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THE HEROIC IDEAL: THREE VIEWS

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THE HEROIC IDEAL: THREE VIEWS

Brenda Rickman Vantrease

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
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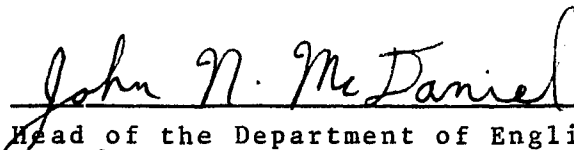
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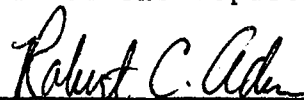
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ABSTRACT

THE HEROIC IDEALS: THREE VIEWS

by Brenda Rickman Vantrease

In the evolution from the epic to the novel, the concept of the hero has undergone a mutation which renders it obscure and has given rise to the theory that the hero is an anachronism which has no place in modern works of fiction. Terms such as "anti-hero," "protagonist," or the diminished "character" have replaced traditional nomenclature. The illusive concept of the heroic ideal is multifaceted and may be approached by many avenues. An exploration of the idea of individualism as a major component of the heroic ideal provides an appropriate means to examine the concept of the hero as developed in three works: Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders, Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, and Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged. An examination of the hero as he functions within each of these works defines his role in the development of the fictional mode and testifies to his place in modern fiction.

Although Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders is a realistic novel which belongs more to the tradition of comedy than of tragedy, its heroine conforms to Northrup Frye's definition of the hero of the "high mimetic mode" in that she is

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superior to ordinary men in her levels of courage and individualism. In spite of the fact that she earns her living as a whore and a thief, Moll has a claim on heroism because of the fortitude with which she confronts her circumstances. In the development of this thesis, analyses of the character and personality of Moll Flanders, of the society in which she lives, and of Defoe's intent and purpose are included.

Although Emily Bronte's Heathcliff of Wuthering Heights does not conform closely to traditional heroic archetypes, nevertheless he obtains the stature of a tragic hero. The figure of Heathcliff is interpreted in the light of Romantic, Gothic, and Byronic archetypes and found to have elements of each. The violent nature of the hero is explored and evaluated in its relationship to the heroic ideal. The conclusion is drawn that although the presence of evil exerts an influence upon the character and actions of Heathcliff, this element does not preclude his being interpreted as a tragic hero.

Ayn Rand's careful choice of the romance as the appropriate genre for her presentation of the heroic ideal testifies to her artistry. An examination of her use of the quest motif and of the development of her supra-human characters is conducted in the light of Rand's own literary and ethical philosophies. The heroic figures of Atlas Shrugged are evaluated by the tenets of Objectivism which include a belief

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in the supremacy of man's mind, a belief in the worth of the individual, and a doctrine which teaches the virtue of selfishness. Attention is given to the moral implications of Rand's philosophy when applied to the actions of the characters in Atlas Shrugged.

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CHAPTER I

MOLL FLANDERS:

ECONOMIC INDIVIDUALISM AND THE HEROIC IDEAL

The nature of heroism remains a critical and unresolved issue in the study of the novel. Since the time of Aristotle critics have attempted to name the special quality or qualities which set apart certain individuals as heroic. Northrup Frye in his essay "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes" explores and defines the hero in relationship to the fictional modes. He expands his simple definition of "somebody doing something" into a detailed analysis involving five classifications in which the hero's "power of action" is compared to that of ordinary man.¹ In my examination of the qualities of heroism as seen in Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders a look at two of Frye's classifications is pertinent.

According to Frye, the hero who is superior in some aspect to the common man but who is subject to social criticism and the order of nature is a hero of the "high mimetic mode," the cloth from which both epic and tragedy are cut. On the other hand, the hero who is not superior to others,

¹ Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 33.

who in a sense represents all of us, is in the "low mimetic mode" from which comedy and realism are fashioned. According to Frye, this latter mode was introduced by the middle-class culture which predominated English literature from the time of Defoe until the end of the nineteenth century.² When the hero moves into the low mimetic, he loses the characteristic of superiority equated with heroism. Thus, the term "hero" begins to create semantic problems. Since Moll Flanders belongs to comedy and realism, she does, within Frye's frame of reference, belong to the low mimetic mode. However, to place her there without qualification denies the superiority which, I believe, she possesses. Moll is not a tragic figure but she shares some characteristics of the hero of the high mimetic mode, chief among which is her superiority to ordinary man. Her individualism, courage, and intelligence provide an appropriate focus for a scrutiny of the concept of heroism.

An analysis of the character and personality of Moll Flanders, of the society in which she lives, and of Defoe's techniques and intents will help to illuminate those elements in Moll's nature which are truly heroic, which are truly superior. If, as Juliet Mitchell suggests, Moll Flanders is really a novel about the relationship of the individual to society, then both the society and the individual must be explored with an emphasis on the tension created by a

² Frye, p. 34.

society which is predicated on material gain in conflict with a spirit of economic individualism.³

Daniel Defoe with his ironic description of Moll in the subtitle to The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders Etc. provides his reader with a superficial sketch of Moll, one which is later developed into a finely detailed, skillfully drawn portrait. In the title he describes Moll:

Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her childhood, was Twelve Years a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent.

His outline of Moll as whore, wife, thief, felon, rich, honest, and penitent serves not only to introduce the reader to his heroine but also serves as a continual source of grist for the critical mill. This enigmatic, ironic element in Moll's personality makes her a realistic character and at the same time troubles the critics. How can one be a "whore" and "five times a wife"? Is such a usage merely careless, or is Defoe being ironic in his use of the term "wife"? Can one who is a thief be honest, and are wealth and penitence

³ Juliet Mitchell, Introd., The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders, by Daniel Defoe (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 5.

likely companions? Only through a closer look at Moll in relation to her world can we really understand such an enigmatic description.

There is not really very much of the heroic in this first introduction to Moll; but as we come to know her, we are drawn to her, and as Virginia Woolfe points out, "we admire Moll Flanders far more than we blame her."⁴ Yet, what can there be to admire in a character who steals from small children and prostitutes herself both within and outside of marriage and then has the audacity to preach morality to her readers? Her "confession" breaks down in many instances to little more than sermonizing, giving her harshest critics some justification in calling her hypocrite. The key to Moll's heroic nature lies in her approach to living. Thief, whore, and hypocrite though she may be, she faces life with a level of courage far above that of the average individual.

Arnold Kettle finds this contradiction in Moll's character to be a positive force in the novel:

The underlying tension which gives Moll Flanders its vitality as a work of art can be expressed by a contradiction which is at once simple and complicated. Moll is immoral, shallow, hypocritical, heartless, a bad woman: yet Moll is marvelous; . . .

⁴ Virginia Woolfe, The Common Reader (N. Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1925), p. 134.

her resilience, courage, and generosity are inseparable from her badness.⁵

Her resilience and courage in an antagonistic environment catch the reader's sympathy early in her story.

From the very first page of the novel Moll is established as a victim of society. Born in Newgate prison to a convicted felon who was transported immediately after her child's birth, Moll tells her reader that she was left

. . . a poor desolate girl without friends, without clothes, without help or helper in the world . . . brought into a course of life which was not only scandalous in itself but which in its ordinary course tended to the swift destruction of both body and soul.⁶

After being adopted by a poor woman in Colchester and anticipating an unhappy life of servitude against which her strong spirit rebels, she is taken into the house of the Mayoress and educated with the daughters of the household. Although she excels the other girls in beauty, charm, and intelligence, she soon realizes that once again society and fate have conspired against her and that

⁵ Arnold Kettle, "In Defense of Moll Flanders," in Of Books and Humankind: Essays and Poems Presented to Bonamy Dobrée, ed. John Butt (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1964), p. 61.

⁶ Daniel Defoe, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1962), pp. 15-16. All other references to the novel will be from this edition and will be noted by page number only.

. . . if a young woman have beauty, birth, breeding, wit, sense, manners, modesty, and all these to an extreme, yet if she have not money, she's nobody, she had as good want them all, for nothing but money now recommends a woman. (p. 27)

As a young innocent, she is exploited by the older brother of the household, who seduces her, wins her complete affections, and then tosses her aside like a worn-out toy. She is forced by her circumstances into a marriage with the younger brother, for whom she feels no love. Five years later she is widowed with two children, but for the first time she is economically independent. After leaving her children with her deceased husband's parents, she is free to enter the marriage market with about 1200 pounds as dowry. Once again, however, she is victimized. She marries a linen draper who, after spending her money, deserts her. Wiser now but once again penniless and with only her wits to get her by, she embarks upon a life as bigamist, whore, and mistress. Thinking to have found a good marriage with a man in colonial Virginia, she is devastated to learn that she is in reality married to her own brother and this time a victim of fate's harshest malevolence. She returns to London to live as best she can without friends, family, or funds upon which she can rely.

After other unfortunate alliances, finally at the age of forty-eight, when her charms are no longer a marketable commodity, she becomes a thief. Moll brings to this new career the same intelligence and skill which she applied

to former endeavors and is a consummate success, staying in the game for the thrill long after the need has passed. She is finally caught, however, and sent to Newgate where she is sentenced to hang. She is converted, repents, wins a reprieve and is shipped off to Virginia with a former husband, who is also a convicted felon. There she finally gains the respectability and independence which she has craved but has been denied since childhood and spends her last years in comfort and peace.

Moll's life and personality are molded from birth by a desire for security. She is, in the words of Virginia Woolfe, "goaded by poverty" from birth.⁷ She is born penniless into a society based on commerce. She has only one commodity to trade and learns early how to use it to advantage. Everett Zimmerman maintains that Moll is shaped by a materialistic society early in her life.⁸ As a child she is aware of a need for money and is offered coins, and as a young woman, she is offered gold by her first lover. Moll soon comes to realize that in a society ruled by property poverty is regarded as criminal. Therefore, Moll, who is no more

⁷ Woolfe, p. 28.

⁸ Everett Zimmerman, Defoe and the Novel (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1975), p. 77.

responsible for her impoverished state than she is for the color of her eyes, is victimized by the system from her birth.⁹

Because Moll has no property and more importantly because she is female and can gain no property, she is forced into a life of crime. Defoe is making a social statement in his creation of Moll and through his representation of her as victim. It is this victimization which, as Ian Watt points out, differentiates Moll from the picaresque hero.¹⁰ She is an economic individualist whose goal is the acquisition of property through which she may achieve security, respectability, and even morality, since poverty is regarded as a sin. She is not, then, merely a charming picaro who mildly amuses the reader but who solicits no real sympathy from him.

Ian Watt maintains that Moll's kind of criminality is a result of the "wide diffusion of an individualist in a society where success is not equally obtainable to all its members."¹¹ Such was the case in eighteenth-century England. With the rise of the new mercantile class, property and property rights became the dominant social force. Juliet

⁹ Tommy G. Watson, "Defoe's Attitude Toward Women as Revealed in Moll Flanders," "The Southern Quarterly, 3, no. 1 (1964), 4.

¹⁰ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif., 1962), p. 94.

¹¹ Watt, pp. 94-95.

Mitchell speaks of the shift in legal and moral viewpoints in the early eighteenth century. The death penalty was most often meted out for property offenses. In its struggle for property, Defoe's society lacked a "stable code of rules."¹² It was a transitional period between feudalism and capitalism and as such was plagued by legal and moral instability.

A society which is based upon property but which will not allow for the free expression of economic individualism (such as eighteenth-century English society) gives birth to widespread criminality. As Watt shows us, when these same criminals are placed in a society which does allow free expression of economic individualism, they become positive forces in society. Ten thousand London criminals were transported from the Old Bailey to the North American plantations between 1717 and 1775.¹³ Here they were no longer criminals but were allowed to acquire property through legitimate means. Many of them became respectable men of property and helped to shape a new nation. In the words of Moll's mother, who is herself a transported felon,

. . . many a New-gate bird becomes a great man, and we have several justices of the peace, officers of the trained bands, and magistrates of the towns they live in that have been burnt in the hand. (p. 86)

¹² Juliet Mitchel, Introd., The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders. By Daniel Defoe (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 11.

¹³ Watt, p. 96.

It is in this colonial setting that Moll finally fulfills her ambition. It is here in a sense that she becomes moral.

Moll's crime then really consists of being poor, female, and ambitious in a society which abhors poverty, discriminates against women, and does not allow for the fulfillment of ambition. At the age of eight years she collapses in fear at the thought of being sent into service:

"Thou foolish child," says she [the nurse], "thou art always crying . . . prithee what dost thou cry for?" "Because they will take me away," says I, "and put me to service, and I can't work housework." "Well, child," says she, "but though you can't work housework, as you call it, you will learn it in time, and they won't put you to hard things at first," "yes, they will," says I, "and if I can't do it they will beat me, and the maids will beat me to make me do great work, and I am but a little girl and I can't do it; and then I cried again, till I could not speak any more to her." (p. 18)

The reader is, like the "good motherly nurse," moved to compassion at the child's insecurity, an insecurity which is to be a strong factor in the shaping of the heroine's character, an insecurity born of circumstances beyond her control. Later in this same episode the child reveals naively her secret ambition to be a "gentlewoman." Unable to bear servitude, she reveals also her intention to be economically independent through doing the only thing she knows--needlework. She also declares that she would rather starve than be a servant.

Moll is innocent at this point. She knows only that she desires security and independence. She does not realize the

lack of alternatives available to one of her station in the realization of these goals. Her nurse does, however, and foreshadows the future of the "little gentlewoman." In reference to a local prostitute the nurse warns "you may soon be such a gentlewoman as that, for she is a person of ill fame, and has had two or three bastards" (p. 21).

As the child matures into a young woman, she gradually learns that she does indeed have something for which others will pay. In her first romantic encounter, she is astounded when her suitor, after kissing her, presses five guineas into her hand. After her first husband dies, Moll once again has to look around to find security for herself. She is wiser now, however, and has learned about assets:

I was now, as above, left loose to the world, and being still young and handsome, as everybody said of me, and I assure you I thought myself so, and with a tolerable fortune in my pocket, I put no small value upon myself. (p. 62)

Although Moll is still operating within the framework of middle-class morality, she is nevertheless putting a price tag on herself and having "been tricked once by that cheat called love . . . resolve s to be well married or not at all" (p. 62). Moll uses sex as an honest tradesman uses goods. She is in the business of trade, dealing in the only commodity which she has.

It is not that she offers herself for sale that distinguishes her, for indeed almost all females of the day exchanged

their services for the security of home and husband. In the upper and middle classes, marriages were practical, based on economic considerations. Jonathan Swift in writing to a young lady is reported to have said, "Yours was a match of prudence and common good liking without any mixture of the ridiculous fashion of romantic love."¹⁴ It is really then not quite fair to castigate Moll for offering herself for sale, if we judge her by the standard of the day. What does distinguish her, however, is the unusual degree of skill, daring, and intelligence with which she markets her product. In telling of one of her exploits she boasts,

I played with this lover as an angler does with a trout. I found I had him fast on the hook, so I jested with his new proposal, and put him off. I told him he knew little of me, and bade him inquire about me; I let him also go home with me to my lodging, though I would not ask him to go in, for I told him it was not decent. (p. 135)

Moll is an intelligent and astute businesswoman in the practice of her trade. When, during the course of her second marriage, she begins to realize that her husband is a spendthrift, Moll takes what precautions she can: "I had foreseen some time that all was going to wreck, and had been taking care to reserve something, if I could, though it was not much, for myself" (p. 64).

¹⁴ G. M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History: The Eighteenth Century (New York: David McKay, 1942), III, 19-20.

Much of her business acumen comes as a result of the hard lessons of experience. After her second marriage leaves her penniless, she resolves to be more careful. If marriage is to be her means of livelihood, then it must be approached in a businesslike fashion. The woman who makes matrimony, like death, "a leap in the dark" Moll considers a fool (p. 90). Avoiding extravagance and knowing the fickleness of fortune, she always invests in the future,

I had everything very handsome about me, but did not affect to be gay or extravagant neither, besides, knowing my own circumstances, and knowing the world as I had done . . . I took care to lay up as much money as I could for a wet day, as I called it. . . . (p. 126)

She is not all calculating, cold business, however. Such a life style is in fact in direct conflict with her warm and generous nature. If Moll fit this kind of life style naturally, there would be little in her to admire. But because her pragmatism goes against the grain, because she is a woman with a woman's emotions, the reader understands that all her artifices are necessary to her survival.

Some critics, Ian Watt for example, dispute Moll's femininity and in so doing deny her courage. Watt sees Moll's character as "essentially masculine" and charges that Virginia Woolfe's admiration for her is due primarily to the fact that Moll represents one of the ideals of feminism, "freedom from

any involuntary involvement in the feminine role."¹⁵ An examination of the way Moll functions in the traditional roles of lover, wife, and mother proves her innate womanhood and her courage in sacrificing emotions to achieve her goal of economic independence. Keeping in mind that this goal is for her a matter of survival and not mere vanity, the reader will interpret her actions outside moral and legal structures in a kinder light. Moll is caught in a vicious trap. Without economic independence, she can obtain neither husband nor livelihood, and without a husband or livelihood, she is destitute. She must have a husband to achieve security, but she must have security to acquire a husband.

To understand Moll's compassion, we need only recall the episode in which she has to tell her husband/brother that they are living in incest. She keeps this secret from him as long as she can, because

. . . to keep him in the dark was the kindest thing I could do, and it was on that account alone that I kept a secret from him, the very keeping of which I thought would first or last be my destruction. (p. 99)

As a wife, Moll observes the strictest codes of fidelity, even though most of her marriages are loveless. That Moll is capable of falling in love we see early in the novel when she is seduced by the older brother of the household in which she

¹⁵ Watt, p. 118.

is living. She learns early, however, that love can be painful and so steels herself against it. Even in her first disappointing marriage to her lover's younger brother, she performs the duties of a wife. However, she cannot help her thoughts:

I never was in bed with my husband but I wished myself in the arms of his brother . . . in short, I committed adultery and incest with him every day in my desires, which without doubt, was as effectually criminal in the nature of the guilt as if I had actually done it. (p. 61)

This passage shows not only that Moll is capable of strong emotions but that she is possessed of a conscience as well.

Perhaps Moll's strongest attachment, certainly her most enduring one, is to a Lancashire highwayman who is like herself in intelligence, courage, and style. He is an adventurer who operates outside the law. Jem, tricked into thinking Moll has money while he himself is engaging in a bit of fraud, marries her only to discover she is as poor as he is. Although happily matched, the two of them realize that they cannot live on love or on the other's nonexistent fortune. Jem leaves her, fearing to draw her into his web of illegal activities. Moll, for her part, declares, "I would have gone with him through the world, if I had begged my bread. . . . O Jemmy! said I, come back, come back, I'll give you all I have, I'll beg, I'll starve with you!" (pp. 147-148).

This does not sound like the feminist who wishes to avoid involvement. But ultimately Moll is practical, and in spite

of her depth of feeling for Jemmy, she recovers to live another day. She is a survivor, but she is not without concern for others. Later, when faced with a proposal of marriage by an honest man, Moll feels genuine remorse for her deceit and cunning and vows to "be a true wife to him and love him suitably . . . and make amends if possible, by what he shall see, for the cheats and abuses I put upon him which he does not see" (p. 174).

Critics have also pointed to Moll's apparent willingness to give up her children as evidence that she is unable to form emotional attachments natural to motherhood, but she is merely doing what many women of her economic status were forced to do. It was a common practice for women of the seventeenth and eighteenth century lower classes to place their children in the care of others because they were unable to feed them. Their actions and Moll's were prompted by love, not lack of it. Moll is a practical woman. She knows that playing mother to her children is a luxury which neither she nor they can afford.¹⁶ After being abandoned by a lover, who leaves her because having recovered from a nearly fatal illness he suddenly becomes moral, she finds herself faced with the reality of her predicament:

And now I was greatly perplexed about my little boy. It was death to me to part with the child,

¹⁶ James Sutherland, Daniel Defoe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 187.

and yet when I considered the danger of being one time or another left with him to keep without a maintenance to support him, I then resolved to leave him where he was, but then I concluded also to be near him myself too, that I might have the satisfaction of seeing him, without the care of providing for him. (p. 121)

Moll feels genuine affection for her children. She is grieved that she must part with them, but she is resilient and adaptable and does what she has to. Expedience is her master. She feels a moral responsibility to her offspring and is shocked at the "wicked practices" of a matron who offers to "help her off with her burthen sooner" (p.170).

In her various roles as wife, mother, and lover, Moll proves herself to be warm, generous, and capable of strong feeling. That she is also intelligent, courageous, resilient, and flexible does not detract from her femininity; it testifies to it.

To fully understand and appreciate the heroic qualities of Moll Flanders, the reader must examine her actions in relation to the world she is born into, giving specific attention to the criminal aspects of that world. Juliet Mitchell observes that the distinction between the criminal class and plebian England cannot be clearly drawn. Moll, as representative of the working class, through her ultimate triumph over the law, emerges as both a "criminal and plebian heroine."¹⁷

¹⁷ Mitchell, p. 15.

Moll has her own code of morality and must square her actions with that code. Her strongest guilt occurs when her actions are in conflict with her personal concept of morality. She uses her extreme distress to excuse reprehensible conduct, explaining that "vice came in always at the door of necessity, not at the door of inclination" (p. 124).

In several places she excuses her behavior by the suggestion that she is tempted beyond human capacity to resist: "Thus the devil, who began, by the help of an irresistable poverty, to push me into this wickedness brought me on to a height beyond the common rate . . ." (p. 193). She also speaks of the "diligent devil" who lays snares for her and prompts her into acts of crime. Moll's conscience twinges her frequently, but she blames her behavior on her circumstances:

On the other hand, though I was not without secret reproaches of my own conscience for the life I led, and that even in the greatest height of the satisfaction I ever took, yet I had the terrible prospect of poverty and starving, which lay on me as a frightful spectre, so that there was no looking behind me. But as poverty brought me into it, and I frequently resolved to leave it quite off, if I could but come to lay up money enough to maintain me. (pp. 116-117)

Arnold Kettle, one of Moll's most zealous defenders, says that she "becomes a criminal because she is a woman. Moll

must be judged (if she is to be judged) against the social history of the eighteenth century."¹⁸ Certainly Defoe, a strong supporter of women's rights, would be the first to point out that her circumstances are indeed strained because of her society's discrimination against women. Defoe often depicts women as victims who must assert themselves in order to obtain rights as individuals. According to Shirlene Mason, who examines Defoe's ideas about the status of women, Defoe uses Moll to illustrate the faulty marriage laws and unrealistic divorce procedures. She says that Defoe "gilds" the crimes of whores because he is perceptive enough to understand their problems.¹⁹

Defoe clearly states his views on sexual relations both inside and outside of marriage in his treatise on Conjugal Lewdness. In his use of the phrase "matrimonial whoredom" he clearly labels the loveless marriages which were the custom of the day and calls those who enter into such contracts legal prostitutes.²⁰ Although she commits "matrimonial

¹⁸ Kettle, p. 63.

¹⁹ Shirlene Mason, Daniel Defoe and the Status of Women (St. Albans, Vt.: Eden Press Women's Publications Inc., 1978), p. 91.

²⁰ Daniel Defoe, Conjugal Lewdness; or Matrimonial Whoredom: A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed, introd. Maximilian E. Novak (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967), pp. 101-102.

whoredom" five times, Moll differs more in title than in character from the respected matrons of her day.

Maximillan Novak neatly summarizes Moll's predicament when he points out that Moll must operate under natural law, divine law, and English law. If, as was usually the case in eighteenth-century English society, these laws are in conflict with each other, then it becomes impossible to preserve all three.²¹ Survival is a natural law which often came in direct conflict with English law. Being forced into breaking English law and somewhat uncertain as to divine law, Moll is careful to preserve precepts of natural law. For example, under natural law a parent must care for a child but must also give him into better hands when necessity demands. To keep the child while unable to care for his needs would be a violation of natural law.

Other examples of Moll's attempts to live by this unwritten law are prevalent. Under natural law incest is a crime, and the committing of it weighs heavily upon Moll's conscience when she finds that she has unwittingly married her brother and borne children by him. Under natural law an individual's degree of guilt depends upon how much responsibility he bears for his destitute state rather than upon

²¹ Maximillan E. Novak, "Conscious Irony in Moll Flanders: Facts and Problems," College English, 26 (1964), 202.

the means by which he relieves that destitution.²² Moll reserves her harshest criticism for men who "reduced some degrees below being ruined" squandered that last penny in an effort to forget their troubles. "There was something horrid and absurd in their way of sinning, for it was all a force even upon themselves; they did not only act against conscience but against nature . . ." (p. 67).

To act against nature to Moll is to sin without justification, and such sins are not subject to the benign influence of casuistry. To take no action, to fail to attempt to lift oneself out of the quagmire of poverty, to refuse responsibility for one's destiny are, for Moll, unpardonable sins.

In his Preface to Moll Flanders Defoe implies a didactic purpose; he hopes the reader "will be more pleased with the moral than the fable" (p. 10). From this statement and from the descriptive subtitle, many critics have inferred that the moral is concerned exclusively with "the wicked life repented of" and have imposed upon the novel a crime-does-not-pay theme which simply does not fit. Defoe might have been speaking to modern critics when he said concerning the novel "this work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to read it, and how to make the good uses of it which

²² Novak, p. 202.

the story all along recommends to them" (p. 10). The critical quibbling over what James Anthony calls "pre-meditated artistry" suggests that perhaps many modern critics do not know how to make the good use of it the author intended.²³ The crux of the debate seems to center on the alleged discrepancy between the author's stated purpose and his sympathetic presentation of a character who breaks all the rules usually associated with moral teachings. This debate relates directly to the question of Defoe's didactic intent, which is in turn directly related to the question of Moll as a superior human being.

That Moll is not punished for her adventures but enjoys a peaceful, comfortable life in Colonial Virginia troubles those among Defoe's detractors who feel that she is not getting what she deserves. If the reader really understands Moll, however, he realizes that she is getting precisely what she deserves--not punishment, but reward. Defoe clearly states this idea for us in his preface:

Her application to a sober life and industrious management at last in Virginia, with her transported spouse, is a story fruitful of instruction to all the unfortunate creatures who are obliged to seek their re-establishment abroad, whether by the misery of transportation or other disaster, letting them know that diligence and application have their due encouragement even in the remotest

²³ James E. Anthony, Daniel Defoe's Many Voices: A Rhetorical Study of Prose Style and Literary Method (Amsterdam: Rodopi NV, 1972), p. 201.

parts of the world, and that no case can be so low, so despicable, or so empty of prospect, but that an unwearied industry will go a great way to deliver us from it. (p. 12)

Defoe clearly intends Moll Flanders to be no idle tale of loosely related episodes in the picaresque tradition but a fable with the unifying element of a heroine characterized by extraordinary "diligence, application" and "an unwearied industry."

His moral, which has been so frequently misinterpreted, has not nearly so much to say about the pitfalls of a criminal existence as it does about the indomitable strength of the human spirit. I am reminded of Frye's definition of the hero in the high mimetic mode when I hear Howard Koonce remark that Defoe in Moll "created a character profoundly superior to her environment . . . and then supplied her with a kind of malignant fate to keep her from achieving her proper destiny by any other than criminal means."²⁴ The novel, then, is not really about criminality but about capitalism. With Moll, Defoe creates a character with superior courage, aspirations, perseverance, individualism, and intelligence, a heroic character in the high mimetic mode who in her search for financial independence expresses the kind of economic individualism upon which an entire capitalist society was to be built.

²⁴ Howard Koonce, "Moll's Muddle: Defoe's Use of Irony in Moll Flanders," English Literary History, 30, no. 4 (1963), 281.

CHAPTER II

WUTHERING HEIGHTS: THE HERO REDEFINED

Wuthering Heights is not a novel which can be read or analyzed casually. The reader who approaches the novel unwarned of its power soon finds himself swirled into a vortex of human emotions so intense that he cannot emerge unmoved. The experience of Wuthering Heights is for many a kind of baptism of fire, a crucible which tempers human experience. It is for others a maelstrom which leaves only confusion in its wake, a confusion in which many critics flounder helplessly. Its complex and multifaceted nature defies superficial criticism.

Much of the power of the novel, as well as much of the critical confusion, emanates from the central character, Heathcliff, who casts his brooding shadow over the moors and pages of Wuthering Heights. Readers are both attracted and repelled by his dark presence. Critics are concerned by their inability to pigeon-hole him with conventional nomenclature. He is neither hero nor villain; he is both hero and villain. He is a composite of the best and the worst in human nature.

Critics too often focus only on one aspect of his character, thereby producing a distortion. Charles Sanger calls him "a sort of human cuckoo . . . who sets out with success to acquire all the properties of the two families, Earnshaws and the Lintons."¹ Arnold Kettle, who finds the novel thematically concerned with property rights, says Heathcliff "carries the positive values of human aspirations on his shoulders."² T. K. Meier takes the other extreme and calls Heathcliff a "capitalist villain."³ Such a wide gap in critical interpretations testifies to the elusiveness of the true nature of Heathcliff. Although each of these interpretations is correct in one sense, each fails as a critical interpretation of the character because each ignores the amalgam which is Heathcliff.

F. P. Pinion comes closest to a proper understanding of the dual nature of the character when he calls him a "hero-villain."⁴ This concept recognizes the presence of both good and evil in extraordinary proportions within the

¹ Charles Percy Sanger, "The Structure of Wuthering Heights" (London: Hogarth Press, Ltd., 1926; rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations, ed. Thomas A. Vogler (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 15.

² Arnold Kettle, Introduction to the English Novel (London: Hutchinson Univ. Lib., 1951), I, 146.

³ T. K. Meier, "Wuthering Heights and Violation of Class," Bronte Society Transactions, 15 (1968), 233.

⁴ F. B. Pinion, A Bronte Companion (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 204.

"hero" and addresses the basic thematic concern of Emily Bronte's novel, which has more to say about good and evil than it does about property and class struggle. However, critics who attempt to categorize Heathcliff within this frame of good versus evil as a Byronic hero fail because the individualism, which is the most striking feature of the character, precludes his being interpreted as a Bryonic archetype.

The fact that he cannot be labelled as heroic in any conventional sense does not mean that he is not heroic. Through an analysis of Heathcliff as a figure who is capable of evil but who has the potential for good, I hope to isolate those elements in his nature which render him heroic while recognizing the influence of evil upon his nature. I conclude that his great strength of will, his ability to resist those influences foreign to his nature, his individualism, his intensity of feeling, and in the words of Royal Gettman, "his capacity to suffer greatly"⁵ give him the stature of a tragic hero. A closer look at Heathcliff's nature and the ways in which he does not conform to conventional concepts of heroes of the Byronic, Romantic, or Gothic archetypes shows him to be a new kind of hero, a hero who, although conforming in no strict

⁵ Royal Gettman, introd., Wuthering Heights, by Emily Bronte (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. xv.

sense to any conventional heroic pattern, comes closest to the ideal of the tragic hero. A look at what Heathcliff is not will lead us to a discovery of what he is.

The reader's access to the character of Heathcliff does not involve the direct route of omniscience. The author employs instead the third-person point of view. The use of this point of view increases the potential for complexity in the development of a character and challenges the reader's powers of perception, especially when the narrator shifts. The tangled skein of Heathcliff's identity, therefore, is not an easy one to unravel and justly so since the character himself is an unusually complex one. To discover Heathcliff, the reader must weigh and balance the evidence drawn from the two principal narrators as well as the different perspectives offered by the other characters and Heathcliff himself. The author never presumes to analyze Heathcliff as villain or hero, ugly or beautiful, moral or immoral but leaves such judgments to the reader. In judging him the reader/critic must also judge those who give evidence for or against him and must take into consideration the degree of perception and motivation of those who heap praise or blame upon his head.

The reader's initial encounter with Heathcliff is also the first for Lockwood, principal narrator of the action of Wuthering Heights. Lockwood comes to Wuthering Heights as a shallow and youthful emissary from a more civilized world, an heir to the Linton legacy of middle-class values, and

takes up residence at Thrushcross Grange. He fancies himself a misanthrope and imagines an affinity with his newly met landlord. He finds the wild moors of Wuthering Heights "a perfect misanthropist's Heaven" and proclaims that he and his landlord, "a capital fellow," are "such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us."⁶

Lockwood soon comes to see, however, the obvious difference between himself and his host: "I felt interested in a man who seemed more exaggeratedly reserved than myself" (p. 33). The reserve noticed at once by Lockwood is a personality trait which Heathcliff has exhibited from his earliest childhood acquaintance with his adopted family, the Earnshaws, and becomes important to a detailed portrait of the master of Wuthering Heights.

As Lockwood continues with his description he notes the paradox of Heathcliff: "He is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman. . . . He has an erect and handsome figure and rather morose" (p. 35). Even Lockwood, who, the reader learns, does not possess great depth of perception, picks up early on Heathcliff's tragic flaw when he remarks about the latter's "degree of underbred pride" (p. 35). The narrator again speaks of the unusual reserve which he perceives to arise from "an aversion to showy displays of

⁶ Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, introd. Bonamy Dobrée (London: Collins, 1847; rpt. 1953), p. 5. All subsequent references to the text will be to this edition and will be noted by page number.

feeling," an aversion which Heathcliff shares with his creator. Charlotte Bronte wrote in a biographical note published in 1847, "My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one, on the recesses of whose mind and feelings, even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed."⁷ This is exactly the kind of reserve which Lockwood notes in his landlord.

Before Lockwood quits the "hospitality" of Wuthering Heights, he sees that he and Heathcliff are not as alike in this respect as he had at first suspected and remarks that he felt "astonishing [ly] sociable" in comparison to his host (p. 38). Indeed, he proves himself to be so when he hazards another visit soon after, encouraged, he says, by his landlord's intelligent conversation.

Lockwood returns to his newly acquired residence at the Grange, and the reader finds an appropriate pause to ponder how he will accept this new acquaintance which Lockwood has introduced. Upon quick reflection the reader is, like Lockwood, intrigued by the handsome, lonely man who is appealing in his reserve and dark mystery. He seemingly has all of the appeal of a romantic hero.

The young tenant's second visit to his landlord plunges the reader further into the complexity of Heathcliff's

⁷ Charlotte Bronte, "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell" in Wuthering Heights, introd. Bonamy Debrée (London: Collins, 1953), p. 20.

nature, and the reader soon becomes aware, along with Lockwood, that Heathcliff's darker side has not completely revealed itself in the earlier visit. An atmosphere of evil pervades the scene. The author chooses words carefully to ensure that the reader not pass lightly over the sinister aspects. The conversation is sprinkled with allusions to evil. Joseph, the old servant, calls upon the Lord to "deliver us from evil" in response to young Catherine's boast that she is "progressed in the Black Art" (p. 45). Heathcliff's behavior when Lockwood is attacked by the house dogs is not only inhospitable but even malevolent as he laughs at the pain and humiliation of his unfortunate guest. By the end of the second chapter, the reader is no longer sure how he feels about the handsome figure but must concede finally that he is both repelled and attracted by the enigmatic master of Wuthering Heights.

Lockwood, who is trapped by one of the violent winter storms common to the Yorkshire moors, finds himself an unwelcome overnight guest. He is led to his sleeping chamber by Zillah, the housekeeper, whose reluctant sympathies have been aroused by the ill-treatment which the young man has received from the family. She hints at mysterious goings on and cautions Lockwood to be quiet; the master never allows lodgers in the mysterious room in which he

will sleep. In this room Lockwood and the reader are allowed the first intimate look behind Heathcliff's reserve. Lockwood, frightened by Catherine's ghost, cries out and alerts Heathcliff to the interloper's presence in the haunted chamber. Although Lockwood is frightened by the appearance of the child's ghost at the window, he soon forgets his fright, so intrigued is he by the landlord's reaction:

Heathcliff stood near the entrance . . . with a candle dripping over his fingers and his face as white as the wall behind him. The first creak of the oak startled him like an electric shock: the light leaped from his hold to a distance of some feet, and his agitation was so extreme, that he could hardly pick it up. (p. 55)

Lockwood at first interprets his host's pallor and agitation as terror, but he soon learns that it is more a mixture of anger and anguish at the intrusion into what is for Heathcliff a shrine. Lockwood is roughly ordered from the room but lingers to witness "a piece of superstition" on the part of his landlord:

He got on the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. "Come in. Come in!" he sobbed. "Cathy, do come. Oh do--once more! my heart's darling! hear me this time, Catherine, at last!"

Lockwood is moved to remorse and compassion:

There was such anguish in the gush of grief that accompanied this raving, that my companion made me overlook its folly, and I drew off, half angry to have listened at all, and vexed at having related my ridiculous nightmare, since it produced that agony. . . . (p. 57-58)

Like the narrator, the reader is in the dark as to why the relating of a gothic nightmare should so upset this powerful man who would seem to be far above such superstition. Regardless of the reason, however, Heathcliff shows himself to be capable of a degree of suffering which is matched only by his dark good looks and rude behavior. It is here that the reader is caught. To be with Lockwood a silent eavesdropper upon the pain of one who lately seemed impervious to pain puts the reader on the side of Heathcliff. Even though he may show himself to be a monster, Heathcliff's suffering covers him like a blanket of redemption. Whatever sins he may have committed must be disproportionate to his agony.

The point of view shifts with the beginning of chapter four to allow the reader another perspective of Heathcliff. His background and history are filtered through the fickle and self-serving perceptions of Nelly Dean, the pragmatic and intelligent housekeeper whose past service in the Earnshaw household and present service to Lockwood provide a plausible mechanism for the blending of the past and the present. Emily Bronte, as Bonamy Dobrée points out, creates in Nelly Dean a narrator who is "brilliantly thought out

and executed."⁸ As the housekeeper gossips to the ailing Lockwood, whose constitution proves unworthy of the malevolent Yorkshire climate, she also gossips to the reader.

From Nelly Dean, Lockwood and the reader hear of the unusual circumstances surrounding the introduction of Heathcliff into the Earnshaw household. When the elder Earnshaw returns overdue from a business trip with the "dirty, ragged, black-haired child" whom he says must be taken as a gift from God "though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil," Nelly and the members of the family are less than generous in their reception of the "gipsy brat" (p. 64-65). The wife scolds and grumbles, the children refuse "to have it in bed with them or even in their room," and Nelly Dean, charitable soul, "puts it on the landing of the stairs hoping that it might be gone on the morrow" (p. 65). This initial introduction of Heathcliff into the middle-class world reveals several things which are to prove important in an analysis of Heathcliff's character. First, it establishes the clash between the two worlds of the poor and the middle class, underlining the class struggle which was so much a part of Victorian England and which is elemental to the molding of Heathcliff's character. Catherine and Edgar as child

⁸ Bonamy Dobrée, introd. Wuthering Heights, by Emily Bronte (London: Collins, 1953), p. 19.

representatives of the middle class show themselves to be totally materialistic, spoiled, and shallow. They are only concerned with broken toys, a crushed fiddle, and a lost whip. Compassion and tolerance are strangers to their natures. Heathcliff, on the other hand, as a child of the lower class, shows the brooding resentment and rebelliousness of the abused and oppressed.

This class struggle is a theme which, introduced early in the novel and developed to a degree throughout, has led some critics to overemphasize the weight of social factors as essential to the understanding of the character of Heathcliff. Although I cannot agree with Bonamy Dobrée that "Wuthering Heights ignores society and its pressure on individuals,"⁹ I do think too much attention can be paid to this subordinate element. Arnold Kettle overstates this theme and in so doing depersonalizes Heathcliff, making him into somewhat of a Marxist hero.¹⁰

Too much can be made of Heathcliff's rebellion against society. As we see later in the novel, although Heathcliff is a rebel, the cause which he champions is more personal than social. Heathcliff is far too selfish to carry the banner for suffering, plebeian England. And, although we

⁹ Dobrée, p. 10.

¹⁰ Kettle, pp. 139-155.

see some of his suffering as rooted in social prejudice and class restrictions, the preponderance of his suffering is brought about by personal flaws and individual actions. Critics who persist in making Heathcliff into an archetype fail to understand his nature; he is highly individualistic in his approach to life and must be interpreted in this light. As Dorothy Van Ghent reminds us, "The passion of Heathcliff and Catherine is too simple and undeviating in its intensity, too complex, for us to find in it any echo of practical social reality."¹¹

The second thing which this meeting between Heathcliff and his new family does is to remind us of the theme of darkness which threads its way throughout the fabric of the novel. Any physical description of Heathcliff involves the idea of darkness--dark eyes, dark hair, dark brooding looks, as well as allusions to the dark world of devils and demons. His very name echoes the violent temper of his Yorkshire environment and the complexity of his psychological make-up. This does not necessarily mean, however, that he is evil, but that he must contend with evil. He must struggle with the darkness both within and outside himself, a struggle which can only produce a soul in torment. An understanding of the tension provided by this

¹¹ Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Wuthering Heights," Wuthering Heights: An Anthology of Criticism, comp. by Alastair Everett (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 158.

conflict between good and evil as it shapes the personality of Heathcliff is essential to any understanding of the question of Heathcliff's true identity.

This tension is nowhere more clearly seen than in Nelly Dean's constantly changing perception of Heathcliff. In recalling the incident of her early rejection of the gypsy child she speaks of her "cowardice and inhumanity" (p. 65). After nursing the child through illness she changes her feelings toward Heathcliff and finds herself developing a fondness toward him but could not "dote" on him because "he was simply insensible" (p. 67). The ill-treatment which he receives at the hands of young Earnshaw, together with his natural toughness, wins Nelly, at least in part, to his side. She tries to help him in his competition with the fashionable Edgar Linton for the affection of Catherine Earnshaw, his "adopted" sister for whom he has developed an unusually strong attachment.

The housekeeper, as does Lockwood, picks up on Heathcliff's flaw, which is to provide the basis for much of his suffering. She advises, "Proud people breed sad sorrows for themselves" (p. 83). She alludes to the evil which plagues Heathcliff until his death when she pushes him toward a looking glass and tells him to mark

that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried,
who never open their windows boldly, but lurk
glinting under them, like devil's spies. . . .

Learn to smooth away the surly wrinkles, to raise your lids frankly, and change the fiends to confident, innocent angels. . . . (p. 84)

She realizes the potential for good in her young charge and tries to instill confidence in him:

You're fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows but your father was Emperior of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together. (p. 84)

It is from Nelly that the reader learns of Heathcliff's need for revenge. When he determines as a youth that he shall one day "pay Hindley back," Nelly cautions him that he should forgive and that punishment should be left to God. Heathcliff replies:

No, God won't have the satisfaction that I shall. I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that I don't feel pain. (p. 89)

Heathcliff as a boy is revealed as sullen, troublesome, and stoic, capable of affection for Catherine, whom he adores and Nelly, whom he tolerates. His love for Catherine Earnshaw is equalled only by his hatred for her brother Hindley, who does everything he can to feed that hatred. He keeps these feelings of hatred locked up inside, where they grow even as he grows. Nelly remembers his stoic endurance:

He seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident and nobody was to blame. (p. 66)

As the twig is bent, so grows the tree; Heathcliff approaches adulthood torn between these violent extremes of his love for Catherine and his hatred for her brother. When he returns to Wuthering Heights from his self-imposed exile brought about by Catherine's announced intention to marry the young heir of Thrushcross Grange, Nelly reports on a seeming transformation:

He had grown a tall, athletic well-formed man; beside whom, my master /Edgar Linton/ seemed quite slender and youth-like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance . . . looked intelligent and retained no marks of former degradation. A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified; quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace. (p. 121)

He has not lost whatever destructive force which seeks asylum in his soul, but he has learned to control it in part, to use it to gain his ends.

But his new pose does not fool the one who knows him best. Although Cathy has loved Heathcliff almost from his initiation into the Earnshaw household, she warns her sister-in-law not to invite his attentions nor to seek his affections because "he is a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" (p. 128).

Only Catherine exercises control over this "fierce man," a control which she relinquishes when she deserts him to marry Edgar Linton. She recalls in a feverish delirium how Heathcliff had once set a trap over a nest of fledglings and how she, upon seeing the nest "full of little skeletons," had "made him promise that he'd never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn't" (p. 147).

Without Catherine's stabilizing influence, Heathcliff is unable to control the crushing destructive forces warring within him. He plots mercilessly the exploitation of Catherine's sister-in-law, Isabella Linton, whom he subjects to great emotional abuse. After having deliberately gained control of Isabella's fortune and having established a possible claim to the Linton properties through marriage, Heathcliff tortures Isabella until he wrings from her an exclamation of undiluted hatred: "The single pleasure I can imagine is to die, or to see him dead!" (p. 175).

Heathcliff grows in cruelty and hardens in his consuming resolve to get revenge at any cost; he states,

I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain. (p. 175)

At first glance he seems to be referring to the pain felt by his victims, but the serious reader might note that

this evil energy seems to increase with the pain which the tormentor feels. He nourishes a demon within himself. His agony reaches its peak with the death of his beloved Catherine, who dies giving birth to her young daughter. Torn by a grief to which he cannot yield, he "trembled, in spite of himself, to his very finger-ends" (p. 188). The observant Nelly makes a mental note:

"Poor wretch!" I thought; "you have a heart and nerves the same as your brother men! Why should you be anxious to conceal them? Your pride cannot blind God! You tempt him to wring them till he forces a cry of humiliation."
(p. 189)

Here again we are reminded of Heathcliff's pride, which forges the bars that hold his soul prisoner. He is not to be allowed the healing balm of gentle grief, and his agony turns to anger as he curses Catherine, who has now deserted him this second time. He cries, "Oh God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life. I cannot live without my soul!" (p. 189). At last, the demon which feeds on his pain grows too fierce to be controlled:

He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears. I /Nelly Dean/ observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained. (p. 189)

Heathcliff's grief is equalled only by his passion for revenge and his love for Catherine. He is a man torn by

violent passions foreign to the world of ordinary experience and tormented beyond that which a normal man can bear.

Because of the heroic proportions of his depth of feeling in a world where all others seem numb in comparison, he becomes an outcast. He spurns the tawdriness of the materialistic world around him, gravitating toward Catherine, who is almost his equal in her individualism, rebelliousness, and spiritual intensity. They are alike, as young Catherine realizes even while she ponders the betrayal of both herself and Heathcliff through her unfortunate matrimonial alliance with Linton: "I love him . . . because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same" (p. 106). Knowing this, she still chooses Linton and brings destruction on them all. If Catherine mirrors Heathcliff in other ways, she is also like him in her excess of pride. She refuses to marry Heathcliff because she would be degraded by a match to one who is socially inferior. She, like Heathcliff, is trapped in a world too small for her extraordinary nature. Once Heathcliff remarks concerning Catherine's position as Linton's wife, "he might as well plant an oak in a flower pot" (p. 176). This analogy applies to its maker, for Heathcliff too is like a giant oak whose life forces, twisted and distorted by confinement, finally burst the crockery prison.

In seeking to unravel the threads of Heathcliff's identity, the reader comes to see at last a powerful figure, superhuman in his strengths and passions, an individual larger than life who should not be judged by standards set for ordinary men, a man trapped in a kind of warp between the physical world and the spiritual world, a man doomed to be a stake in the eternal contest between the primeval forces of good and evil.

The presence of evil as it reveals itself in violence and cruelty within the character of Heathcliff cannot be disputed. The walls of Wuthering Heights reverberate with his cruel taunts and threats. His cruelty to animals gives silent testimony to his violent nature as he sets traps for birds in his youth and later, when he no longer has youth to plead his innocence, hangs a small dog. However, his cruelty is nowhere more appalling in its intensity than in his treatment of his wife, Isabella, whom he uses shamelessly. He boasts to Catherine of "Wrenching off" Isabella's fingernails if she gets in his way and warns that he will paint her "mawkish waxen" face with the colours of the rainbow "turning her blue eyes black every day or two" (p. 132).

His verbal, psychological, and even physical abuse of Hindley, Hareton, and Isabella culminates in a scene which best shows the violence of Heathcliff's nature. Isabella,

out of desperation, and Hindley, out of hatred for the man who has cheated him out of his birthright and robbed him of his son, lock Heathcliff out of the house. Isabella relates the story to Nelly Dean: Heathcliff, driven from Catherine's grave by a winter storm, arrives to find that his wife and Hindley have locked him out. His temper, stretched taut by his recent vigil, erupts in rage. He appears in the window and demands that she unlock the door.

His hair and clothes were whitened with snow, and his sharp cannibal teeth, revealed by cold and wrath, gleamed through the dark. "Isabella, let me in, or I'll make you repent!" (p. 199)

Isabella taunts him jealously:

"That's a poor love of yours that cannot bear a shower of snow! We were left at peace in our beds as long as the summer moon shone, but the moment a blast of winter returns you must run for shelter! Heathcliff, if I were you, I'd go stretch myself over her grave and die like a faithful dog." (p. 199)

Hindley rushes at Heathcliff, whose head and shoulders protrude into the room through the open window, with his loaded pistol and knife, but Heathcliff flings himself upon the weapon.

The charge exploded, and the knife, in springing back closed into his owner's wrist. Heathcliff pulled it away by main force, slitting up the flesh as it passed on, and thrust it dripping into his pocket. . . . His adversary had fallen senseless with excessive pain. . . . The ruffian

after entering through the window kicked and trampled on him and dashed his head repeatedly against the flags, holding me with one hand, meantime, to prevent me summoning Joseph. He exerted preter-human self-denial in abstaining from finishing him completely. (p. 199)

After beating Hindley, Heathcliff then binds up his wound "with brutal roughness," stopping short of killing him in the hope of inflicting yet more pain another day.

Hindley always brings out the worst in Heathcliff. The weakness of Hindley and Isabella seems to invite vile treatment at the hands of the powerful man who is unable to resist the temptation to abuse them. Heathcliff's cruelty toward these two is not confined to blind rage. He plots the downfall of each. He marries Isabella both to avenge himself against her brother Edgar and to acquire access to her fortune. With cold deliberation he also plots and achieves his revenge against Hindley as he strips him of his possessions. In the words of Nelly Dean,

The guest was now the master of Wuthering Heights: he held firm possession, and proved to the attorney--who in his turn proved it to Mr. Linton--that Earnshaw had mortgaged every yard of land he owned, for cash to supply his mania for gaming; and he, Heathcliff, was the mortgagee. In that manner Hareton, who should now be the first gentleman in the neighbourhood, was reduced to a state of complete dependence on his father's inveterate enemy; and lives in his own house as a servant, deprived of the advantage of wages, and quite unable to right himself, because of his friendlessness, and his ignorance that he has been wronged. (p. 208-209)

Heathcliff's cruel use of his own son to gain his evil ends gives unimpeachable evidence of his diabolical nature. After forcing Linton Heathcliff to leave the refuge offered him by his uncle Linton at Thrushcross Grange following the death of Isabella, Heathcliff outlines his plans for his son. He responds to Nelly's admonition to "be kind to the boy" with the promise that he will be "very kind to him." He explains as follows:

My son is prospective owner of your place, /Nelly now works at Thrushcross Grange/ and I should not wish him to die till I was certain of being his successor. Besides, he's mine, and I want the triumph of seeing my descendant fairly lord of their estates: my child hiring their children to till their father's lands for wages. That is the sole consideration which can make me endure the whelp: I despise him for himself and hate him for the memories he revives! (p. 228)

In page after page Heathcliff vents his wrath with a fury that transcends that of which any human being should be capable. Wherever he goes, violence, pain, and evil follow. His violence, while it shocks, confuses and repels the reader, should not mislead him into a misinterpretation of the character. The presence of evil does not mean that Heathcliff is not heroic. A closer look at him strips away the evil veneer and lays bare a spirit pure and powerful in its indomitable strength and individualism.

Heathcliff's heroism is not conventional. He is not the "romantic hero" in the sense in which the term is often

interpreted. He is moral, but his morality is not the usual brand. He is depraved, but his depravity, like his morality, lies outside ordinary concepts of romanticism. He scorns the tin trappings of the romantic hero. The reader should not fall into the trap into which Isabella blundered, Isabella whom Heathcliff could "hardly regard in the light of a rational creature" so obstinate was she in picturing him "a hero of romance" (p. 173). Catherine had warned her sister-in-law that Heathcliff was not a "pearl-containing oyster of a rustic" (p. 128). Yet she insisted upon casting him in the role of romantic hero.

Heathcliff is obviously not a romantic hero in the traditional sense which demands goodness, self-sacrifice, and noble deeds, and while he does have some characteristics of the Byronic hero as John Ehrstine outlines him,¹² he cannot really be called a Byronic hero. According to Ehrstine, the Byronic hero begins with failure--a collapsed world with a memory of innocence. Heathcliff's world crashes in when Catherine betrays him. All of his subsequent actions occur as a result of this tragedy. However, his memory is not all that innocent. He was less than angelic before the collapse of his world. He came into the world a dark child. In addition, according to Ehrstine, the Byronic

¹² John W. Ehrstine, "Byronic and the Metaphysic of Self-Destruction," in The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism, ed. G. R. Thompson (Pullman, Washington: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 94-108.

hero also feels strong guilt. There is little evidence to support this characteristic in Heathcliff. Although he often warns others to stay out of his destructive path, he feels little guilt for his actions. He feels that his maltreatment of Hindley has more in common with justice than revenge and that Catherine should assume culpability for his actions. Even on her death bed he reminds her:

You teach me now how cruel you've been--cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me and cry; and wring out my kisses and tears: they'll blight you--they'll damn you. You loved me--then what right had you to leave me? What right--answer me--for the fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart--you have broken it; and in breaking it you have broken mine. (p. 183)

Furthermore, the Byronic hero seeks to escape tyranny through the restoration of unity.¹³ If Heathcliff, as Arnold Kettle and others have suggested, were deeply involved and motivated by socio-economic interests, then we could assign to him this characteristic. While it is true that he does rebel against tyranny and does seek to restore a kind of unity through his reunion with Catherine after death, the forces against which he rebels and the unity

¹³ Ehrstine, p. 97.

which he seeks to restore are personal rather than social. It is this highly personal and individualistic aspect of Heathcliff's nature which prevents his being interpreted as a Byronic hero in the strictest sense. As W. A. Craik points out, Lockwood perceives that Heathcliff is not the Byronic hero that he first suspects him to be when he hears him speak savagely to a pretty young girl (the young Catherine).¹⁴ Craik also points out that Heathcliff's violence is not born of sadism but is rather a "breaking" out of the agony of frustration within him and points out that the violent acts which he commits are seriously provoked.¹⁵ He does not, like Faust, deliberately court evil, but rather is so selfish and single-minded in his pursuit of his personal goals--vengeance and reunion with Catherine--that he has no patience or energy to battle the evil within himself.

Heathcliff does have some of the appeal of the Byronic hero. Albert Guerard hints at sexual overtones in the creation of Heathcliff when he says that "only a woman could have imagined such a figure of masculine power."¹⁶

¹⁴ W. A. Craik, The Bronte Novels (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968; rpt. 1971), p. 47.

¹⁵ Craik, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶ Albert J. Guérard, "Preface to Wuthering Heights," from the Preface to Wuthering Heights (Pullman, Washington:

Heathcliff is a powerful man, powerful in physical build, intellect, and above all powerful in will. He is a volcano about to erupt, unleashing destruction and creating havoc. Such power if controlled creates great energy for good or evil. Heathcliff has the power within himself to acquire what he wants. He desires vengeance; he obtains vengeance. He covets property; he acquires property. Yet he cannot acquire the one thing which he desires most--Catherine. Thus he becomes weak--an example of the paradox of the giant brought to his knees by a woman. He is appealing even in his weakness as he is in his power. As Guerard also admits, some readers--especially female--may find that his "grand passion" makes all else, even goodness, seem irrelevant.¹⁷ It is through this passion that the powerful energy of Heathcliff, inherently neither good nor evil, comes to be a positive or negative force in the lives of the persons involved. Colin Wilson, who interprets Heathcliff in the light of Abraham Maslow's theory of dominance in women, touches upon this theory also. In essence he says that the more dominant the woman, the more dominant,

Washington Square Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 63-68: rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Wuthering Heights, ed. Thomas Volger (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 65.

¹⁷ Guerard, p. 65.

forceful, even violent her concept of masculinity. He suggests that Emily Bronte was such a woman and that she found Heathcliff's violence appealing.¹⁸ While it is fascinating to imagine that Emily Bronte created the powerful figure of Heathcliff out of a love-starved imagination festering in the barren atmosphere of Haworth, it is certain that she created him out of an artistic need: obviously, it is the almost supernatural power of Heathcliff as it is twisted and manipulated by a passion of equal dimensions which gives the novel its immense power.

It is this dark power which also lends the flavor of the gothic to the novel. Even though Heathcliff cannot be typed as a purely gothic hero, there is obviously a strong gothic influence in the novel and in the creation of the central figure. The setting is typically gothic in its wild and undisciplined atmosphere. Lockwood first describes it:

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling. "Wuthering" being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed:

¹⁸ Colin Wilson, "A Personal Response to Wuthering Height," in The Art of Emily Bronte, ed. Anne Smith (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 223-237).

one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow winds are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door; above which among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date "1500" and the name "Hareton Earnshaw." (p. 34)

This gothic setting is complete with ancient graveyard;

The place of Catherine's interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel, under the carved monuments of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and mulberry plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat mould almost buries it. (p. 190)

The wild Yorkshire moors echo the tumult raging within the characters themselves. Lowry Nelson, who calls Heathcliff one of "the gothic hero's most successful immediate heirs,"¹⁹ points out that Heathcliff is at one with the indifferent natural world of Wuthering Heights. Cathy calls Heathcliff "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement,

¹⁹ Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," Yale Review, 52 (1962), 252.

without cultivation, and arid wilderness of furze and whinstone" (p. 128). In the gothic setting of Wuthering Heights Emily Bronte has created what David Daiches refers to as "a perfect relationship between nature and human passions."²⁰ As G. R. Thompson declares, "Dark Romanticism evokes an image of the lonely, isolated self pressing onward despite all obstacles while either indulging or struggling with an eternal evil."²¹ In this sense Heathcliff and the novel belong to this gothic tradition. However, even though Wuthering Heights may have its genesis in the gothic tradition, it transcends the genre. Gothic writers present man as eternal victim--both of self and of something outside self.²² Heathcliff is not, however, an eternal victim because he is ultimately, through death, re-united with his beloved Catherine, a union which must end his suffering. The positive ending of the novel, the happy union of the young Catherine and Hareton, negates the purely gothic notion of man as eternal victim. This ending also reveals Heathcliff to be a hero more in the tradition of tragedy than in that of dark romanticism.

²⁰ David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature (New York: Ronald, 1970), II, 1066.

²¹ G. R. Thompson, Introd. in The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism, ed. G. R. Thompson (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 1.

²² Thompson, p. 6.

In what sense can Heathcliff be said to be heroic? Truly, he is not moral in any traditional sense, does not live by precepts governed by the common ideas of virtue. Indeed, he lives by no rules that we can see; he sets himself above the codes which govern lesser men. His nature is violent, aggressive, destructive. Yet, there can be little argument that Heathcliff is an heroic man. He is superior to the average man in strength of will, individualism, passion, and capacity for suffering.

However, it is the purpose for which he uses these characteristics which troubles his detractors. They argue that his great strength of will, passion, and intellect are used for destruction, and therefore he cannot be called heroic. To my way of thinking, this is too simplistic an approach. As Mary Robinson points out, it is unjust to hold Heathcliff, who is uncertain of his parentage, responsible for his passionate nature which he inherited or for the deformity of that nature produced by his environment and circumstances.²³ Heathcliff cannot help his passionate nature which causes his obsession with Catherine, nor can he assume guilt for his excessive

²³ Mary E. Robinson, "The Origin of *Wuthering Heights*," in *Emily Bronte*, Mary E. Robinson 2nd ed. 1889; rpt. in *Wuthering Heights: An Anthology of Criticism*, ed. Alastair Everitt (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1967), p. 6.

pride which prohibits any attempt to stop Catherine in her tragic marriage to Edgar Linton.

Frederick Karl reluctantly admits this when he declares: "Like a Greek tragic figure, Heathcliff is what he is; the elements of his greatness (his will to power) contain as well his flaw (his overweening passion), and he is unable to escape himself."²⁴ When Karl further asserts that because Heathcliff is not a sympathetic character, he cannot be a tragic hero, he cuts right to the heart of the matter. Reader sympathy is, in the last analysis, the final factor in the heroic equation of the conflict between good and evil in Heathcliff, and reader sympathy is, of course, as difficult to understand as individual tastes. When Karl says that Heathcliff's evil deeds prohibit reader sympathy, what he is really saying is that he feels no sympathy for the character and therefore cannot view him as a tragic hero.

Many critics share this feeling. Even Charlotte Bronte finds the character of Heathcliff repulsive. In the Editor's Preface to the 1850 edition of Wuthering Heights, Charlotte pictures Heathcliff as a monster, "a man's shape animated by demon life--a Ghoul--an Afreet" who "stands unredeemed."²⁵

²⁴ Frederick Karl, An Age of Fiction: The Nineteenth Century British Novel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964; rpt. 1969, p. 86.

²⁵ Charlotte Bronte, "Editor's Preface to the New

But, Charlotte Bronte draws her heroes in the guise of the romantic ideal. A comparison of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights reveals a psychological complexity in the latter which the author of the former would be incapable of understanding.

Some critics and readers, undisturbed by the evil influence at play against the character, view Heathcliff differently and find themselves in sympathy with him. For example, Elizabeth Drew observes that the very passion which Karl labels a flaw could have become a powerful force for good in Heathcliff's life had it not been twisted by Katherine's rejection.²⁶ If Wuthering Heights has a villain, it is in the person of Catherine, who betrays both Heathcliff and herself to suffering.

Heathcliff's great potential for suffering is equal to the destructive force which rages within him. He must pay not only for his sins but also for the greater immorality committed by Catherine in her rejection of him. Through Heathcliff's suffering, his sins and Catherine's are expiated, even though his suffering is not voluntary

Edition in Wuthering Heights," introd. Bonamy Dobrée (London: Collins, 1953), p. 30.

²⁶ Elizabeth Drew, The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963), p. 226.

and is not the kind of noble act which usually redeems the tragic hero. He is united with Catherine in death as he could not be in life, and the restoration of harmony which the tragic hero seeks is accomplished. The analogy drawn by Walter Allen is an apt one. Heathcliff and Catherine he sees as two great rivers which should by nature flow into each other but whose "courses are diverted, their proper channels damned" causing the perversion of "obstructed energy."²⁷ When the lovers are re-joined by death, harmony is restored.

Lockwood notes the harmony of nature which gives gentle testimony to the restored harmony:

I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next to the moor: the middle one grey, and half buried in heath; Edgar Linton's only harmonized by the turf, and moss creeping up its foot; Heathcliff's still bare.

I lingered around them under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth. (p. 348)

John Hewish in his biographical study of Emily Bronte quotes an obscure poem which he uncertainly attributes to the author of Wuthering Heights. These lines from the

²⁷ Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1954), p. 226.

poem "Often Rebuked, Yet Always Back Returning" capture the spirit of the individualism which asserts itself in the heroism of Heathcliff, a different kind of hero but no less a hero than the romantic archetypes whom he does not imitate.

I'll walk, but not in old heroic traces,
 And not in paths of high morality,
 And not among the half-distinguished faces
 The clouded forms of long-past history.

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading;
 It vexes me to choose another guide:
 Where the gray flocks in ferny glens are feeding
 Where the wild wind blows on the mountain side.

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing,
 More glory and more grief than I can tell:
 The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling²⁸
 Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.

Heathcliff walked where his nature led him, both to glory and to grief, and in his love for Catherine, he found both his Heaven and his Hell.

²⁸ John Hewish, Emily Bronte: A Critical and Biographical Study (New York: Macmillan, 1967; rpt. 1971), p. 93.

CHAPTER III

ATLAS SHRUGGED: A ROMANTIC PERSPECTIVE

"Who is John Galt?" With these four words Ayn Rand launches a philosophical romance of epic proportions creating a hero who gives new definition to traditional concepts of morality and virtue. In Atlas Shrugged (1957) she leads her readers to confront a new reality, a reality which addresses the existence of man in a universe which is conquered by reason. The author states that her purpose in writing is "the projection of the ideal man."¹ Toward this end she populates Atlas Shrugged with not just one, but several characters, all aspiring toward the fulfillment of Rand's concept of the ideal man, all possessing virtues which she defines within the framework of her capitalist/objectivist philosophy. Chief among these, like a greater god ruling lesser gods, is John Galt, for whom the reader searches throughout the first half of the book. Although the hero asserts his influence in absentia for the first part of the romance, the reader is allowed glimpses of him

¹ Ayn Rand, "The Goal of My Writing," The Objectivist, Oct., 1963, n.p.; rpt. in The Romantic Manifesto, by Ayn Rand (New York: World Pub. Co., 1969), p. 161.

through others who personify his heroic characteristics. Ayn Rand's ultimate ideal, perfected in the figure of John Galt, not only incarnates the tenets of her philosophy but also stands as an example of her technical skill as a writer of romance.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy as it relates to the concept of heroism and to isolate and articulate those traits which render John Galt and the citizens of Galt's Gulch heroic. In order to do this, some attention must necessarily be given to an understanding of the romance genre used in Atlas Shrugged and to an analysis of the technical skill with which Rand employs the genre as well as to an understanding of the objectivist philosophy and the way in which it functions within the framework of the romance.

John Galt and his band of followers are unique among mortals; their level of heroism and the consistency with which they practice it place them outside the perimeter of realistic fiction. Dagny Taggert, Francisco d'Anconia, Hank Rearden, and John Galt, the central "movers" in Atlas Shrugged, belong more to the tradition of romance than to the novel. Northrup Frye tells us in his essay "Theory of Genres" that the basic difference between the novel and the romance lies in the concept of characterization:

The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by revery, and however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable² is likely to keep breaking out in his pages.

The character of John Galt as he is revealed in Rand's work conforms to Frye's definition of the archetype. The "something nihilistic" which breaks out in the pages of Atlas Shrugged has nothing to do with the rejection of truth, the belief in non-absolutes, or the belief in the futility of existence which is sometimes associated with nihilism. The humanism which is the philosophical basis of Rand's nihilism denies all such beliefs. However, from a political point of view, Atlas Shrugged can be seen as nihilistic in its advocacy of the destruction of conventional, social, political, and economic institutions and in its attempt to replace these institutions with a new order. John Galt vows to "stop the motor of the world," thereby wreaking social, economic, and political chaos.³

In defining the romance, Frye further asserts that "the romance, which deals with heroes, is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which

² Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 305.

³ Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 710. All other references to the work will be to this edition and will be noted by page number only.

deal with gods."⁴ Certainly John Galt is consistent with Frye's definition, for he is a kind of half-god, as a study of his relationships with the other characters will show. Steel girders, industrial machines, high-rise office buildings, and mining operations replace the natural environment usually associated with the romance. For Ayn Rand's characters, however, this world of business and industry is a natural environment and provides an appropriate element for the display of her super heroes and her ideal man. Dagny Taggart, Vice-president in Charge of Operations of Taggart Transcontinental Railroad, finds this kind of environment not only natural to her but essential. It addresses a basic need within her. Just as some men find flowers, trees, and open spaces necessary to a relaxed and creative frame of mind, she is only comfortable and productive around the sights and sound of human activity. While on vacation in the wilderness, she finds herself longing for the sight of a billboard and goes in search of a factory with the same sense of purpose and motivation which others feel in searching out a waterfall or a giant canyon (p. 280). She finds nature beautiful, but human productivity is the well from which she draws her inspiration. Dagny's efficiency of mind, body, and spirit belongs to the world of productivity. She finds in her railroad and its operation

⁴ Frye, p. 306.

her raison d'être. She loves it with the clean, pure emotion that others reserve for nature. As the Comet, the fastest and best passenger train of the Taggart line, enters the terminal, she feels a rush of emotion:

She always felt it when the train went underground--this sense of eagerness, of hope and of secret excitement. It was as if normal existence were a photograph of shapeless things in badly printed colors, but this was a sketch done in a few sharp strokes that made things seem clean, important, and worth doing.

She watched the tunnels as they flowed past; bare walls of concrete, a net of pipes and wires, a web of rails that went off into black holes where green and red lights hung as distant drops of color. There was nothing else, nothing to dilute it, so that one could admire naked purpose and the ingenuity that had achieved it. (p. 18)

This love of "naked purpose" Dagny shares with the other members of the cult of the superior. Francisco d'Anconia, heir to the world's copper mines, is her childhood friend with whom she shares her ambitions and love for the railroad built by her ancestor. "Frisco," as she calls him, is one of the first defectors to Galt's scheme, one of the first to deprive society of the fruits of his mind by deliberately destroying that which he enjoys most--the gigantic enterprise that was d'Anconia Copper. Henry ("Hank") Rearden, builder and controller of the world's most productive steel mills, is one of the last to join the strike, fighting against heavy odds to maintain his integrity in a world which wrenches it from him as a price exacted for the right

to be a producer. He, too, understands "the naked purpose," for it is his motive power. He looks at the "red glow of the mills" and finds the sight "as life-giving as a sunrise" (p. 31).

Finally there is John Galt, physicist and engineer, the leader of the strike by "the men of the mind" against the element in society which denies the efficacy of the mind but adheres to the creed of "unearned rewards and unrewarded duties" (p. 1010). John Galt represents, in the god-like reverence paid to him by his followers, not a real individual but an abstraction. Ayn Rand, who speaks of the romantic hero as "larger than life," as the "abstraction of man's best and highest potentiality applicable to and achievable by all men . . .,"⁵ consciously creates this figure who is half-human, half-divine. Her humanistic view of man as worthy of glorification demands the acknowledgement of this quality of the divine, which she believes to be the perfecting of reason, as a characteristic of man. She proclaims:

An artist (as for instance, the sculptors of Ancient Greece) who presents man as a god-like figure is aware of the fact that men may be crippled or diseased or helpless; but he regards these conditions as accidental, as irrelevant to the essential nature of man--and he presents a

⁵ Ayn Rand, "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age," The Objectivist, Nov., 1962, n.p.; rpt. in The Romantic Manifesto, p. 117.

figure embodying strength, beauty, intelligence,⁶ self-confidence, as man's proper, natural state.

The representation of the ideal rather than the real should, then, be the goal of the artist. She is the artist and John Galt is the ideal.

That Dagny Taggert, loved by both Francisco and Rearden, should reject them for John Galt is a condition which the rejected lovers not only accept but expect. He is their superior; therefore, under their own code, they must willingly surrender her as one would pay tribute, reverently and even joyfully. When Francisco realizes that he has lost Dagny to Galt, his reaction is one of acceptance:

Francisco's hand stopped. For a long moment he was seeing nothing but Galt's face. Then his eyes moved to hers. He put the bottle down and he did not step back, but it was as if his glance drew back to a wide range, to include them both.

"But of course," he said. . . . His voice had an even, uninflected sound. . . . "I knew it twelve years ago," he said. "I knew it before you could have known, and it's I who should have seen that you would see." (p. 809)

Hank Rearden likewise accepts Dagny's choice with calm, stating simply, "I think I've always known that you would find him . . . I knew that I was not your final choice" (p. 861).

⁶ Ayn Rand, "Art and a Sense of Life," The Objectivist, Mar., 1966, n.p.; rpt. in The Romantic Manifesto, p. 46.

The lack of realism in their reactions is further emphasized by the close, almost family relationship that the three enjoy. Rearden and d'Anconia risk their lives in a rescue attempt of the man for whom they should feel jealousy. Even at the end, the three are happily anticipating their return to the world to rebuild that which they have destroyed. The fraternal atmosphere is not lost on the reader. The obvious lack of bitterness and antagonism among three men who want the same woman is devoid of realism.

Rand depicts her villains with the same intensity with which she delineates her heroes. No democratic government is as consistently irrational, no "free" society as consistently mindless, no people so consistently bent on and devoted to self-destruction as the society which she pictures. A process of disintegration which should realistically take decades is distilled into years, months, and finally days.

In her battle against non-absolutes, she finds it necessary to define her philosophy in terms of either/or. There are few levels or characters in between. Her characters either exhibit unquestionable courage or they are spineless worms. James Taggert, Dagny's brother and President of Taggert Transcontinental, serves as her foil. He is without physical or spiritual beauty. He seeks unearned profits, unearned praise, and unearned love; he is a coward and a compromiser in the ugliest sense of the world. He is a creature without any redeeming characteristics, and he gets

no sympathy from the reader for his weakness. Most importantly, he functions as a symbol of mediocrity which the reader comes to despise.

Hank Rearden's parasitic brother Phillip performs the same function. He lives off the productivity of Rearden's mind, while at the same time he seeks to destroy that which makes the productivity possible. He seeks to destroy the hand that feeds him through supporting social and political processes which limit productivity, yet he never holds a job nor contributes to his own physical livelihood in any way. He dares to call his brother selfish.

The use of archetypes who so clearly represent good and evil gives rise to the charge that the work lacks realism; however, a lack of realism in the development of the characters of Atlas Shrugged in no way denigrates the artistic value of the romance. To try to impose realism upon the romance is an affront to the genre. Ayn Rand is aware of this issue, and she professes only a limited debt to realism: "An artist," she says, "recreates those aspects of reality which represent his fundamental view of man and of his existence."⁷ Her view of man is unashamedly romantic; therefore, the romance is an appropriate medium for the

⁷ Ayn Rand, "Basic Principles of Literature," The Objectivist, July, 1968, n.p.; rpt. in The Romantic Manifesto, p. 81

expression of her philosophical and literary goals. At the same time, however, her characters and plot grow naturally out of the cold, hard reality of the world of trade, rather than some more exotic, fantastic clime which is sometimes associated with romance. Her summation of herself as a "romantic realist" is not unreasonable.⁸

To understand Ayn Rand's "ideal man" one must first understand the ethic by which he lives. As Frye points out, the romance is a likely vehicle for the projection of ideals and searches for "some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space."⁹ The golden age which Galt and his dropouts desire and seek to precipitate is an age which is to be governed by the objectivist ethic. Ayn Rand articulates this philosophy in two essays, The Virtue of Selfishness (1964) and For the New Intellectual (1961), but she personifies it in Atlas Shrugged.

The basic tenets of Rand's objectivist philosophy as outlined in her essays include a belief in the triumph of reason and the necessity of laissez-faire capitalism as the proper environment for that triumph. The heirs and precipitators of her ideal world are "the producer of wealth and the purveyor of knowledge--the businessman and the

⁸ Rand, "The Goal of My Writing," p. 168.

⁹ Frye, p. 186.

intellectual."¹⁰ Terms such as duty and self-sacrifice she considers anathema to the healthy spirit. She rejects Immanuel Kant's morality of "Selflessness" with the cutting observation that those who accept such a philosophy "deserve it."¹¹ She also rejects Auguste Comte's philosophy of Altruism, which places others above one's self. On the other hand, she refuses to acknowledge as truth Neitzsche's rebellion against altruism, which she says sacrifices others to the individual.¹² Giving praise only to Aristotle, she castigates the philosophers of times past: "The great treason of philosophers is that they defaulted on the responsibility of providing a rational society with a code of rational morality."¹³ Man, she maintains, must be guided by his intellect, not by his emotions. The new morality of her egoistic philosophy holds that self-interest is man's proper moral goal. Nathaniel Branden, in his study of the works and philosophy of Ayn Rand, defines Objectivism as follows:

In metaphysics it [Objectivism] is the principle that reality is objective and absolute, that it exists independent of anyone's consciousness, perceptions, beliefs, wishes, hopes or fears--that which is, is what it is--that existence is

¹⁰ Ayn Rand, For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 25.

¹¹ Rand, For the New Intellectual, p. 32.

¹² Rand, For the New Intellectual, p. 36.

¹³ Rand, For the New Intellectual, p. 37.

identity--that A is A. In epistemology, it is the principle that man's mind is competent to achieve objectively valid knowledge of that which exists. In ethics, it is the principle that the values proper to man are objectively demonstrable.¹⁴

The place where the reader really comes to confront Objectivism, however, is within the pages of Atlas Shrugged, in the words and actions of its sincerest advocates. This is not to say that Ayn Rand prostitutes her art to serve didacticism; the romance stands on its own merits. It is not a means to an end but an end in itself. She clearly states that "art does not teach . . . teaching is the task of ethics."¹⁵ Through her fiction, she seeks to allow man to experience life as it ought to be. Atlas Shrugged offers a plot structure which operates independently of any didactic purpose. Yet Atlas Shrugged, which she calls a "blueprint on how to be free," stands as her most convincing argument that sacrifice is "immoral," that altruism leads to totalitarianism, and that rational selfishness leads to real benevolence and not self-indulgence.¹⁶ But the book also stands as a fine literary work, a romance in which the

¹⁴ Nathaniel Branden, Who is Ayn Rand?: An Analysis of the Novels of Ayn Rand (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 56.

¹⁵ Rand, "The Goal of My Writing," p. 170.

¹⁶ "An Interview with Ayn Rand," The Phil Donahue Show, NBC, 22 May 1979.

characters are well developed and the plot tightly constructed. Ayn Rand states that her purpose in writing fiction "is not the philosophical enlightenment of my readers," and she claims to be "amused and wearied" by those who think that it is. "I write--and read," she says, "for the sake of the story."¹⁷ This statement testifies once again to the author's wisdom in her choice of the romance; good plot development is an essential ingredient of the genre.

Rand's view that the plot should be consistent with the theme and that a natural link should exist between plot and theme is evident in an analysis of Atlas Shrugged. Her "Plot-theme," as she defines it, is "the men of the mind going on strike against the altruist--collectivist society."¹⁸ The quest motif of the romance as outlined by Northrup Frye is clearly the best choice for such a plot-theme. The three stages which he outlines are easily traced in the development of Atlas Shrugged. The first stage, he tells us, is "the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures." This stage is followed by the "crucial struggle" and finally by the "exaltation of the hero."¹⁹ The perilous journey is

¹⁷ Rand, "The Goal of My Writing," p. 170.

¹⁸ Rand, "Basic Principles of Literature," p. 64.

¹⁹ Frye, p. 187.

for John Galt and his followers a figurative and a literal journey which begins in frustration, a frustration born of pressures brought against each of them to limit their productivity, a frustration born of doing business in a world of "looters" and "moochers." John Galt, employed as a young engineer for the Twentieth Century Motor Company, invents a motor which could revolutionize conventional transportation, a motor which draws its energy from the atmosphere. Enraged by the social experiment based on the collectivist concept "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" in which the owners of the factory are indulging, Galt deliberately decides to withdraw his mind from those who seek to steal its fruits. He disappears, taking the secret of his invention with him. His literal journey takes him to a hidden valley in the Colorado mountains, screened from the world's view. Here he begins a new social order based on the concept of free trade between "men of the mind." The utopian community nestled in the mountains offers refuge to men from all professions. In its self-sufficiency it gives proof to the workability of the philosophy of its citizens. Dr. Hugh Akston, former Professor of Philosophy at one of the nation's most respected universities and mentor to John Galt, is the other half of Rand's partnership between the "businessman and the intellectual." In the valley Akston becomes a businessman also. The former professor earns his gold--the valley operates on the gold

standard--by half-interest in a tobacco company. Each cigarette turned out is, like every product in Galt's Gulch, of highest quality. Each cigarette is stamped in gold with the sign of the dollar, which is the logo for the entire community.

Each refugee in the valley practices a simple trade other than the one for which he has gained fame and fortune and ultimately pain. No task is too menial to be performed with pride. Lawrence Hammond, formerly the nation's best automobile manufacturer, runs a grocery store. Dwight Sanders of Sanders Aircraft raises hogs for bacon, and "Judge Narragansett of the Superior Court of the State of Illinois" produces eggs and butter from his poultry and dairy farm (p. 713). The author's point that these men of the mind are also men of integrity is well taken. Their products, whether automobiles, oil, or tobacco, are the very best.

Many of them have outside jobs as well. But all have sworn to withdraw their minds from the grasp of the world. Whatever jobs they hold on the outside are simple and not very productive. Each individual who enters the community enters into a covenant: "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine." These words are inscribed over the door of the power plant, which represents

the only religious structure in the valley. It stands as a temple to man's reason.

From his job as "the lowest track-worker" of Taggert Transcontinental, John Galt is free to recruit from the United States and the world the best brains of his age. One by one they disappear to look for sanctuary in Galt's Gulch, earning for the recruiter the name "the destroyer." Galt watches each potential member as he becomes more and more frustrated in his battle against government bureaucracy and restrictions, and when the time is ripe, he offers them his alternative. For some the defection is easy; they have nowhere else to go. For others the journey to Galt's Gulch is fraught with peril and indecision.

For Francisco d'Anconia the journey is especially difficult. He is not free simply to defect, taking the fruits of his labor with him or destroying them in one dramatic conflagration as Ellis Wyatt does his oil fields. If he disappears, the world will go on plundering the mines which he and his ancestors have developed. Adopting the facade of a playboy, he deliberately sets out to destroy the mines in such a way that when the world discovers he is gone, there will be nothing left to loot. He tells Dagny Taggert of his scheme:

The playboy--it was a part that I had to play in order not to let the looters suspect me while I was destroying d'Anconia Copper in plain sight of

the whole world. That's the joker in their system, they're out to fight any man of honor and ambition, but let them see a worthless rotter and they think he's a friend, they think he's safe--safe!--that's their view of life, but are they learning! (p. 765)

The instruction of the looters is what they are all aiming for. When the world's copper supply is depleted, Francisco thinks that he has taught his lesson well.

For Hank Rearden and Dagny Taggert the journey is a long one. They cannot abandon that which they hold most dear. In desperation, Dagny tries to leave the railroad in the inept hands of her brother James and the fools which make up the board of directors, but she finds herself rushing back as a mother would rush to a hurt child when she hears that the famous Taggert Tunnel has been demolished in an accident:

Her scream sounded like the screams that had rung out in the one last moment in the darkness of the tunnel. . . . She stood still. She looked as if she were seeing, not the room around her, but the scene in Colorado. Her sudden movement had the abruptness of a convulsion. With the single-tracked rationality of a somnambulist, . . . she whirled to the door and ran. (p. 621-622)

Even when her private plane crashes into Galt's utopia and she is allowed a glimpse of an existence without the kind of pain and pressure which has become her daily fare, an existence which offers a life and a love which she cannot find on the outside, she cannot desert her railroad. She

tells the members of Galt's Gulch why she must return to the outside world:

I cannot bring myself to abandon to destruction all the greatness of the world, all that which was mine and yours, which was made by us and is still ours by right. . . . (p. 807)

Hank Rearden shares Dagny's ties to the outside world. He cannot seek sanctuary, abandoning his mills. John Galt watches his struggle and understands: "I saw what a price he was paying for his brilliant ability, what torture he was enduring . . . struggling to understand what I had understood . . ." (p. 959). When the government, represented under the auspices of the Steel Unification Plan, finally takes his profits away and places them in a common pool, when his mind and his profits have been plundered, he realizes that he has no reason to remain. The end of the journey, the goal for which they all are questing, lies, however, not in Galt's Gulch, but in the re-establishment of a world where free trade and human productivity enjoy their own rewards.

The second stage of the quest motif, the "crucial struggle," comes to each of the characters when each has completed his own individual journey and has committed himself to the goal of the strike. For John Galt this "crucial struggle" is especially violent. After announcing his intention to a country torn by panic and economic chaos, he is taken

prisoner by government officials who attempt to force him to save the country. Acknowledging the superiority of his mind, they still seek to impose upon his reason, begging him to lead them to a "peaceful, scientific age and to prosperity" (p. 1100). When he refuses to bargain with them because they "have no value to offer" (p. 1101), they attempt to use his mind by force. Using a new invention, a torture machine which sends electrical current through his body, they seek to persuade him to their point of view. When he refuses, they scream at him, "We want you to take over! . . . We demand that you dictate! . . . We order you to save us! . . . We order you to think!" (p. 1143). Their pain machine, like the society which produced it, is defective. Inevitably the machine breaks down; it is no match for the man against whom it is pitted. Galt is rescued by his followers in a dramatic take-over of the compound.

The romance moves finally into its third stage, the exaltation of the hero, as the existing political, economic and social order is completely destroyed. This destruction is complete when the last existing train is abandoned by its crew. Its massive engine becomes a symbol for the motor of the world which has finally come to a halt. In Galt's Gulch the strikers gather around their leader to contemplate their triumphant return:

They could not see the world beyond the mountains,
there was only a void of darkness and rock, but

the darkness was hiding the ruins of a continent: the roofless homes, the rusting tractors, the lightless streets, the abandoned rail. But, far in the distance, on the edge of the earth a small flame was waving in the wind. . . . It seemed to be calling and waiting for the words John Galt was now to pronounce.

"The road is cleared," said Galt. "We are going back to the world."

He raised his hand over the desolate earth; he traced in space the sign of the dollar. (p. 1168)

The various stages of the quest as outlined by Frye are fulfilled. The journey has been made, the crucial struggle won, the enemy defeated, and now the exalted hero is returning to the world he has conquered, a world which will be dominated by his sign--the sign of the dollar.

Although the heroes of Atlas Shrugged are typical to the romantic genre in their superiority to ordinary human beings and in their fulfillment of a quest, they are atypical in the sense that the values which they hold and for which they struggle are not the values commonly attributed to heroes of romance. Their heroic characteristics must be evaluated in the light of the hero's action juxtaposed with its objectivist correlative.

Of these characteristics, courage is logically the first; the objectivist ethic demands courage as its natural prerequisite. Intellectual courage is the bridge which allows the individual to recognize a value-system foreign to the accepted system practiced by the society. Intellectual courage leads him to question the received wisdom of his

forebearers. But moral courage provides him with the strength to act upon his findings. Without the moral courage to put his new value system into practice, his life becomes a sham. He is damned to the kind of hell which Dr. Robert Stadler endures. Robert Stadler, a famous scientist, a contemporary of Hugh Akston, has the intellectual courage to revolt against a value system which seeks to destroy reason. But, unlike his counterpart, he lacks the moral courage to pursue the dictates of his mind and accepts a post as director of the State Science Institute. When confronted by John Galt, his former pupil, with his defection, he cringes in self-defense:

I'm not to blame for it! I'm not! I never had a chance against them! . . . You don't know how deadly they are! . . . What could I do against their fists? I had to live, didn't I? (pp. 1117-1118)

He dares to tell John Galt, who is being held prisoner, that he could do nothing, that he had no choice but to live by their code. Stadler is a moral coward and he suffers a coward's fate. He is destroyed by his own scientific genius, which is directed against him by the looters on whose alters he sacrificed his reason. Of Stadler, "nothing remained alive among the ruins--except for some endless minutes longer, a huddle of torn flesh and screaming pain that had once been a great mind" (p. 1133).

Physical courage is only the outward manifestation of moral courage and is, of course, necessary in the hero of romance. The heroes of Galt's Gulch display their depth of moral courage through physical acts of bravery. Francisco d'Anconia leaps to the edge of an exploding steel furnace and hurls clay into its mouth to seal it, with apparent disregard for his own safety. Hank Rearden in an act of daring pulls him back from the lips of the inferno. Damneskjold Ragnar, a third "son" of Hugh Akston and Robert Stadler, risks his neck daily in fearless acts of piracy. He acquires international infamy and a price on his head, stealing from the "thieving poor and giving back to the productive rich" (p. 576). As a tax collector or re-collector of income taxes, he keeps meticulous records on his "customers" and returns to them, sometimes to their surprise and even shock, the exact amount of their income taxes in gold.

For Francisco d'Anconia and Dagny Taggert, the ultimate test of moral courage comes when they must abandon the products of their minds to the looters. For Francisco the defection is particularly painful. He cannot merely walk away but must deliberately and painfully destroy that which he has sworn to maintain. He assumes the guise of a playboy, gaining a reputation for decadence and wastefulness in order that the world will not notice that he is destroying d'Anconia Copper bit by bit so that it will collapse in upon itself, leaving nothing for the looters. In choosing to travel this

road, he pays a double toll. He loses the kind regard of the only woman for whom he cares and gains in its place her scorn. When Dagny finally learns the truth about Francisco, she has already met John Galt, and Francisco's loss cannot be recovered. He points to the valley with pride, as if he were giving her a rare gift: "There it is--its your earth, your kingdom, your kind of world--Dagny, I've always loved you and the fact that I deserted you, that was my love" (p. 765).

Even as courage is vital to the objectivist ethic, so is individualism. The very basis of Objectivism is centered in the sanctity of the individual. Two categorical imperatives of Objectivism insist that every man should seek his own self-interest and that no man should use force against another to prevent his seeking his self-interest. Even though the heroes of Atlas Shrugged function as romantic archetypes, they are archetypes of individualism. Each character insists upon his rights to the profits of his own labor and the products of his own mind. Individualism is the premise upon which capitalism is founded, and capitalism is central to the "theme-plot" of Atlas Shrugged. In the utopian community of Galt's Gulch the rights of the individual reign supreme, and because all of its citizens respect the rights of the individual, the valley's only judge has to rely upon his dairy farm for his vocation in the absence of civil disputes.

John Galt outlines the individualistic philosophy by which his followers live. In a three-hour radio speech to an incredulous nation he speaks of the supremacy of the individual, of the sanctity of his mind, and of his rights to the profits of his reason. He begins his speech as follows:

Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Thompson [the acting head of state] will not speak to you tonight. His time is up. I have taken over. You were to hear a report on the world crisis. That is what you are going to hear. (p. 1009)

A world crisis does indeed exist at this point. The world's copper is depleted, its oil supply dangerously low. Automobiles, tractors, and giant machines, their engines rusted, lie abandoned, grim reminders of a more prosperous age. The nation has been deprived of most of its superior minds and is in economic chaos. There is little left to loot. The collectivist government feeds the public rhetoric to quiet the growing discontent. Into this situation steps John Galt to confront the masses with his truth. He identifies himself as the one who has deprived them of the "men of justice, of independence, of reason, of wealth, of self-esteem," and announces his purpose in doing so. He articulates for his listeners the concept of free trade, of which individualism is the cornerstone. The right of the individual to enjoy exclusively the fruits of his reason is a fundamental concept of laissez-faire capitalism. Galt tells his radio audience that "no rights can exist without the rights to

translate one's rights into reality--to think, to work, and to keep the results--which means: the right of property" (p. 1062). The function of government, he maintains, is to preserve this individual right.

Ayn Rand defines capitalism as "a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned."²⁰ The purpose for which the government rightfully exists, she says, is for "protecting man's rights, i.e., the task of protecting him from physical force."²¹ This is the philosophy which John Galt lives by and which he seeks to promote. Governmental actions such as the Steel Unification Plan and the Railroad Unification Plan, which demand that all profits be placed in a common pool, clearly violate the rights of the individual and cannot be tolerated. Galt concludes his speech by admonishing his listeners:

Fight for the value of your person. Fight for the essence of that which is man: for his sovereign rational mind. Fight with the radiant certainty and the absolute rectitude of knowing that yours is the battle for any achievement, and value, any grandeur, any goodness, any joy that has ever existed on this earth. (p. 1069)

²⁰ Ayn Rand, "What is Capitalism," The Objectivist, Nov. 1965, n.p.; rpt. in Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, ed. Ayn Rand (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 19.

²¹ Rand, "What is Capitalism," p. 19.

The collectivist/socialist society in Atlas Shrugged lives by a different code. It fights for the value of society; the greatest good for the greatest number is the rule of government, even if it means sacrificing men like Hank Rearden or John Galt to some vaguely defined common good. The nationalizing of private property is done in blatant disregard for individual rights. Profits are looted and businesses destroyed in the name of public good.

The insistence upon the sanctity of the individual and his rights, the foundation upon which capitalism rests, is challenged by those who seek to plunder. Those who speak in loud tones at cocktail parties about the common good are busily at work feathering their own nests. James Taggert is among the worst of these. He has no need for money--or for power, since he is President of Taggert Transcontinental--but he has a need for self-esteem. He is weak and seeks to find a counterfeit strength in all the hangers-on who use him for their personal ends, those who say the highest compliment that they can pay him is that he is "not a real businessman" (p. 404). The irony adds a strong touch. Indeed, he is no businessman. Without his sister's restraining influence he would let the vultures tear his railroad apart to gain favor in their eyes:

"We are at the dawn of a new age," said James Taggert, from above the rim of his champagne glass. "We are breaking up the vicious tyranny of economic power. We will set men free of the rule of the dollar. We will release our spiritual aims

from dependence on the owners of material means. We will liberate our culture from the stronghold of the profit-chasers. We will build a society dedicated to higher ideals. . . ." (p. 404)

Ayn Rand shows those who preach sacrifice and who profess a scorn for money as "the root of all evil" to be hypocrites. Their lack of integrity is juxtaposed to the strict adherence of her heroes to their own moral code. This moral integrity is central to the plot of Atlas Shrugged. Although their system of values is not perfectly consistent with the heroic ideal of romance, the devotion which they feel for these values renders them moral beyond that expected of ordinary human beings. The quest upon which John Galt and his followers embark is essentially a moral one. As Rand explains in "Basic Principles of Literature," "If man possesses volition, he chooses values; if he chooses values, he must act to gain or keep them. If he elects to keep them, he engages in purposeful action to gain this end."²² This purposeful action constitutes the plot. It is not the value system which we must judge as moral, but the devotion to that value system. This devotion constitutes moral action.

The moral code of the strikers is a morality of reason in direct opposition to the morality of sacrifice preached by the socialists/collectivists. John Galt and his strikers are devoted to the humanistic notion that man's reason is

²² Ayn Rand, "Basic Principles of Literature," p. 82.

his salvation and that man's greatness is achieved through his capability to practice reason in his life. As Nathaniel Branden points out, the heroes in Atlas Shrugged exercise their ability to reason in every aspect of their lives, not only in their work but in their personal relationships as well.²³ Hazel Barnes reminds us that Rand, like Aristotle, sees man's reason as that which sets him apart from the animals.²⁴ To be moral, therefore, man must dedicate himself to reason and must allow it to rule over his emotions, which are related to instinct. Personal relationships must, then, be based on reason and not emotion. When Dagny, at the age of sixteen, asks Francisco what it is that he likes about her, he points to the "glittering rails" of the Taggert railroad. When Dagny responds disappointedly that the railroad does not belong to her, he replies, "What I like is that it's going to . . ." (p. 97). This should not be interpreted as the casual remark of a fortune hunter. Francisco is an heir to millions; he does not admire Dagny for her money. Father, he sees within her the drive, courage, and, above all, the ability to make the railroad hers. It is this that attracts him.

²³ Branden, p. 63.

²⁴ Hazel Barnes, An Existentialist Ethics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 32.

This is not to say that relationships based on reason cannot be passionate or that emotions have no place in personal relationships, but that emotions are subordinate to reason and that the mind rules the body. A natural and reasonable link exists between the two. Francisco states this clearly:

The men who think that wealth comes from material resources and has no intellectual root or meaning are the men who think--for the same reason--that sex is a physical capacity which functions independently of one's mind, choice, or code of values. They think that your body creates a desire and makes a choice for you--just about in some such way as if iron ore transformed itself into railroad rails of its own volition. Love is blind, they say; sex is impervious to reason and mocks the power of all philosophers. But, in fact, a man's sexual choice is the result and sum of his fundamental convictions. Tell me what a man finds sexually attractive and I will tell you his entire philosophy of life. Show me the woman he sleeps with and I will tell you his valuation of himself. (pp. 489-490)

Ironically he says these words to Hank Rearden, who is sleeping with the woman that Francisco himself loves. However, Rearden does not understand the basis of his attraction, only that he cannot ignore it. For this he blames Dagny and demands that she share his guilt. After their first night together, he berates her:

What I feel for you is contempt. But it's nothing compared to the contempt I feel for myself. I don't love you. I've never loved anyone. I wanted you from the first moment I saw you. I wanted you as one wants a whore--for the same reason and purpose. (p. 254)

He is a victim of a moral code which has been imposed upon him. He does not understand why he cannot feel this same passion for his wife, Lillian, who does not share his spirit. He thinks, however, that he should be able to feel passion for her, and because he cannot he is consumed with guilt, a guilt which becomes unbearable when he finally betrays her. As he is able to reject the moral code of his society, he is relieved of his guilt and comes to understand his love for Dagny. He reminds Dagny of his words on that first night:

You knew that the physical desire I was damning as our mutual shame is neither physical nor an expression of one's body, but the expression of one's mind's deepest values, whether one has the courage to know it or not. That was why you laughed at me. . . . You knew that it was my mind, my will, my being and my soul that I was giving you by means of that desire. (p. 857)

The same moral code which allows him to acknowledge his passion as moral demands that he give her up to his superior. While Hank Rearden is unmistakably heroic, he is not of the heroic stature of John Galt. Therefore, John Galt is more worthy of Dagny's love. Both Francisco and Rearden recognize this and accept it as natural and right. Their attitude in this respect, however, has nothing to do with self-sacrifice. It is simply that their morality prohibits them from seeking that which they have not earned. Since they are not Galt's moral or intellectual equal, they cannot earn Dagny's love.

John Galt outlines this new morality in his radio speech. It demands recognition of three things as "the supreme ruling values of life" (p. 1018). Reason, Purpose, and Self-esteem--the capitalization and the implied religious reference to the trinity are not lost on the reader--are gods of the new religion. Rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, productiveness, and pride are the virtues by which every individual must live. Galt defines each virtue within the objectivist frame of reference. Rationality, "recognition of the fact that existence exists, that man's mind is capable of perception of reality," destroys thousands of years of mystical and philosophical concepts of reality (p. 1018). Independence, "the recognition of the fact that yours is the responsibility of judgment and nothing can help you escape it," demands responsibility of its believers (p. 1019). Integrity permits no breach between body and mind, between action and thought, between one's life and convictions (p. 1019). Honesty, "the most profoundly selfish virtue man can practice," refuses acceptance of a value system of others (p. 1019). Justice demands that every man be judged for what he is and treated accordingly. Productiveness recognizes that all work is creative work, "if done by a thinking mind" (p. 1019). Pride is a natural prerequisite to self-esteem and insists upon the value of self (pp. 1020-21).

The men of Galt's Gulch must uphold the highest moral standards. Their commitment to these values must be pure.

Just as Francisco is willing to give up Dagny for this commitment, so must Hank Rearden be willing to give up his mills--not in a spirit of sacrifice, however, for one does not sacrifice to his own self-interest. Francisco attempts to convince Rearden that he should reject society's value system and with it the burden of guilt which he carries for his inability to conform to that code. He tells Rearden:

"You're one of the last moral men left in the world."

Rearden chuckled in bitter amusement. "I've been called just about everything but that. And you're wrong. You have no idea how wrong. . . . Moral? What on earth made you say it?"

Francisco pointed to the mills beyond the window. "This . . . if you want to see an abstract principle, such as moral action, in material form--there it is. Look at it, Mr. Rearden. Every girder of it, every pipe, wire and valve was put there by a choice in answer to the question: right or wrong? You had to choose right and you had to choose the best within your knowledge--the best for your purpose, which was to make steel--and then move on and extend the knowledge, and do better, and still better, with your purpose as your standard of value. You had to act on your own judgment, you had to have the capacity to judge, the courage to stand on the verdict of your mind, and the purest, the most ruthless consecration to the rule of doing right, of doing the best, the utmost best possible to you. Nothing could have made you act against your judgment, and you would have rejected as wrong--as evil--any man who attempted to tell you that the best way to heat a furnace was to fill it with ice. Millions of men, an entire nation, were not able to deter you from producing Rearden Metal--because you had the knowledge of its superlative value and the power which such knowledge gives. But what I wonder about, Mr. Rearden, is why you live by one code of principles when you deal with nature and by another when you deal with men? . . . Why don't you hold to the purpose of your life as clearly and rigidly as you hold to the purpose of your mills?" (p. 451)

Francisco makes his points with Rearden: reason must be allowed to rule Rearden's life, and reason must dictate that he not leave the products of his mind and efforts in the hands of looters. Morality dictates that Rearden withdraw his mind from the service of evil. By placing his steel in the hands of those who are immoral--who seek the fruits of another man's labor--he is perpetuating immorality. Only when Rearden and Dagny give up their business enterprises do they reach the highest level of morality, which is total commitment to one's value system. To be moral, they must not only be productive, but they must take pride in their productivity and the reason which allows it, and they must acknowledge it and demand its reward as a moral right.

The reward for being moral falls upon not merely the productive but the non-productive as well, just as punishment falls on ordinary mortals who are victimized by the corruption and decadence of the collectivist ethic. Those who are weak and unable to produce are better served by a well-ordered and productive economic system than by an economic system which is doomed to consume itself. The common good, then, is served when individual rights and incentives to produce are preserved. Individuals who are moral but who lack the heroic levels of ability of the heroes of Galt's Gulch are destroyed by a system whose goal is the stifling of productivity. Cherryl Taggart, wife to James Taggart, is an ordinary girl, undistinguished by superior ability or

intellect. She is only a shopgirl at a five-and-ten prior to her marriage to James Taggert, who chooses her as a testimony to his altruism and assumes that because of her lowly position and his elevated one, he will not have to earn her love. She has no superior ability, but she is moral--she realizes the value of ability and productivity and understands that no human being has a right to seek that which he has not earned. When she learns the true nature of her husband and the hypocrisy of those who profess to seek the common good, she commits suicide.

Eddie Willers, childhood friend of the Taggerts, an executive of the Taggert railroad, is also a victim. Like Cherryl, he recognizes the value of ability and productivity to the general welfare of society and, like Cherryl, he is moral. Also like Cherryl, he is just an ordinary person, not heroic in his courage or level of ability. When the Comet is abandoned by its crew and its giant engine stands silent on the track, Eddie Willers tries in vain to make it move, as if by making it move he can somehow restore order to a crumbling world. He lacks the ability of John Galt, Dagny Taggert, or Hank Rearden, and he cannot make it move, this symbol of "the motor of the world":

In the enormous silence, he heard the rustle of tumblewoods stirring in the darkness, like the chuckle of an invisible army made free to move when the Comet was not. He heard a sharper rustle close by--and he saw the small gray shape of a

rabbit . . . dart/ing off into the darkness--but he knew that the advance was not to be defeated. He stepped to the front of the engine and looked up at the letters TT. Then he collapsed across the rail and lay sobbing at the foot of the engine, with the beam of a motionless headlight above him going off into a limitless night. (pp. 1166-67)

The evil that brings about the collapse of Eddie Willers, the suicide of Cherryl Taggart, and the economic chaos into which the world crumbles, signaling the end of economic freedom, is an evil that the strikers realize before John Galt defines it for them. Francisco is the first to question the old values and to recognize the immorality inherent in them. Francisco has returned from college and tries to communicate to Dagny something of the truth he has discovered under the guidance of Dr. Hugh Akston:

Dagny, there's nothing of any importance in life--except how well you do your work. Nothing. Only that. Whatever else you are will come from that. It's the only measure of human value. All the codes of ethics they'll try to ram down your throat are just so much paper money put out by swindlers to fleece people of their virtues. The code of competence is the only system of morality that's on a gold standard. (p. 100)

Dagny, who is only sixteen, responds in consternation, "Francisco, why are you and I the only ones who seem to know it?" She further asserts in the way of a sixteen year old that she is unpopular, "not because I do things badly, but because I do them well." When she jests that perhaps she should try to do things badly to become popular, Francisco

slaps her in the face. Such a suggestion represents to him the ultimate profanity, the denial of man's ability.

Years later Dagny echoes this same feeling. After her vain attempts to find the inventor of the motor which she found in the ruins of a factory, she tries to find a scientist who will undertake to complete the design. After her fourth interview, one with a contemptuous young man who states that he thinks such a great invention should not be tolerated because it would be unfair to lesser scientists and that the strong should not have the right "to wound the self-esteem of the weak," she sits in "incredulous horror before the fact that the most vicious statement she had ever heard had been uttered in a tone of moral righteousness" (p. 353).

These episodes are tiny foreshadowings of the destruction to follow. They show how deeply ingrained the moral corruption can become when evil is committed with self-righteous moralizing. The strongest foreshadowing, however, is the destruction of the Twentieth Century Motor Company. The history of this company which attempted the same experiment-- "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"--that the country is now risking, reveals to the reader the ultimate punishment which is to follow. Dagny Taggart, in her search for the inventor of the motor, gives sanctuary to an unemployed lathe operator who is discovered

sleeping outside her private car. As the Comet moves westward, she invites him into her car for dinner. She recognizes in him a kindred spirit, evidenced by the "bone-white" shirt collar and his concern for his property even though it consists only of "a small dirty bundle." She encourages him to talk. She learns that he was formerly employed by the Twentieth Century Motor Company and hopes that he can offer insight into the fate of the factory and the abandonment of the motor. The tramp tells of the experiment which destroyed one of the world's most prestigious and productive enterprises.

As the old man tells the story of how he lost his job after twenty years of service, the reader comes to realize that this is yet another victim. The company and all of its employees voted to adopt the experiment proposed by the new heirs, an experiment which the lathe operator would later come to see as "evil--plain, naked smirking evil" (p. 661). They voted for the plan out of ignorance and guilt: "if anybody had any doubts he felt guilty and kept his mouth shut--because they the owners of the factory made it sound like anyone who'd oppose the plan was a child-killer at heart and less than a human being" (p. 661). He explains the economics and why any such collectivist system is doomed to fail:

Try pouring water into a tank where there's a pipe at the bottom draining it out faster than you pour it, and each bucket you bring breaks that pipe an inch wider, and the harder you work the more is demanded of you, and you stand slinging buckets forty hours a week, then forty-eight, then fifty-six--for your neighbor's supper--for his wife's operation--for his child's measles--for his mother's wheel chair--for his uncle's shirt--for his nephew's schooling--for the baby next door--for the baby to be born--for anyone around you--its theirs to receive, from diapers to dentures--and yours to work, from sunup to sundown, month after month, year after year, with nothing to show for it but your sweat . . . for the whole of your life, without rest, without hope, without end. . . . From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. (p. 661)

As Dagny listens quietly, he tells of how men lost their self-respect, their dignity, and their pride, how production fell off because each man denied his potential and did inferior work for fear of being exploited. A system that was supposed to teach brotherly love produced hatred and greed; "That's when we learned to hate our brothers for the first time in our lives" (p. 665). One by one the best brains, best workers, left, leaving only the moochers and the few victims who, like himself, were trapped by their years.

After four agonizing years, "it ended the only way it could--in bankruptcy" (p. 670). Angered by the pronouncement, "None of us may leave this place now, for each of us belongs to all the others by the moral law which we all accept" (p. 671), John Galt stood before the raw, edgy crowd of six thousand and vowed, "I will put an end to this for once and

for all. . . . "I will stop the motor of the world" (p. 671). The old man remembers that the crowd scornfully dismissed the young engineer.

But years later, when we saw the lights going out, one after another, in the great factories that had stood solid like mountains for generations, when we saw the gates closing and the conveyor belts turning still, when we saw the roads growing empty, and the stream of cars draining, when it began to look as if some silent power were stopping the generators of the world and the world was crumbling quietly, . . . then we began to wonder and ask questions about it. (p. 671)

This story not only serves to inform the reader of the origins of John Galt, whom Dagny had never met at this point, but serves to alert the reader of what is to follow. As the reader remembers the "blighted" area of Starnesville, once a thriving, industrial city, and the decayed hulk that was the Twentieth Century Motor Company, he realizes that this is a foreshadowing of the devastating punishment to be visited upon the world.

The only ones to escape the punishment are those who have the moral integrity not only to recognize the evil but to fight it. Cherryl Taggert, Eddie Willers, and even the unemployed lathe operator from the motor company are moral in their recognition of evil, but they lack the sense of purpose and the superior intellectual ability which the heroes display. Strength of purpose forces Hank Rearden to create Rearden Metal by asserting itself as "one thought held

immovably across a span of ten years, under everything he did and everything he saw. . . ." (p. 30). Strength of purpose allows Francisco, who once told Dagny that the most depraved human being was the man without a purpose, to destroy his copper business. It allows Ellis Wyatt to burn his oil fields. Strength of purpose coupled with superior intelligence allows Dagny Taggert to keep her railroad running against insurmountable odds and finally to surrender it for the fulfillment of a greater purpose. Strength of purpose and ability allow John Galt to stop the motor of the world. Strength of purpose or motive power is the mover of the world, and when it is withdrawn, the world, like a giant machine, grinds to a halt, its engine rusted and useless.

Who is John Galt? Ayn Rand poses the question at the beginning of Atlas Shrugged and at frequent intervals throughout the story in the hopes that the process of discovery will enhance the structure of her romance and will lead the reader to a philosophical and moral evaluation of his own values. Structurally John Galt is the unifying element. In his function as a super-hero for whom the reader as well as the major characters must search, he allows for the mechanical advancement of the plot-theme. The reader suspects that he is the track-worker who occasionally meets Eddie Willers in the cafeteria of Taggert Transcontinental, but his identity and purpose remain obscure. As Dagny searches for John Galt,

the reader searches with her for this mysterious figure. Is he "the destroyer," which she calls him, or is he the savior of a corrupt world? The reader is not certain about his function, even as Dagny is not.

John Galt is not only the structural pivot of Atlas Shrugged; he is also the philosophical pivot. The reader must search for his own philosophical values, even as Hank Rearden and Dagny Taggert must, and he must find them in an understanding of the heroism of John Galt. The author offers her reader a variety of clues to his nature. Francisco sees Galt in mythic terms:

John Galt is Prometheus who changed his mind. After centuries of being torn by vultures in payment for having brought to men the fire of the gods, he broke his chains and withdrew his fire--until the day when men withdraw their vultures. (p. 517)

This image cuts very close to the meaning of John Galt. The analogy to a mythical, super-human figure is especially appropriate to an understanding of the nature of the hero, not only as he functions within the genre of the romance but as he functions in the real world of business and morality. The "fire" which he seeks to withdraw is the light of reason.

When Galt introduces himself in his radio speech, he acknowledges his intention and his ability to destroy civilization until such a time as "the vultures are withdrawn." He identifies himself:

Who is John Galt? . . . I am the man who loves his life. I am the man who does not sacrifice his love and his values. I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world, and if you wish to know why you are perishing--you who dread knowledge--I am the man who will now tell you. (p. 1007)

With this introduction he admits a confidence and power beyond what mortal man could be expected to possess. He is a supra-human figure who cannot be destroyed or placated, a figure before whom the masses cower and the heroes bow. Because of this god-like quality in his character, he is even less realistically developed than the others. Ayn Rand, who points out the difficulty of good character development of the romantic hero,²⁵ is deliberate in her presentation of Galt as an abstraction, deliberate in her choice of the romance as the only milieu in which this kind of hero is artistically functional.

Her allusion to Atlas underscores the care with which she chooses her genre and the skill with which she employs it. Galt is "Atlas, the giant who holds the world on his shoulders," who stands "blood running down his chest, his knees buckling, his arms trembling but still trying to hold the world aloft with the last of his strength, and the greater his effort the heavier the world . . ." (p. 455). Atlas

²⁵ Ayn Rand, "What is Romanticism," The Objectivist, May, 1969, n.p.; rpt. in The Romantic Manifesto, p. 161.

shrugs, but his shrug is not an act of defeat; it is an act of defiance. If the reader has fulfilled the quest offered by the author, if the philosophy of Atlas Shrugged is successfully presented, then the reader regards this as an act of heroism. The reader comes finally to understand that John Galt in his abdication of a world whose moral code is corrupt, in his insistence upon a return to morality, stands as the essence of "the best within us" (p. 1147). Ayn Rand in her careful choice of the romance as her medium, her successful employment of the quest motif, and finally through her skillful development of her super-heroes, creates in Atlas Shrugged a finely wrought work which serves as an appropriate tribute to the greatness of man.

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