as such heightening filters. Mentioned here must be the special role played by her central heroines. It is conspicuous that in stark contrast with her choice to present her major heroes, Galt and Roark, almost entirely from the outside, Rand gives us frequent access to the minds of her heroines. This is especially true of Dominique in *The Fountainhead* and Dagny in *Atlas Shrugged*; but the same tendency can be observed in *We the Living*, where Kira's is the only mind we ever get inside, whereas the two heroes, Leo and Andrei, are presented from the outside. The result is that Rand's heroines not only engage us more strongly than their male counterparts, coming across as much richer and more complex human beings, but they also contribute to the special perspectival coloration—perceptually, conceptually, and emotionally—of many of the scenes. In fact, Rand's heroines come close to functioning as Jamesian reflectors, the centers of consciousness through which we form our impression of the unfolding story.²⁰ As we shall see, however, some of her other characters also serve an important mediating function—for example Hank Rearden and Peter Keating—so that Rand's heroines are by no means ruling reflectors as in the Jamesian conception.

¹⁷ James's most ambitious attempt to apply this technique can be found in *The Ambassadors* (1903), where he tries to tell the whole story through the mind of only one protagonist, James Strether. A further development of this limitation of narrative perspective occurs in the stream-of-consciousness novels. Interestingly, however, while James was concerned with the filtering power of an exceptionally perceptive consciousness, a mind possessing what he described as "the power to be finely aware and richly responsible," (Preface, *The Princess Casamassima*, 1908) in the stream-of-consciousness novel, the story world is more typically filtered through ordinary or disoriented minds.

¹⁸ Seymour Chatman has proposed that the word "filter" should be used as a special term to suggest what he describes as "the mediating function of a character's consciousness—perception, cognitions, emotion, reverie—as events are experienced from a space within the story world." See his *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 144. My own use of the word "filtration" is strongly indebted to him.

¹⁹ As Chatman argues, *Coming to Terms*, 144, the term filter "catches the nuance of the choice made by the implied author about which among the character's imaginable experiences would best enhance the narration—which areas of the story world he wants to illuminate and which to keep obscure."

²⁰ Den Uyl, *The Fountainhead: An American Novel*, 63, has argued for the view that Dominique is the central character of *The Fountainhead*, precisely in the sense that "it is through her eyes that the reader sees its world." However, if Dominique is the center of consciousness, Howard Roark is clearly the center of attention, as well as the major plot-determining character—and in this regard the major protagonist of the novel.

But a second, and no less important, reason for Rand's use of filtration is that it serves her art of dramatic showing by enabling her to transfer various narrative tasks from the narrator to a character. That is, instead of having the narrator describe the setting, or comment upon a character, or explain the meaning of the events, she lets one of her characters perform these tasks, either while conversing with others or while thinking to himself. Thus, what would in the narrator's voice be overt telling is subsumed under or becomes part of the showing by being integrated into a dramatic scene. Or to put it more succinctly, the telling is done through the showing. The most evident instances of such telling by showing can be observed in Rand's fondness for giving her characters lengthy philosophical speeches that sum up the meaning of the events. Sometimes, however, and often more subtly, she transfers the narrative task to the character's inner scene, making her points through the character's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings rather than through his speech-making.

One type of such filtration can be observed in many of Rand's descriptive passages.

Descriptive filtration

A distinctive feature of Rand's novels is the large number of descriptive passages they contain, giving us details both of the setting and of the appearance of the characters. These descriptions are rarely presented from the narrator's perspective, although there are some examples, most notably the description of Roark on the cliff in the opening of *The Fountainhead* (FH 15–16). Usually, however, Rand chooses to have her descriptions filtered through the coloring eyes and feelings of one of the characters. Even in the Roark example she quickly switches from the narrator's perspective to that of Roark.

Typically, Rand likes to filter her descriptions in a way that is also heavily slanted. That is, she presents the perceptual elements in a scene as objectively seen or heard by a character but stylistically controlled by the narrator to achieve a special effect. Basically, such slanted descriptive filtration serves the purpose of enhancing the visual force of a particular scene, but additionally it may serve other narrative functions, such as character revelation, symbolic suggestion, or mood creation.²¹

For illustration, we may take the opening scene of *Atlas Shrugged*, where Eddie Willers walks through the deteriorating streets of a future New York. To a large extent, this scene is filtered through Eddie's eyes. But the purpose is less to give us an impression of Eddie as a character than to give us an impression of a city in decline and to establish an opening mood. Eddie is merely the vehicle for these narrative goals. As a result, the descriptive passages are rendered in Rand's typically slanted manner, conveying the city scene exactly as Eddie may perceive it but with a selective emphasis, both of words and content, that transmits a sense of gloom and decay. The following excerpt will give the idea:

Eddie Willers walked on, wondering why he always felt it at this time of day, this sense of dread without reason. No, he thought, there's nothing to fear: just an immense, diffused apprehension, with no source or object....The feeling came to him suddenly, at random intervals, and now it was coming more often than ever. It's the twilight, he thought; I hate the twilight.

The clouds and the shafts of skyscrapers against them were turning brown, like an old painting in oil, the color of a fading masterpiece. Long streaks of grime ran from under the pinnacles down the slender, soot-eaten walls. High on the side of a tower there was a crack in the shape of a motionless lightning, the length of ten stories. A jagged object cut the sky above the roofs; it was half a spire, still

²¹ For a further discussion of this point, see my essay "Styles of Showing," in this volume, [**page].

holding the glow of the sunset; the gold leaf had long since peeled off the other half. The glow was red and still, like the reflection of a fire: not an active fire, but a dying one which it is too late to stop.

No, thought Eddie Willers, there was nothing disturbing in the sight of the city. It looked as it had always looked. (AS 11–12, ellipsis added)

Even if the description of the central paragraph is not rendered directly from Eddie's viewpoint, it is presented as if from his perspective by being framed by his thoughts. Visually, it gives a graphically objective picture of the city around him, just as he might observe it, yet in a way clearly slanted to impress upon the reader the idea of a great civilization about to die. Note, for example, the evocative similes ("like an old painting in oil, the color of a fading masterpiece;" "like the reflection of a fire: not an active fire, but a dying one which it is too late to stop"). The wider emotive connotations of this idea, however, are suggested to us mainly through Eddie's accompanying feeling of vague apprehension. As readers, we are largely held within the limitations of his perspective, not being permitted to see or know much more than he does but stirred into a sense of mystery.

Retrospective filtration

Another important way in which Rand filters the narration of her stories can be observed in her habit of presenting past events through a character's mental memories—or in her use of what we may call retrospective filtration.

In all her novels, Rand likes to move back and forth in time, making use of retrospective passages, or flashbacks, that present events that have occurred either before the major story begins or during certain lapses of time within the story. Sometimes, these passages are rendered by the narrator, who presents the earlier events in a summary, usually containing both narrated and dramatized passages (as in the summaries of Ellsworth Toohey's early life in *The Fountainhead* and of Andrei's early life in *We the Living*). More commonly, however, they are rendered by one of the characters, assuming the guise of dramatization by becoming part of a dramatic scene. Such dramatized presentation of the past may take two forms. It may be dialogic, with one character recounting his memories of past events to another character (as in the case of the tramp's account in *Atlas Shrugged* of the demise of the Twentieth Century Motor Company). Or it may, often more subtly, be mental, with a character engaging in inner reminiscences about past experience. In this latter case, the earlier events, since they are not recounted but remembered, are themselves strongly dramatized, taking the form of internally visualized scenes rather than narrated summaries. As a result, such mental retrospection often involves a type of dual dramatization, with scenic flashbacks inserted into a present scene.

That Rand herself saw the flashback as an essentially dramatic technique is suggested by her statement in her fiction-writing course that "A flashback is a scene taken from the past. It is a dramatized exposition." (AF 150) It must be noted, however, that this definition is not strictly correct, since a flashback in fiction may very well take the form of a narrative, as is the case even with some of Rand's own flashbacks (for example, Wynand's thinking back on the course of his life in *The Fountainhead* while contemplating suicide).²² But on the whole, her flashbacks tend to be strongly dramatized and so serve as a powerful means of exposition,

²² Some commentators have abandoned the term "flashback" altogether from discussions of verbal narrative, reserving it for the visual medium of cinematic narrative. Cf. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 64. I retain it here, however, partly because of Rand's use of the term and partly because of the cinematic quality of many of her flashbacks, a point discussed in my essay "Styles of Showing," (*page ref this volume).

filling in gaps in the story line that would otherwise have to be told by means of the less dramatic method of overt narration.

Consider, for example, the following (abridged) passage from *Atlas Shrugged*, which renders Hank Rearden's reminiscences about his past on the day he has poured the first order of Rearden Metal:

After a while, he realized that he was thinking of his past, as if certain days of it were spread before him, demanding to be seen again. He did not want to look at them; he despised memories as a pointless indulgence. But then he understood that he thought of them tonight in honor of that piece of metal in his pocket. Then he permitted himself to look.

He saw the day when he stood on a rocky ledge and felt a thread of sweat running from his temple down his neck. He was fourteen years old and it was his first day of work in the iron mines of Minnesota. He was trying to learn to breathe against the scalding pain in his chest. He stood, cursing himself, because he had made up his mind that he would not be tired. After a while, he went back to his task; he decided that pain was not a valid reason for stopping.

He saw the day when he stood at the window of his office and looked at the mines; he owned them as of that morning. He was thirty years old. What had gone on in the years between did not matter, just as pain had not mattered. He had worked in mines, in foundries, in the steel mills of the north, moving toward the purpose he had chosen....

He saw an evening when he sat slumped across his desk in that office. It was late and his staff had left; so he could lie there alone, unwitnessed. He was tired. It was as if he had run a race against his own body, and all the exhaustion of years, which he had refused to acknowledge, had caught him at once and flattened him against the desk top. He felt nothing, except the desire not to move. He did not have the strength to feel—not even to suffer. He had burned everything there was to burn within him; he had scattered so many sparks to start so many things—and he wondered whether someone could give him now the spark he needed, now when he felt unable ever to rise again. He asked himself who had started him and kept him going. Then he raised his head. Slowly, with the greatest effort of his life, he made his body rise until he was able to sit upright with only one hand pressed to the desk and a trembling arm to support him. He never asked that question again. (AS 36–37)

The expository function of this flashback is quite evident. Primarily, it gives us some vital information about Rearden's life before this day. This expository function is, however, disguised by its natural integration into Rearden's present situation, becoming part of the scene. Note, for example, the touch in the introductory paragraph of having Rearden's memories be something he indulges in only reluctantly, against his inclination to despise memories, but felt as natural and appropriate in this particular situation. The result is that the flashback not only gives us some important background information but also adds a certain poignancy to the present scene, enhancing our understanding of why this day is so important to Rearden.

Another interesting aspect of this flashback is that, even though it summarizes certain days of Rearden's life, the summary is not rendered by means of a narrative but by means of a series of remembered images, or tableaux, juxtaposed in the manner of a cinematic montage. Viewed separately, each of these images conveys a key but isolated moment in Rearden's

career; but viewed together, they add up to a powerful picture of the excruciating effort and self-overcoming it has cost him to reach this special if lonely day of triumph.

An even stronger integration between memories and dramatic situation is observable in Cherryl Taggart's flashback memories, also in *Atlas Shrugged*, of her marriage with James Taggart, which occur in a dramatic confrontation scene between Cherryl and Taggart after they have been married for nearly one year. Here, however, the memories take the form, not of visualized peak moments, but of a series of heavily slanted dramatic scenes that, interspersed with Cherryl's thoughts and feelings, highlight Cherryl's gradual alienation from her husband and her struggle to understand his character and cope with her situation. What we get is not merely a survey of past incidents but also Cherryl's inner questioning of these incidents. Thus, although the flashback has a clear expository function in that it provides necessary informational details about the development of the marriage, it becomes an integral part of the present scene, enhancing its dramatic power by focusing on the inner drama of Cherryl's desperate self-inquiry.

Contributing to this dramatic integration is Rand's use of a "seamless" transition from past memory to present situation:

What do you want of me?—was the question that kept beating in her mind as a clue. What do you want of me?—she kept crying soundlessly, at dinner tables, in drawing rooms, on sleepless nights—crying it to Jim and those who seemed to share his secret, to Balph Eubank, to Dr. Simon Pritchett—what do you want of me? She did not ask it aloud; she knew that they would not answer. What do you want of me?—she asked, feeling as if she were running, but no way were open to escape. What do you want of me?—she asked, looking at the whole long torture of her marriage that had not lasted the full span of one year.

“What do you want of me?” she asked aloud—and saw that she was sitting at the table in her dining room, looking at Jim, at his feverish face, and at a drying stain of water on the table. (*AS* 819–20)

In her fiction-writing course, Rand explains that her technique in this flashback is to bring Cherryl, and the reader, back to the present by means of the spilled water. Her intention is that the reader will connect the water with the incident in which Taggart accidentally topples a glass of water right before Cherryl starts thinking back (*AF* 151–52). But in addition, Rand signals the transition from inner past to outer present by having Cherryl repeat in the present, first silently then out loud, a question she has repeatedly formulated to herself in the past. The result is a close-knit integration of the flashback memory into Cherryl's present situation and concerns that disguises its expository function.

Evaluative filtration

Such scenic disguise of a narrative task is also characteristic of Rand's use of evaluative filtration, or the technique of controlling the reader's judgment of a character by filtering the presentation of this character through the impressions it makes on the mind of another character. Like many nineteenth-century novelists (e.g. Jane Austen, George Eliot, Victor Hugo, Feodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy), Rand was deeply concerned with the art of moral projection, seeking to elicit from the reader a specific moral response to her characters. Unlike her predecessors, however, she relied less on overt commentary but sought (as we have seen) to affect the reader's judgment by means of slanted showing, selecting those facts—both of overt behavior and mental processes—that would evoke the particular response she had in mind. Yet, as an auxiliary means, she did make some use of direct commentary and

analysis. Such commentary, however, is rarely done by an external narrator offering his opinions about a character through direct telling. More commonly, it is communicated under the guise of dramatization, through a character participating in a scene. Sometimes, this scenic commentary is dialogic, with one character stating his views on a given person to a third party—as exemplified by Howard Roark’s comments upon Peter Keating’s second-handedness in his conversation with Gail Wynand (*FH* 606–09). But at other times—often less explicitly and more impressionistically—it is mainly mental, taking the form of what we may call evaluative filtration, or the rendering of inner perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that mark one character’s silent response to another.

This method is vital to Rand’s projection of her heroes. As noted above, Rand rarely goes into the minds of her two ideal men, Galt and Roark, but presents them mainly from the outside. However, in doing so, she does not stick strictly to the impersonal viewpoint of the narrator but frequently uses other characters as filters to guide the reader towards the right moral estimate. Especially, she makes extensive use of her central heroines.

This must be related to Rand’s stated conviction that “the essence of femininity is hero-worship—the desire to look up to a man.”²³ Although Rand most certainly believed that a woman was a man’s equal, both morally and intellectually, there is a clear gender division in her projection of the ideal man since the fully realized exemplars of human perfection in her novels are her two male heroes, John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged* and Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*. To some extent, the heroines of these two novels, Dagny and Dominique, are relegated to the role of hero-worshiper. Even though Dagny especially (Dominique never rises to more than a potential) has distinctive heroic traits in her own right, being the nearest Rand ever came to creating the ideal woman, she is also used as a vehicle for the projection of Galt, just as Dominique serves as a vehicle for the projection of Roark.

This is not merely a question of presenting these women’s hero-worshipping feeling for the two men on the dramatic level of speech and action. It is also a question of using them as filters by presenting the hero in large part through their admiring eyes and romantic imagination. John Galt, for example, is to a large extent depicted from Dagny’s perspective. The first description of him is done entirely through her eyes, as demonstrated by the following excerpt, which gives us Dagny’s impression when she wakes up after her crash in the valley and sees Galt for the first time:

She was looking up at the face of a man who knelt by her side, and she knew that in all the years behind her, *this* was what she would have given her life to see: a face that bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt. The shape of his mouth was pride, and more: it was as if he took pride in being proud. The angular planes of his cheeks made her think of arrogance, of tension, of scorn—yet the face had none of these qualities, it had their final sum: a look of serene determination and of certainty, and the look of a ruthless innocence which would not seek forgiveness or grant it. It was a face that had nothing to hide or to escape, a face with no fear of being seen or of seeing, so that the first thing she grasped about him was the intense perceptiveness of his eyes—he looked as if his faculty of sight were his best-loved tool and its exercise were a limitless, joyous adventure, as if his eyes imparted a superlative value to himself and to the world—to himself for his ability to see, to the world for being a place so eagerly worth seeing. It seemed to her for a moment that she was in the presence of a being who was pure consciousness—yet she had never been so aware of a man’s body. (*AS* 652)

²³ Ayn Rand, “About a Woman President,” in Leonard Peikoff, ed., *The Voice of Reason* (New York: Meridian, 1990), 267.

What we have here is an example of slanted evaluative filtration. As a description, the passage gives a clear impression of Galt's face, as Dagny sees it, but in a way strongly slanted to convey Dagny's hero-worshipping estimate. Clearly, the words are those of the narrator rather than Dagny, conveying to us what she feels rather than what she thinks by highlighting her intensely felt perception of his soul through her awareness of his body. Although this is a response that tells us something about Dagny as a person and as a woman, its main function is less to reveal her capacity for hero-worship than to heighten the reader's response to Galt as a hero by pulling his evaluation towards Dagny's romantically charged perspective.

This method of using the heroine to control the reader's evaluation of the hero can be traced back to Rand's earliest fiction—although here it assumes a somewhat different focal emphasis. For in her early works, Rand was less concerned with the concretization of a heroic ideal than with the projection of a woman's feeling of hero-worship. As a result, her early heroes are only vaguely suggested, never quite materializing into fully embodied ideals. This is especially true of *The Husband I Bought* (1926) and *Red Pawn* (1931–32), which give us psychological projections of man-worshipping heroines rather than objectified projections of heroes.²⁴ Even in *We the Living*, where the male protagonists move into the foreground, the central focus is on Kira as a hero-worshiper. It was only in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* that Rand was able to give us fully realized heroes, making them more than objects of a woman's idealizing feeling. Yet, the female perspectivization remains.

In fact, it is in many ways developed. In her earlier stories, the heroine's man-worshipping psyche is presented mainly from the outside, through speech and action (with the exception of *The Husband I Bought*, which is written as a first-person narrative). But in her two mature novels it is to a much larger extent presented from inside, through the heroine's exalting but also conflict-ridden perspective. The result is a type of double characterization in which the heroine's inner response to the hero serves as a means of characterizing both—the hero and the heroine—at the same time. As an example, we may take the following excerpt from *The Fountainhead*, which gives us Dominique's first perception of Roark:

She looked down. Her eyes stopped on the orange hair of a man who raised his head and looked at her.

She stood very still, because her first perception was not of sight, but of touch: the consciousness, not of a visual presence, but of a slap in the face. . . . She knew it was the most beautiful face she would ever see, because it was the abstraction of strength made visible. She felt a convulsion of anger, of protest, of resistance—and of pleasure. (*FH* 206)

Read in context, this passage tells us something important about Dominique through her response to Roark; but it also tells us something important about Roark through his effect on Dominique. The characterization thus goes both ways, illustrating Rand's view that Roark is a kind of testing stone for people. Their response to him will reveal who they are.²⁵

From a feminist perspective it may be tempting to criticize Rand for this use of the heroine as a man-worshipping filter, and to see it as an expression of her gender

²⁴ Leonard Peikoff makes this point in his preface to Rand's first story *The Husband I Bought* (1926). As he writes, "The early heroes are merely suggested; they are not fully realized until Roark. But whatever the language and literary problems still unresolved, the motif of the woman's feeling for a hero *is* realized." See *The Early Ayn Rand*, Leonard Peikoff, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1984), 4.

²⁵ Cf. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 75, 79.

“asymmetry.”²⁶ But it may here be argued that literarily it has great advantages. Not only does this female filtering serve to enhance our impression of the heroes, by shrouding them in the color of personally felt perception; it also adds to the psychological interest of the women themselves, making them engaging projections of the feeling of hero-worship.

Rand, however, does in no way restrict her filtered projection of the hero to the heroine. Other characters as well serve from time to time as evaluative screens. In some cases, we even get the hero-worshipping perspective of other male figures. Roark, for example, is sometimes filtered through the admiring estimate of Gail Wynand. In addition, Rand sometimes filters her portrayal of the hero through the eyes of characters marked by a hostile attitude—but then with an ironic slant to distance us from their perspective. Here, for example, is Mrs. Keating’s impression of Howard Roark in an early part of *The Fountainhead*:

She stood looking after him through the screen door, watching his gaunt figure move across the rigid neatness of her parlor. He always made her uncomfortable in the house, with a vague feeling of apprehension, as if she were waiting to see him swing out suddenly and smash her coffee tables, her Chinese vases, her framed photographs. He had never shown any inclination to do so. She kept expecting it, without knowing why. (*FH* 18)

Although the perspective of this passage is that of Mrs. Keating, Rand’s purpose is clearly not to reveal her character but to use her as a vehicle to convey the disturbing effect Roark has on many people through the mere quality of his independence, without having shown any inclination towards offensive behavior. To make us see this in a positive light, Rand relies on a marked ironic slant in the narrator’s choice of words (for example, the descriptive phrase: “the rigid neatness of her parlor”) that serves to prevent identification with the character’s perspective. Although Mrs. Keating’s feeling towards Roark is one of disapproval, the reader is led to one of approval.

An interesting variant of such ironically modulated filtration can be observed in Rand’s occasional use of a collective viewpoint in her heroic projections, or her trick of filtering her presentation of the hero through the eyes of a group of people—as in this excerpt from *The Fountainhead* describing the audience’s response to Roark at the Stoddard trial:

Roark sat alone at the defense table. The crowd had stared at him and given up angrily, finding no satisfaction. He did not look crushed and he did not look defiant. He looked impersonal and calm. He was not like a public figure in a public place; he was like a man alone in his own room, listening to the radio. He took no notes; there were no papers on the table before him, only a large brown envelope. The crowd would have forgiven anything, except a man who could remain normal under the vibrations of its enormous collective sneer. Some of them had come prepared to pity him; all of them hated him after the first few minutes. (*FH* 349)

The obvious purpose of this passage is to highlight Roark’s extraordinary calm in the face of social pressure. Instead of doing this through the eyes of a friendly spectator, however, Rand chooses to do it through the eyes of a hostile crowd, marked by an attitude of resentment

²⁶ Cf. Thomas Gramstad, “The Female Hero: A Randian-Feminist Synthesis,” in Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 345.

toward the independent man. Yet, by means of a strongly ironic slant that undermines the crowd's hostile viewpoint, the passage serves as an effective means of evoking our admiration for Roark, leading us towards a positive estimate of his indifference.

But whatever its significance for the projection of the ideal hero, evaluative filtration is a method that also plays an important role in Rand's portrayal of other characters. Notable here is her use of filtration to control the reader's response to her arch-villain, Ellsworth Toohey in *The Fountainhead*. Though hidden behind a philanthropic mask, Toohey's evil is sometimes disclosed through the fearful apprehensions of another character, vaguely sensing but not fully understanding his villainous nature. The first presentation of Toohey, for example, occurring at the mass meeting where he gives a speech, is strongly filtered through Keating's response—both to Toohey's speech and to the effect it has on the audience. The following passage, which renders Keating's perception of Toohey's effect on his niece, Catherine, will illustrate:

Keating looked at Catherine. There was no Catherine; there was only a white face dissolving in the sounds of the loudspeaker. It was not that she heard her uncle; Keating could feel no jealousy of him; he wished he could. It was not affection. It was something cold and impersonal that left her empty, her will surrendered and no human will holding hers, but a nameless thing in which she was being swallowed. (*FH* 110)

By means of mental analysis, interspersed with bits of narrated monologue, Rand here conveys Keating's vague awareness of Catherine's loss of identity in the presence of her uncle. Although the analysis is quite objective, in the sense that it gives us an accurate idea of what Keating is seeing and feeling, it is also slanted by being rendered in words that clarify for us, in conceptual terms, what Keating only senses on a more subliminal level.

As in her filtered projections of the hero, Rand's filtered projections of other characters often involve double characterization, with simultaneous revelation of the filtering character and the character that is the object of the filtration. An interesting example can be observed in the scene in *The Fountainhead* where Keating has dinner with Dominique and Gail Wynand in order to obtain the commission for the Stoneridge building—at the price of selling Dominique. Although this scene is rendered primarily by means of dialogue, it is given a special dramatic coloration by being screened through Keating's perspective, both perceptually and emotionally, with no inside views of Wynand or Dominique. The result is a double characterization, as we form our impression of Wynand through his effect on Keating, and of Keating through his response to Wynand. Here is one such inside view, giving us Keating's response to Wynand's blunt insults and refusal to play the conventional game of pretending that this deal is something respectable:

Keating noticed that his palms were wet and that he was trying to support his weight by holding on to the napkin on his lap. Wynand and Dominique were eating slowly and graciously, as if they were at another table. Keating thought that they were not human bodies, either one of them; something had vanished: the light of the crystal fixtures in the room was the radiance of X-rays that ate through, not to the bones but deeper; they were souls, he thought, sitting at a dinner table, souls held within evening clothes, lacking the intermediate shape of flesh, terrifying in naked revelation—terrifying, because he expected to see torturers, but saw a great innocence. He wondered what they saw, what his own clothes contained if his physical shape had gone. (*FH* 441–42)

What this passage conveys is in part Keating's sense of unreality in Wynand's presence, and his utter discomfort at Wynand's unconventional behavior. But in addition, it vividly suggests (through the device of turning the light from the lamps into X-rays) Keating's subliminal awareness of both Keating's and Dominique's moral purity, his perception of their innocence of soul in throwing off social masks. Thus, apart from giving us a direct glimpse of Keating's mind in this particular situation, the passage also subtly serves to guide our moral response to Wynand and Dominique, obviating the need for direct narrative commentary. Once again, we may observe Rand's effort to present evaluative commentary through the scenic form of a character's inner drama rather than through an intrusive narrator.

Thematic filtration

A similar transference of commentary from narrator to character occurs in Rand's use of filtration for the purpose of thematic explication. As a novelist of ideas, Rand wrote stories that had to carry a heavy weight of philosophical meaning. Yet, on the whole she avoids the heavy-handed method of having the narrator expound her themes through explicit commentary. Instead, she relies on the dramatic method of having one of her characters sum up the meaning of the events in an appropriate scenic context. Sometimes, and most conspicuously, this takes the form of lengthy philosophical speeches—as for example, Roark's courtroom speech in *The Fountainhead* and Galt's radio speech in *Atlas Shrugged*. Many have criticized Rand for this habit of engaging her characters in such explicit philosophizing, and with some justification (especially in the case of Galt's speech). However, what has been less noted, and that deserves more attention, is her often refined use of internal discourse to make her philosophical points. In this case, what we get is not a character giving a public lecture but a character engaged in lone speculation about the deeper significance of his experiences.

One example of this can be observed in the depiction in *Atlas Shrugged* of the first ride on the John Galt Line, which is largely filtered through Dagny's perspective, both on the perceptual level and on the level of philosophical conceptualization. Here is an excerpt:

The glass sheets of the cab's windows made the spread of the fields seem vaster: the earth looked as open to movement as it was to sight. Yet nothing was distant and nothing was out of reach. She had barely grasped the sparkle of a lake ahead—and in the next instant she was beside it, then past.

It was a strange foreshortening between sight and touch, she thought, between wish and fulfillment, between—the words clicked sharply in her mind after a startled stop—between spirit and body. First, the vision—then the physical shape to express it. First, the thought—then the purposeful motion down the straight line of a single track to a chosen goal. Could one have any meaning without the other? Wasn't it evil to wish without moving—or to move without aim? Whose malevolence was it that crept through the world, struggling to break the two apart and set them against each other? (AS 229–30)

If these reflections had been presented by a narrator, they would have been intrusive and preachy, but transferred to Dagny, as inner formulations of her experience of the train ride, they become part of the scene we are watching, closely linked to Dagny's emotional situation. Conspicuous here, and contributing to their naturalness in this situation, is the note of wondering in Dagny's thoughts. Rather than verbalizing fully worked out ideas, she seeks answers to fundamental questions concerning the meaning of the train ride. The result is a delicately oblique guidance of the reader's understanding.

Quite often, such internalized rendering of philosophical meaning occurs in scenes where a character, after years of inquiry, reaches a decisive moment of philosophic discovery. Hank Rearden's final recognition of the "sanction of the victim" principle discussed above provides one example of this. Another example is Dagny Taggart's full realization of the ugly nature of altruism, which occurs in the chapter in *Atlas Shrugged* entitled "Their Brothers' Keepers." As is typical of Rand, Dagny's train of thoughts begins with sense perception, which is modulated into a metaphor:

She sat looking at the ancestral map of Taggart Transcontinental on the wall of his office, at the red arteries winding across a yellowed continent. There had been a time when the railroad was called the blood system of the nation, and the stream of trains had been like a living circuit of blood, bringing growth and wealth to every patch of wilderness it touched. Now, it was still like a stream of blood, but like the one-way stream that runs from a wound, draining the last of a body's sustenance and life. One-way traffic—she thought indifferently—consumer's traffic. (AS 844–45)

Then, a few pages later we get the abstract summing-up:

Did it matter—she thought, looking at the map—which part of the corpse had been consumed by which type of maggot, by those who gorged themselves or by those who gave food to other maggots? . . . Both were alike in fact as they were alike in spirit, both were in need and need was regarded as sole title to property, both were acting in strictest accordance with the same code of morality. . . . —men had achieved the ideal of the centuries . . . they were serving *need* as their highest ruler, need as first claim on them, need as their standard of value, as the coin of their realm, as more sacred than right and life. Men had been pushed into a pit where, shouting that man is his brother's keeper, each was devouring and was being devoured by his neighbor's brother, each was proclaiming the righteousness of the unearned and wondering who was stripping the skin off his back, each was devouring himself, while screaming in terror that some unknowable evil was destroying the world. . . .

She sat looking at the map, her glance dispassionately solemn, as if no emotion save respect were permissible when observing the awesome power of logic. She was seeing—in the chaos of a perishing continent—the precise, mathematical execution of all the ideas men had held. (AS 848)

This is quite an ingenious way of explicating a theme through a character's mind. Instead of being offered a long speech, we get an inside view of Dagny's thought processes while looking at a fading map of Taggart Transcontinental. From observing the map, she comes to conceive of the railroad system in metaphorical terms as the nation's blood system, a blood system, however, which no longer brings growth and wealth to the country but is being drained of its last blood, running only one way (an analogy hinted at by the slanted description of the railroad lines on the map as "red arteries winding across a yellowed continent" and summed up by Dagny's thought "one-way traffic . . . consumer's traffic"). This, in turn, leads Dagny to identify, in conceptual terms, the philosophical cause of the country's industrial collapse: the moral one-way traffic contained in the belief that man is "his brother's keeper." Not only is this train of thought fully consistent with Dagny's character and with what we know about her intellectual capacities, but it also flows naturally from her existential situation, so that the philosophical thought is closely integrated with factual

experience. Since, in addition, the philosophical thought is on a level of abstraction and comes at a point in the story that logically adds up to it, it becomes thematically significant, serving as a valuable guide for the reader's understanding of the whole plot-line—of all the events that take place in the story.

Conclusion

My purpose with this essay has been to draw attention to the important role played by Rand's presentation of consciousness in her novels, especially *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Although Rand's narrative art rests primarily on her belief in the primacy of plot, or on the artful organization of external events, her plot-lines are infused with a strong spiritual dimension, in token of her philosophical emphasis on the need to integrate mind and body in human existence. Rejecting the hectic and often inane action of merely physical plot stories, she gave due attention to the spiritual dimension of her narratives. As I hope to have shown, this spiritual dimension is revealed not only indirectly, through speech and action, but also through a refined use of direct and strongly stylized projections of a character's mind. As I also hope to have shown, these inside views served multiple functions—both on the psychological level of character revelation and on the narrative level of filtration—often combined and integrated in interesting ways. The result is a narrative art much richer and much more complex in the rendering of human consciousness than often assumed.