



Atlas Shrugged

Ayn Rand

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This is the story of a man who said that he would stop the motor of the world and did. Was he a destroyer or the greatest of liberators?

Why did he have to fight his battle, not against his enemies, but against those who needed him most, and his hardest battle against the woman he loved? What is the world's motor — and the motive power of every man? You will know the answer to these questions when you discover the reason behind the baffling events that play havoc with the lives of the characters in this story.

Tremendous in its scope, this novel presents an astounding panorama of human life — from the productive genius who becomes a worthless playboy — to the great steel industrialist who does not know that he is working for his own destruction — to the philosopher who becomes a pirate — to the composer who gives up his career on the night of his triumph — to the woman who runs a transcontinental railroad — to the lowest track worker in her Terminal tunnels.

You must be prepared, when you read this novel, to check every premise at the root of your convictions.

This is a mystery story, not about the murder — and rebirth — of man's spirit. It is a philosophical revolution, told in the form of an action thriller of violent events, a ruthlessly brilliant plot structure and an irresistible suspense. Do you say this is impossible? Well, *that* is the first of your premises to check.

Atlas Shrugged Details

Date : Published April 21st 2005 by Dutton (first published 1957)

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Author : Ayn Rand

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From Reader Review Atlas Shrugged for online ebook

Stephen says

COMING....NEXT.... SUMMER....EXCLUSIVELY TO GOODREADS.....

A review so ambitious, so controversial, so staggeringly ~~over-hyped~~ unique that it has to be seen in order to be read. A review many minutes in the writing (*and several hours in the photo finding*). A review so important that one **Dr. Hyperbole** had this to say upon seeing it....

This is the review most people didn't even know they wanted to read. A review of one of the most talked about and polarizing classics of the 20th century...**ATLAS SHRUGGED** by Ayn Rand.

This review will pull no punches as it discusses all aspects of the novel and includes opinions that run the gamut from 5 stars of love to seething cauldron's of 1 star rage...and everything in between. Here is just a sampling of some of the views you can expect to find in the review experts are already calling "*longer and more repetitive than the novel itself*":

5 STARS:

"This is a book that proudly celebrates both the individual and the potential for greatness inside all of us. It is a book of new and radical ideas being passionately expressed by someone who believes deeply in them. Whether you agree or disagree whole-heartedly or belong somewhere in the middle, it's right and proper to respect the passion and conviction that Ms. Rand feels for her subject."

---**Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin**, *FMR Governor*,
Imperial Outlands Region in a Galaxy Far, Far Away

"Regardless of how you feel personally about the ideas expressed in this book, it seems clear and not subject to serious debate that the philosophy of objectivism created by Rand added an entirely new voice to the landscape of philosophical, economic and political debate. Call it controversial, call it inflammatory, even call it wrong, but it is impossible to call it irrelevant. There is little question that as a book of ideas, Atlas Shrugged is a monumental book and deserves its place as one of the most important books of the 20th Century...Ain't I right there Normie."

---**Cliff Calvin**, *Postman*, *Boston, MA*

1 STAR:

At the far other end of the spectrum are those that thought Atlas Shrugged was 1200 pages of mind-numbing, bowel churning, elitist tripe. Among these detractors was one **P. Griffin** from Quohog, RI, who had this to say:

Unfortunately, when pressed for specifics or examples to support his opinion, Mr Griffin screamed and ran away to hide

Also not a fan was one **Jules Winnfield**, an independent contractor from, according to him, “The Valley of Death” who had real problems with Rand’s prose which he found clunky and very unpolished. He summed up his opinion about Rand's writing ability as follows:

4 STARS:

Back on the positive side, you will hear from more people who found Rand’s magnum opus to be powerful and something definitely worth reading.....

“Ayn Rand was born in Russia and grew up witnessing first hand the failings of collectivism as well as many of its more brutal aspects enforced in the former U.S.S.R. Therefore, her passionate embrace of the “free market” and capitalism and the idea of rewarding the individual for excellence is certainly understandable in light of her origins. It is also true that Rand’s depiction of a dystopian future in which individual achievement and have been replaced by collectivism and distribution according to need has more than just passing relevance today. Whether or not you believe her vision is skewed or biased, there is still much that her book can add to the debate on the proper role of government in the life of the individual.”

--**Gabe Kotter**, School teacher, James Buchanan High School, Brooklyn, NY

“In my opinion, the MOST IMPORTANT lesson that can be taken from Atlas Shrugged is the concept that Rich, successful people are not evil simply because they are wealthy and are certainly not the enemy of the poor or the disadvantaged. There are GOOD and BAD in every economic layer in society and this bias just seems extremely destructive.***I know that wealthy people are an easy target for humor but when people actually believe that being wealthy makes someone “less moral” or “less good” it starts to sound eerily similar to when people used to say about other groups “There just not like us, there different.” Sorry, I can’t buy into that. People are people and everyone is entitled to being judged for who they are.”

--**Mr. Hankey** (aka The Christmas Poo)

“Every person that ever gave me a job, an opportunity or the means to feed myself and provide for my family was WEALTHY by most peoples standards. Walk around your house and pick up the products that you use every day and that make your life easier and ask yourself how many of them were made by people who made a lot of money off them (my guess is most of them). The world we be a lot worse off without the inventors, the builders and the risk takers and they deserve our thanks and not our animosity....Nanu Nanu”

--**Mork**, Ambassador from the Planet of Ork

2 STARS:

Of course, the negative reviews don't stop with the 1 star commentators. There were additional negative reactions raised about Atlas Shrugged and this review promises to tackle them in depth. One very controversial subject deals with attacks on Ayn Rands views on sexuality which are certainly on display in the novel. Comments about the sexual relationships described in the story being “odd” or “freaky” are not uncommon and some go so far as to accuse Rand of having a “rape fantasy fetish.” **A. Powers** from Great Britain, who was unable to divulge his exact occupation actually attacked Rand personally with this very blunt reaction to Atlas Shrugged’s sexual content.

A second, less controversial view but one that is probably far more relevant to a true analysis of this work is Rand’s consistent use of blatant and obvious “straw men” to support her argument. Many people have argued that for someone so passionate about her beliefs who is absolutely convinced of the rightness of her convictions, she sure felt the need to stock the book with a lot of easily dispatched "straw man" characters.

As **I Amin** from Uganda put it: “This was probably my biggest problem with the book. If [Rand] is so sure that her arguments are valid and correct, then why doesn’t she have the Rand characters (i.e., those espousing her opinions) debate against the **best** arguments that the ‘other side’ has to offer. Instead she has peopled her expository novel with ‘over the top’ caricatures of the socialist system so that they can easily tear them down. This does nothing but preach to the converted and has all the persuasive power of a political attack ad.”

Or, put another way, “I think there is a compelling debate in there somewhere. Unfortunately, Rand, Dum Dum that she is, decided to load the other side’s quiver with nothing but wet noodles and so comes off looking scared of a true debate.”

--*Gazoo, Intergalactic Talking Head*

Another cause of very negative reactions stems from the incredible amount of repetition and redundancy used by Rand in the stating of her opinions. State your opinion once and that is laudable. If it is overly complex, maybe you repeat it a second, even a third time. However, in a 1200 page novel when you have to listen to the EXACT SAME POINT made 10, 20 or even 30 times, you can cause your audience to become very irate and disenchanted. One disgruntled reader stopped reading the novel halfway through and said simply.....

3 STARS

Finally, you will here from those who found both positive and negative qualities in Rand’s novel. Many found the prose less than noteworthy but were very taken by the plot. Others liked the characters but had issues with the world-building (or lack thereof) in Rand’s tale. Still others liked the passion of Rand's convictions but found her message lost in a myriad of meandering speeches.

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All of these issues and much more will be tackled in this comprehensive, detailed review of Rand’s controversial classic. While not to be released until mid-summer 2012, early buzz is already calling this review “*A review of Atlas Shrugged.*” We only hope we can live up to those expectations. Until then.....

deanna says

The best way to understand Rand's message in this book is to simply close it, and beat yourself over the head with it as hard as possible. This is essentially what Rand does throughout it's ridiculous length. I see no reason that a book with a strong lesson can't also have decent character development, natural dialog, and a believable plot. Of course, I also think that you can establish a theme with subtlety, and trust that your reader will figure it out. Ayn Rand writes as if the elements of fiction get in the way of her message, and that reader's skull's are extraordinarily thick and require a firm beating over the head to absorb the theme. Countless philosophers have said the same thing better (and quicker).

I realize that I offend many atheists, agnostics and free thinkers by writing this, but as one myself, I have to say that a passionate love of Ayn Rand is not required for membership in that particular club. Save yourself a headache, and pick up the much shorter *Anthem*. It's just as overdone, but weighing it at ounces rather than pounds, it'll leave a smaller dent in your head.

Oh, and if you're only reading it to answer the question on geeky bumper sticker "Who is John Galt?" He's the hero and a symbol of the capitalism in its conflict over what Rand saw as the oppressive and ultimately destructive forces of large government type societies (you, know. . .socialism, fascism, etc.). It's usually stuck on the butt end of a car to express general disenchantment with big government, and a lack of heroes. Now you know, so go read something worthwhile, and if you insist on reading Ayn Rand, hit her non-fiction. Stripped of an attempt at storytelling, she doesn't do half bad.

Seth says

This book, as much as I detest it, is actually rather useful. Those who have read it tend to be those whom I most especially desire to avoid. Because those who have read it are invariably proud of the fact--ostentatiously so--it is even easier for me to keep my life free and clear of delusional egomaniacs. Thank you Ayn Rand.

Christopher says

As Ayn Rand's immortal opus, Atlas Shrugged, stands as a tome to a philosophy that is relevant today as it was in her time. Basically, the major moral theme is that there are two types of people in the world: the Creators and the Leeches.

The Creators are the innovators who use the power of their will and intelligence to better humanity. The first person to create fire is often referenced as the paradigm for these people. In the book, each of the major protagonists also represent Creators improving the human condition with their force of will.

The Leeches (my word) are the people who create nothing, but thrive off feeding on the Creators. In Rand's view, they are the bureaucrats, politicians, regulators, etc. Throughout human history she tells us, these people have benefited through no ingenuity of their own, but merely from piggybacking on - and often fettering - the success of the Creators.

Where the conflict in this book arises is when the Creators decide they have had enough and revolt. I won't spoil the book by describing specifics, but let's just say it causes quite the societal drama. For Leeches can't feed where there's no blood.

All that is fairly significant and involved and worth the read to begin with, but where this book really stimulates me is in the fact that it is still relevant. Today we have Creators and we have Leeches. Some titans of industry and technology move our culture forward and others hold it back to their own benefit. I work in Silicon Valley and I see this all the time. That's why in many ways I consider this voluminous novel to be as important to a business education as Art of War.

To cite other readers' posts, you don't have to agree with what Rand is extolling, but I think you'd be foolish to try and deny the existence of this struggle since it is ingrained in humanity. Yes, Ayn does get long winded and arrogant in parts as she draws the battle lines, but I don't think an author could have crafted such a powerful conflict without copious quantities of ego to accentuate the differences.

Manny says

In some ways, this is a very bad book. The style is stiff and clunky, and the world-view she is trying to sell you has holes you could drive a train through. There is a nice putdown in *One Fat Englishman*. The main character has just been given a precis of Objectivism. He says "I bet I'm at least as selfish as you. But I don't why I need to turn that into a philosophy". Thank you, Kingsley Amis.

But on the plus side, the book is a page-turner; it does a great job of helping people brought up in a left-wing tradition to understand the right as not just deluded or evil (my friend Gen said she had the same experience after reading it); and it is good at voicing the frustration that competent and honest people feel when they are surrounded by incompetent and dishonest ones. And the romance between Dagny and Hank is emotionally very satisfying. I was so disappointed when she... hm, no spoilers. But I fear the author's desire to push her philosophical agenda got in the way of the story.

OK, let's try again. I haven't exactly changed my mind on any of the above, but, as Jordan persuasively argues, it's kind of missing the point. And, with all due respect to the other reviews here, most of them are also missing the point.

Why? Well, because we're answering the wrong question. Some people uncritically adore this book. Guys, dare I suggest that you might want to broaden your reading tastes just the tiniest amount, and see if you still feel that way? A rather larger group of reviewers can't stand Ayn Rand, and point out various obvious flaws: lack of feeling for English prose style, lack of character development, lack of realistic dialogue, interminable sermons on Objectivism, and sundry other charges. Of course. All of that's clearly true. But here's the question I find more interesting: if the book is so terrible, how come it's been such a gigantic success? It's been said that only the Bible has had a greater influence on 20th century American thought. It must have something going for it. What?

So here's my second attempt. I think the book is dishonest, but it's dazzlingly dishonest, on a grand scale, and that's what readers find fascinating. As everyone knows, the basic thesis is that people should be more selfish, and that this will in some mystical way be good for society as a whole; a boldly paradoxical idea, and, at first sight, it's complete nonsense. I can well believe that my selfishness might be good for me personally, but why on Earth should it be good for anyone else? It flies in the face of at least two thousand years of Western ethical thought, which has been largely focused on making people *less* selfish, not more. As has been widely pointed out, Objectivism is pretty much the antithesis of Christianity. Which does suggest the question of why many people on the American Right claim both to be Christians and at the same time supporters of Rand's ideas, but let's not get into that right now. I don't really understand how the American Right thinks, so it'll be more productive to consider my own reactions to the book, which were by no means all negative.

Okay: at risk of appalling many of my GR friends, I have to admit that I liked a good deal of *Atlas Shrugged*. In particular, I find Dagny a sympathetic main character. Yes, she's the Mary Sue to end all Mary Sues, but that's exactly it. Rand believes in her so completely that I can't help being swept along. I am aware that few real women are hypercompetent technical and managerial geniuses, who think nothing of working 48 hours straight and then looking drop-dead gorgeous in a designer gown. (If the movie ever does get made, though, you must admit that Angelina Jolie was a shrewd piece of casting). Even if Dagny doesn't exist, I want her to, and I've seen many worse role-models for young women. That mixture of beauty, intelligence and passion is appealing. And sure, most of the other characters are one-dimensional stereotypes, but, when you're as self-centered as Ayn Rand was, that's how you see things. It's a subjective view, and I find it interesting to

look at the world through her eyes.

Now that I've admitted that I love Dagny - I must admit that I can't decide whether I want to be her or sleep with her; probably a bit of both - let's get on to analyzing Rand's big con. A large part of the book is a lavish, over-the-top, melodramatic romance. Will Dagny get her guy? She's hopelessly in love with Hank, who feels just the same way about her. But Hank's ghastly wife, Lillian, seems to be an insuperable obstacle to their happiness. Hank's got all these mistaken *principles*, see, which mean he has to stay with Lillian, who doesn't appreciate him one bit, rather than go off with his true love. The best scene in the book is the confrontation at the party. Hank has created his new miracle alloy, which is a thousand times stronger than steel and a cool blue-green color to boot. The very first thing he makes from it is a bracelet for Lillian. And is she grateful? Of course not! She's actually going around complaining to the other women about this ugly thing her dumb husband has given her to wear on her wrist. Why couldn't he give her a diamond bracelet like a normal guy? But Dagny, in a blazing fury, goes up to her, and in front of everyone says that she'll be so happy to swap her own diamond bracelet for Hank's unappreciated present. Honestly, if you're not on Dagny's side at this point, I fear you have no heart at all. I was certainly cheering her on, and given the general success of the novel I assume I was one of millions.

Rand has stacked the deck, but she's not exactly the first author to do so. The reasonable point she's making here is that, in romantic matters, people should often do what they want to do, rather than than what they feel they ought to do. Straightforwardly selfish behavior is better for everyone; people need love, which makes them happy, rather than pity, which ultimately makes them miserable. At least, it's true in this particular case. You're sitting there willing Hank to understand what's so blatantly obvious. And, once she's got you to buy into her idea, she switches the cards right under your nose. In just the same way, she argues, people should *always* act selfishly! See, if you're given something you haven't truly earned (whatever that means), it won't make you happy. Moreover, the people who are actually entitled to it will feel hurt and frustrated, just like Dagny, and in the end they'll lose their motivation. And thus, um, if you tax multi-billionaires at more than whatever the fashionable rate is, civilization will collapse. QED. I may have condensed the argument a little, but I think that's roughly it.

As already mentioned, this is nonsense, and shows that romance authors, even quite good ones, shouldn't try their hand at political philosophy. But that needn't stop you from appreciating their romances, and I certainly did. Next week, I will be reviewing Barbara Cartland's commentaries on Kant. To be continued.

Jennifer says

This book really makes you take a good hard look at yourself and your behavior, which is why I think a lot of people don't like this book. It's a lecture and most people don't like to get lectured. I loved it. It gave me a good swift kick in the ass. While I've never been a "looter," I have made several irrational decisions in my life, which this 1000+ page lecture has helped me to stop doing. It teaches you to think with your mind, rather than your heart. It doesn't make you an uncaring person. You still feel with your heart, but you think with your mind. Use your mind instead of expecting to get the rewards of others who do all the thinking. If everyone did this, the world would be perfect - that is the idea behind Ayn's story. Of course, this will never happen. Ayn knew that. She just wrote a story about her ideal world. A lot of authors do that. No need to get pissed off at her because of it.

Yes, the book is wordy, but her words are genius in my opinion. I loved the long radio speech. Skip it if you are hating the book or better yet, stop reading it. Go out and smell the flowers instead. Is the story black and white? Definitely. Authors have different styles - people complain. If every author wrote in the same style,

people would complain.

I can't tell you how many co-workers I've met who complain about how the CEO is making so much money and they should get some of that money. Well, go to college, get a business degree and work your way up the corporate ladder if you want the CEO's salary. Don't sit around and expect those kinds of rewards because you work in accounts payable. You know what it takes, so do it and shut up. If it wasn't for the person who created this company, you wouldn't even have a job. I'm an administrative assistant making less money than the people complaining about wanting more money. It just makes me sick. But the people in Ayn's story didn't work for money. They loved their jobs. And she wasn't saying you had to be a rich, corporate big shot to hold the world up. There were teachers and stay at home moms in her little world in the mountains.

Ayn has extremely valuable points and if you are someone who is constantly looking for something to criticize in every book, then don't read it. If you can't handle looking at your imperfections, don't read it. If you have an open mind and are willing to learn something from every book and experience you have and grow as a person, then you will benefit from reading this book.

Meredith Holley says

[image error]

Richard Derus says

UPDATE 8/25! This blog debunks some of the Aynholes' major misunderstandings about the book.

Pretentious poseur writes pseudophilosophical apologia for being a sociopath. Distasteful in the extreme.

Jason Pettus says

Would you like to hear the only joke I've ever written? Q: "How many Objectivists does it take to screw in a lightbulb?" A: (Pause, then disdainfully) "Uh...one!" And thus it is that so many of us have such a complicated relationship with the work of Ayn Rand; unabashed admirers at the age of 19, unabashedly horrified by 25, after hanging out with some actual Objectivists and witnessing what a--holes they actually are, and also realizing that Rand and her cronies were one of the guiltiest parties when it came to the 1950s "Red Scare" here in America. Here in Rand's second massive manifesto-slash-novel, we follow the stories of a number of Titans of the Industrial Age -- the big, powerful white males who built the railroad industry, the big, powerful white males who built the electrical utility companies -- as well as a thinly-veiled Roosevelt New Deal administration whose every attempt to regulate these Titans, according to Rand, is tantamount evil-wise to killing and eating babies, even when it's child labor laws they are ironically passing. Ultimately it's easy to see in novels like this one why Rand is so perfect for late teenagers, but why she elicits eye rolls by one's mid-twenties; because Objectivism is all about BEING RIGHT, and DROPPING OUT IF OTHERS CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT, and LET 'EM ALL GO TO HELL AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, without ever taking into account the unending amount of compromise and cooperation and sometimes sheer altruism that actually makes the world work. Recommended, but with a caveat; that you read it before you're

old enough to know better.

Simon says

Absolutely terrible.

Imagine an analogous situation:

A white supremacist writes a book in which all the white characters are great and all the black characters are awful. If you were to read that book and as a result buy into white supremacy; that would make you an utter utter fool.

And yet, Rand writes a book where anyone who is a raging capitalist is a veritable super-hero and anyone who pauses for half a second to consider that maybe such a system is sub-optimal is a sniveling lunatic - and lo, the mindless prols think it's a masterpiece and a template for how the world should be run. The most annoying book I have ever read.

Jason says

Ayn Rand makes my eyes hurt. She does this, not by the length of her six hundred thousand word diatribe, but rather by the frequency with which she causes me to roll them. Do you want to know what I've learned after spending nearly two months reading Ayn Rand's crap? Here's a brief rundown, Breakfast of Champions style.

Socialists are scary. Socialists are frightening creatures who lurk in corners, waiting to pounce on you. They are unpredictable, they have curvature of the spine, and they often foam at the mouth.

This is a socialist:

Capitalists, on the other hand, are calm and rational beings who never lose their tempers. You can always trust a capitalist. And they are super easy to spot, too—just look for the hummingbirds who sew their clothes for them.

This is a capitalist:

Ayn Rand's characters come in only two flavors, and which kind you get depends solely on the extent to which they embody her philosophical ideals. The capitalists (the "good guys") are the moral heroes of the story, the ones who fight back against economic regulation. This regulation is seen as unwanted intervention, the government essentially trespassing on one's property rights by means of unfair (unfair to the *capitalists*, I might point out) legislation. The "bad guys" are, of course, represented by the socialists—the ones passing the legislation, although Rand does a good job of throwing anyone else into this category who, while not active participants in passing these laws, may not be totally opposed to them, either.

The problem with all of this is the fact that her characters are not at all believable. They are robots who mechanically spew forth her inane drivel or, if they are of the *other* flavor, behave in a manner so utterly ridiculous as to demonstrate the rationality of the capitalist over the vicious, gun-toting socialist who's come

to rob your house, rape your Ma, and shoot your Pa. Rand is so egregious in the maltreatment of her antithetic characters that it's almost laughable. Beyond that, the narrative itself is monotonous and repetitive. This is not exactly a beach read.

But even if I were to put all of that aside, I still wouldn't be able to get over the fact that Rand's argument here is to put an end to social collectivism of *every form*. That means: no social security, no unemployment insurance, no federally funded health care, no public roads, no public housing, no public education, no income taxes, no property taxes—does this not sound insane?! I get the whole “ooh” and “aah” aspect of libertarian freedoms, but I'm betting there wouldn't be a lot of volunteers willing to relinquish their adequately funded public services on the basis of a free market economy. And ultimately, this is the fundamental principle on which Rand and I disagree. Although I do believe, and strongly, that the government should have no authority to interfere in the private lives of its citizens, do I think the government should also abstain from interfering in the regulation of the economy? Hellz, no! I want those corporate mother fuckers taxed and if that means Ima start foaming at the mouth, then so be it.

Ultimately, this novel is more absurdist fiction than dystopian fiction. Rand takes an all-in-or-all-out approach to problem solving; there can be no moral ambiguity—either you're with her or you're not, and I'm not. But what does she care? Rand is an unabashed admirer of the wealthy industrialist and it is for *him* that she bats her eyes and licks her lips, not for me.

David says

“Check your premises” the major characters are told. Well let's check the premises of Ms. Rand's story.

The first (false) premise is that there are only a dozen or so people in the country who are worth a damn. They have well above-average intelligence, have worked hard and have been lucky enough that their work has paid off in oodles of money (which they don't enjoy or even care about because they are too busy working). But they can't bear the thought of paying taxes to support the services they receive and depend upon.

The second (false) premise is that every government employee is a lazy no-good who has nothing on his mind but pillaging the bank accounts of the lucky dozen. But beyond that, the government is inherently evil, to the point of passing laws that inflict major economic damage and suffering on virtually everyone in the country with the exception of the privileged government leaders. This evil government is all-powerful and has total control over every newspaper, television and radio station. Fat chance. Obviously the author's image of government derives from her formative years in the USSR. She has no concept that other governments have not tolerated the oppression that she found there.

The third (false) premise is that the rest of the people of the U.S. are mostly a bunch of lazy morons who blindly accept the statements of the evil government and their patsy press. Further, they have no ability or process to provoke change. They wander around like a bunch of sheep being led to the slaughter. If only they weren't so stupid and lazy they would all be as rich as the “lucky dozen elite”. Since they didn't have the ability (or intensity or luck) to become one of the elite, they all think that the elite should support them so they don't have to work. The country has a middle class composed of about 24 people who are the trusted, loyal assistants of the elite. They are good enough to do everything their masters ask, but not good enough to join their masters in “Atlantis”. When the elite disappear (on strike), their trusted assistants are left behind to bear the misfortune of the rest of the poor slobs.

This is all set on a stage of poor science fiction, which includes such things as a magic “motor” generating

vast amounts of energy out of nothing. The author doesn't seem to know the difference between a motor and a generator and uses the terms interchangeably. Then there is a magic "ray" that makes large areas of land invisible, powered, of course, by the magic "motor". These magic things were, of course, invented by the intelligent elite who use them to help wreak havoc and despair on the rest of the 200 million people of the country in order to punish the evil government.

Then there's the (obligatory) sex. Dagny Taggart, the heroine and only intelligent woman in the universe, has sex with three of the elite. She dumps the only real relationship (with Rearden) in favor of the demi-god John Galt (who she barely knows) along the lines of a teenage girl throwing herself at one of the Beatles. Her favorite encounters are sado-masochistic.

In the end, after they have succeeded in destroying the economy of the world and most everyone's life, the elite magnanimously plan to sashay back into the real world and rebuild the hundred years of technology that they just destroyed. Isn't that a brilliant idea? They think the only path to change is to take their football and go home. You have to wonder how brilliant these people really are.

The author spends great quantities of print describing and re-describing thoughts and feelings of the characters ad nauseum. The redundancy is overwhelming.

This poor attempt at science fiction with a supposed moral message demonstrates how a 350 page book can be padded to become a 1200 page behemoth. Elitists, libertarians and others paranoid about the government will undoubtedly enjoy this book. Paramilitary groups will love it. Most of the rest of us will ask ourselves "What the hell was she was thinking?"

Richard says

Ayn Rand's characters are almost completely defined by the extent to which they embrace her beliefs. A good guy by definition is someone who agrees with her; a bad guy someone who dares to have a different point of view. For all the lip-service Rand pays to individualism, she brooks no dissent from her heroes; none of her so-called individualists ever expresses a point of view significantly different from hers.

To illustrate the gulf between Rand's characters and human reality, consider this behavior. When Dagny Taggart meets Hank Rearden, she dutifully becomes his property, for no other reason than that he's the most Randian male around. When John Galt arrives, ownership of the prize female transfers from Rearden to Galt, because Galt is the more Randian of the two. Does it ever occur to Hank to be resentful or jealous? Does Taggart experience loyalty or regret? Might Taggart love Rearden despite his lesser Randness? No, those are all things that human beings might feel.

(In a related departure from reality, sex in Randland is more or less indistinguishable from rape. Foreplay? Romance? Capitalists don't have time for that commie nonsense.)

The real focus of *Atlas Shrugged* is to extoll Rand's philosophy. (Not to debate it, since no one in Randland with any any intelligence or competence could have a different point of view.) About Rand's philosophy I'll just make two points (which I'm not going to bother providing evidence for at the moment).

The first is that, like most social Darwinists, Rand fell short in her understanding of natural selection. Her philosophy was largely based on the false belief that nature invariably favors individual selfishness. In reality, evolution has made homo sapiens a social animal; cooperation and compassion are very human traits.

More importantly, even if cold selfishness were man's nature in the wild, it would *not* necessarily follow that that would be the best way for us to behave in our semi-civilized modern condition.

The second point is that, contrary to Rand's belief, pure laissez-faire capitalism never works; it invariably leads to exploitation of the poor and middle class and to environmental catastrophe. The best economic system that has ever been devised -- so far -- is a mixture of capitalism and socialism.

s.penkevich says

I really like trains, but goddammit does this novel give them a bad name.
Also, everyone, pardon my french. And sorry Grandma.

Recently someone told me this was their favorite novel. I believe they referred to it as 'the greatest book ever written.' I find a lot wrong with that statement. Because who cares about Ulysses, right? No, that won't do, I'm going to have to drink and rant for a moment. I refrained from commenting to the customer, because I'm sure it is typically for political reasons that people like this book and, whatever, some people swing left, some people swing right, some people suckle the golden calf of capitalism and some love thy socialist ways and who am I to judge. I'm not a politician and you should all thank me for that. I'd like to push politics aside but, frankly, I think it is solely for political reasons that this book managed to stay relevant and in print. However, I suppose you are all here to hear about the politics of this book and I would be boring you with talks of wooden character and language and overall juvenile writing abilities, so I'll save those for after. I don't want to argue politics, especially not while drinking, so lets take a moment to look at the plot (and oh what a plot it is) and see how the politics hold up within. Besides, there isn't much to analyze in this one as the writing barely goes beneath the surface.

Once upon a time there were some factory owners. These factory owners *loved* to preach about the pride in working for their company, and hey, maybe conditions are piss-poor and maybe you are barely scraping by to feed your growing family, but at least you can take pride in working for a great company and that should satisfy you and give you *meaning* (some cool existentialist thought could have been added into the book for that, but Rand misunderstood Kant so I doubt she'd be able to add anything beyond surface detail and pop-philosophy). Then one day the great evil government (the government is such a caricature and it's almost a surprise she didn't have them all wearing black hooded cloaks. And really, who voted for those guys?) passed some outlandish laws that people couldn't have a monopoly and maybe we should pay our workers. Suddenly, having pride in what they did seemed *terrible*. Instead of taking pride in their company and working hard to sustain the nation they so loved, like they preached to their employees, they bitched about it a bunch and then stopped working. Nice guys, right? They set up a utopia (Ayn Rand of all people should know utopia is a word for 'fake') society where competing is *so cool* and they say stuff like 'man, I hope someone competes with me and nearly puts me out of business', which isn't all that different from what was going on in the society they bitched out on in the most comically shameful manner possible. Meanwhile it is made to seem like cheating on your wife is way cool and general chaos ensues.

So it goes for awhile, but then, THEN, after a overlong speech that takes all the points any reader with half a mind already put together for themselves and regurgitates it out without the metaphors and into a boring speech that repeats itself many times about the points already mentioned in the novel and then makes sure you know the stuff already mentioned in the novel through a long speech, all hell breaks loose and the main characters bust into town like the goddamn A-Team. Guns blaze, Dagny murders a few dudes and the one character who was actually worth reading about blows up the super-weapon (because that guy was awesome. Screw the rest of the characters, I want to read more about that guy. He was '*about it*', like people who are apparently '*about it*' say while slugging their Mountain Dews and playing video games.) All integrity of the

novel was lost with the hysterically overblown rescue scene. I mean, they even got out on 'choppers' at the end. It was the worst action movie I've ever seen, and I'm not even going to go into the scene where apparently it is okay to shoot your employees in the head for going on strike. And that, my friends, is Atlas Shrugged. People seem to really like the politics, which are 'if things aren't going your way say 'fuck my beliefs, I quit, and fuck america too.' And also, apparently, fuck anyone in the military because Dagny shoots a kid in the fucking face for following orders. Because if there is one thing Ayn Rand can't stand, it's taking pride in your work.

Finally. What I really want to talk about is the book as a piece of literature, so don't get all steamed up about politics on me here, pal! Granted, there are a few pretty lines here, particularly the line about cigarettes and how all great thinkers should have that glowing ember at their fingertips while the lightbulb of thought is burning, but other than that Rand is a forgettable sci-fi novelist that has poorly aged with time. Not a line of dialogue rings true to actual speech, not a cough or a scoff can go without her graciously informing the reader that the scoff or cough shows their disapproval or discomfort and whatnot. Furthermore, she certainly can't let a metaphor slip out without explaining it; reading Ayn Rand feels like being a grown adult and sitting in a elementary reading class and having the teacher explain how books work. It's as if she has no faith in her reader as a literate, thinking human being. Worse, the characters are the sort that can only exist on the page and have such narrow-minded two-dimensional aspects that one can't possibly imagine them walking around in the real world. Of course the government is terrible in this novel, its such a caricature that nobody in their right mind would bother being submissive to it. Granted, this book is satire, but come on Rand, put some effort into your creativity.

' *James, you ought to discover some day that words have an exact meaning.*' This idea pops up constantly in *Atlas Shrugged*, that words have a specific and definite meaning, and the character always wields this like a weapon straight to the heart (James *does* suck as a person and character so I don't feel bad for him for his inability to easily retort. However, Rand seems fully unable to build three-dimensional characters so is it that James is garbage or Rand herself?). This idea is possibly my least favorite aspect of the book because it is comically incorrect. Though maybe my English degree is as useless as it is as finding me a job (totally useless), but from what I've gathered reading books (and Derrida) is that language is anything but exact. Language is pliable, words are an attempt at harnessing the abstract into sound, caging thought into something more tangible. If words have an exact meaning then all the poets have been doing is creating gibberish. And how can Rand go on writing her weak metaphors if she actually believes that statement.

Briefly, Ayn Rand separates people into two categories: those that make, and the 'looters'. I've slept on a lot of couches, but also made a lot of breakfast sandwiches. What then am I?

Somehow, people still rave about this book. I will say, however, that the chapter where they kill everyone by putting a steam engine through a tunnel was incredibly well done. She could have cut the rest of the novel and simply published that chapter because all the major points are present and for a brief moment the book felt worth reading. I also loved the bits about the pirate and the scene where the government takes over the mines to find them desolated. There are some great 'fight the man' moments but they are buried under a god-awful plot that puts the plot and politics before the writing and told through characters that are so two-dimensional that I can't even believe the scenes that have them walking down a street. There's some politics here I guess some people could get down with, and I do understand that this is a response to the horrors of Communist Russia, but she did this so much better in *Anthem* (though even in that she contradicts herself often. Right after a large discussion on freedom and not letting others think for you, the man names the woman character. He just tells her, this is now your name. Which seems suspiciously not like the freedom the man was fighting for) and others have tackled the issue in a much more agreeable and artistic manner. All sarcasm and jokes aside, I simply do not think this book is well written. I could honestly not care less about the political aspects, its the literary aspects that cause the low rating. I came, I read, I shrugged.

1/5

Disclaimer: I read this while working in a factory that had no heat or AC and paid minimum wage as the salary cap. However, the office had AC, heat and tons of paid vacation. Perhaps I'm just bitter about the time I was sent home for listening to a DFW interview on Bookworm because it was 'spreading liberal propaganda in the workplace.'

Disclaimer #2: 1 star is probably too harsh, but I really wanted to try writing an angry rant review for once. Sorry, I'm most likely the asshole in this situation.

There are two novels that can change a bookish fourteen-year old's life: The Lord of the Rings and Atlas Shrugged. One is a childish fantasy that often engenders a lifelong obsession with its unbelievable heroes, leading to an emotionally stunted, socially crippled adulthood, unable to deal with the real world. The other, of course, involves orcs. - John Rogers

Christopher Stephen says

When my mother gave me this book and said, "I think you will like this; I read it over a vacation in a week when I was your age," I took one look at the massive text and couldn't believe it. She also said that I reminded her of the characters....a statement to this day I take pride in....

And that is exactly what I learned from this book: that pride is most beautiful thing, and to live on this earth means that one must understand its reality, and learn to use one's mind to make it what one wants it to be. It is about truly loving life and all that it means to 'live' it. It is the reason why I understand myself as a man who belongs on earth....

It is very long (almost 1200 pages), so get ready for an epic. I won't try to say it is great literature, though if the style fits the person who is reading it, it will certainly be an amazing read. It can be long-winded and wordy at times, but what philosopher isn't? My advice: stick with it through the first half of the first section: it takes it bit to get going in the book, but once it starts, it is worth it....

To the proposition that we all have inside of us the inherent values to be heroes: we just need to learn the virtues that will bring those values out of us...

C.S. Leary
