

Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* and Her Idea of Ideal Man-Woman Relationship

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Abstract

*Ayn Rand is a Russian emigrant novelist and Objectivist philosopher who finally settled in American. Her *The Fountainhead* (1943) is her most popular novel through which she supports the principles of her Objectivist philosophy. The present research paper discusses her idea of ideal man-woman relationship as it emerges in *The Fountainhead*. Her fictional as well as non-fictional writing is greatly influenced by her past which she spent in the communist Russia. Born in Russia, Rand had firsthand experience of the Russian Revolution, nationalization of private property, especially, the bourgeois people's property. In the communist Russia, the capitalist class was destroyed and attempts were made to erode individualism for 'the great collective'. The present paper analyses the extent to which these experiences have influenced her and the man-woman relationship in her novel *The Fountainhead*.*

Key Words: *Man-woman relationship, Objectivism, Self-respect, individualism, etc.*

Ayn Rand (1905-1982) is a Russian born American woman novelist and an Objectivist philosopher who permanently settled in the United States. Her *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) are fictional manifestos of her Objectivist philosophy where Rand champions individualism and capitalism and staunchly criticizes Russian communism, collectivism, and socialism as well as fascism, Nazism, welfare state and modern liberalism.

Rand is a Russian emigrant writer and her perception of man-woman relationship forms the core of the present research paper. Her fictional as well as non-fictional writing is greatly influenced by her past which she spent in the communist Russia. Born in Russia, Rand had firsthand experience of the Russian Revolution, nationalization of private property, especially, the bourgeois people's property. In the communist Russia, the capitalist class was destroyed and the individual's place in the community was rejected. This could be a reason why Rand appears to be an advocate of individualism and capitalism and a strong hater of collectivism.

The Fountainhead presents Rand's Objectivist philosophy. The prime motive and purpose of her writing is: *the projection of an ideal man*. She wants to portray Howard Roark *as an end in himself*. Rand has another aim to present through the novel. She wants to present the kind of social system that will make it possible for her ideal man to exist and to function. She sees this society as a free, productive, rational system that demands and rewards the best in man. Rand sees such ideal social set up only in *Laissez-Fair-Capitalism*. In short, Rand is trying to present Howard Roark as an ideal man and laissez-fair-capitalism as an ideal social set up. Rand is trying to suggest that rational self-interest, independence and egoism can lead human relationship towards happiness and success. These principles play a very crucial role in the construction of perfect man-woman relationship.

Rand's *The Fountainhead* depicts a broad range of man-woman relationships which have failed due to lack of belief in the principles of Rand's Objectivism- rational self-interest, independence and egoism which alone, according to Rand, lead human relationship towards happiness and success.

Most of the close, intimate and familial relationships in her novel turn out to be unsuccessful. These relationships include Peter Keating-Mrs. Keating (mother-son relationship), Ellsworth Toohey-Catherine Halsey (uncle-niece relationship), and Guy Francon-Dominique Francon (father-daughter relationship), Gail Wynand-Dominique Francon (husband-wife relationship). These intimate relationships fail as the partners involved do not understand the importance of rational self-interest, independence and egoism. Again these principles are accountable for the failure of most of the love relationships in the novel such as Peter-Catherine relationship, Peter Keating-Dominique Francon relationship. Many professional relationships including Mr. Roark- Mrs. Wilmont relationship and Peter Keating-Mrs. Dunlop relationship also fail due to lack of rational self- interest, independence and egoism. This is Rand's idea of unsuccessful or non-ideal human relationship.

Howard Roark-Dominique Francon relationship forms the central interest of the novel as well as of this study. Howard Roark is a first-rate architect and is Rand's ideal man. Dominique Francon is the female protagonist of the novel and is described by Rand as the

perfect woman for an ideal man like Roark. Rand's idea of an ideal relationship seems to be 'hero-worship' or 'man-worship'. In Howard Roark, Rand creates a Godlike figure whom Dominique will worship throughout her life as she is described as a 'perfect priestess' in her notes. Naturally, Roark acquires prominent, high position whereas Dominique follows him and is at a secondary position.

Dominique is the first one to recognize Roark's greatness, his originality and the first to love him, to submit to his greatness and originality. She appreciates architectural uniqueness of the Enright House built by Roark in her column and immediately submits to his greatness. She submits to Roark's greatness and uniqueness mentally, physically and even spiritually. She perceives that the society in which he lives does not believe in individualism and discredits it. She realizes that he will not survive in the evil society. So, she decides to destroy him before the rest of the people destroy him. She blocks his clients and commissions. She punishes herself by marrying to Peter and receives more humiliation, torture, degradation. She endangers her life in dynamiting the Cortland housing project.

According to Rand, this is an ideal man-woman relationship as both the partners find their self-interest in one another. Dominique's happiness lies in Roark. She can lead a happy and peaceful life only at a time when the society allows Roark to exist and function in the society. Throughout the novel, Dominique exists for Roark. She receives anguish, torture and humiliation because of her involvement in Roark. Her marriage with Peter and Gail are the ways of self-destruction for her. Rand has presented Dominique a sacrificial being who must devote her life to Roark and should submit to his existence. This is Rand's idea of ideal man-woman relationship.

The present researchers don't agree with Rand's idea of ideal man-woman relationship. This relationship cannot achieve ideal status, because there is no equality in it. This relationship is marked by love, mutual understanding, sacrifice, and devotion for the man on the part of the woman and man's indifference towards the plight of the woman.

Though Roark is Rand's ideal man, and Dominique is her ideal woman and Rand projects their relationship as the ideal one, it fails to seem ideal for the readers. Rand wants Dominique to love this great man, to sacrifice for his needs and to submit to his greatness. Dominique exists only for Roark and she is given no other concrete function other than hero-worshipping in the novel. In the granite quarry when Dominique sees Roark, she realizes: "she had found an aim in life" (*The Fountainhead*, p.205). This statement implies that Roark is the centre of her existence and without him she cannot lead an independent life.

Roark-Dominique relationship is marked by Roark's superiority, dominance, powerfulness, aggressiveness and by Dominique's submissiveness, powerlessness, and ineffectuality. In the first Roark- Dominique meeting, it is found that the writer favors the

hero's aggressiveness and potentials at the cost of the heroine: "she knew that she could not move until he permitted her to" (1943, 205). Dominique is the owner of the granite quarry yet Rand's hero possesses her: "it was not a glance, but an act of ownership" (1943, 205). Dominique is presented as an object to be possessed, owned by Roark and is helpless and passive in his presence.

Rand has been accused by Feminists of being dishonest, disloyal to her own sex. Its evidence is the sex scene in the novel. Rand believes that "sex is an expression of man's self-esteem, of his self-value" (Toffler, 1964) and yet, the sex scene doesn't have anything to do with woman's self-value.

"It was an act that could be performed in tenderness, as a seal of love, or in contempt, as a symbol of humiliation and conquest. It could be the act of lover or the act of soldier violating an enemy woman. He did it as an act of scorn. Not as love, but as defilement... But the act of master taking shameful, contemptuous possession of her was the kind of rapture she had wanted" (1943, 217).

In this context, the expression of man's (male's) self-esteem, self-value is of much importance and the woman and her moral grace, strength has little or no meaning. Roark is not just expressing his self-esteem, self-value but is violating her aggressively. Rand appears to be less concerned about the woman's physical, moral values as she humiliates female sex. The feminist critics are hostile with Rand's sex scenes. Susan Brownmiller charges Rand as a traitor to her own sex. (65). This charge is appropriate as Rand has not justified the position of woman in human relationship. The woman just becomes an object of expression of man's self-esteem, self-value he is indifferent to her consent.

Moreover, Rand portrays Dominique Francon as a human being without any self-interest and self-respect who seeks self-immolation for Roark. Rand sees no moral or physical dignity in a woman like Dominique:

"I want to sleep with you. Now, tonight, and at any time you may care to call me. I want your naked body, your skin, your mouth, and your hands...I want you – I have no self-respect to bargain with me and divide me- I want you –I want you like animal, or a cat on a fence, or a whore." (1943, 272)

Rand has presented Dominique as a woman dependent on Roark for her existence. Without Roark, Dominique's existence is meaningless. There are so many instances in the novel where Dominique expects self-destruction, self-immolation by offering her total existence to him. Dominique is shown as dissatisfied with the world because the world can't understand the worth of a person like Roark. She snatches away Roark's clients not to cause

him economic disadvantages but to ‘protect’ the defilement of his talent at the hands of mediocrity:

“Roark, you won’t win, they’ll destroy you, but I won’t be there to see it happen. I will have destroyed myself first. That’s the only gesture of protest open to me. What else I could offer you? The things people sacrifice are so little. I’ll give my marriage to Peter Keating. I’ll refuse to permit myself happiness in their world. I’ll take suffering. That will be my answer to them, and my gift to you.”
(1943, 375)

Thus, Roark-Dominique relationship becomes peculiar because of the heroin’s self-destructiveness, hero’s aggressiveness and the interference of other male characters. Dominique bears much pain, torture, humiliation, and degradation at the hands of many male characters. On the contrary, Roark is shown as completely unresponsive to her pathetic condition. So this relationship doesn’t seem an ideal one.

Ayn Rand’s perception of man-woman relationship is closely linked with her political views, and Objectivist philosophy. The novel is essentially a struggle between individualism on the one side and collectivism on the other. Naturally, Rand’s characters can be divided into the same two groups. Given her love for individualism and hatred for collectivism, Rand sees only a few characters as good and all others as evil.

Ayn Rand (1969, 168) in her *The Romantic Manifesto*, has said that the objective of her fiction is to represent the people “as they might be and ought to be”. However, the above analysis of characters in *The Fountainhead* makes it clear that when she says “my purpose is the projection of ideal man”, she does not mean ‘ideal human being’, but literally an *ideal male*. No woman character in the novel is perceived as an ideal human being. And so, Dominique, Dagny Taggard, etc., are just ‘ideal priestesses’ created for the ‘ideal man’.

As Ayn Rand is concerned with depicting ideal man, ideal woman, ideal social system, naturally, the category of ideal man-woman relationship cannot be avoided. To understand her ideas about ideal man-woman relationship, it is necessary to understand why some relationships in her work fail. Roark-Dominique relationship gets foregrounded because of the background of all other failed relations. Most of the relationships fail because the people involved have not realized what they really want and try to achieve that which they think society values. For example, Peter Keating really loves Catherine but marries Dominique, because of the pressures of his mother and the hope of getting money, success, and power through this marriage. Catherine is actually unhappy and a depressed person but is deceiving herself that she is happy with the social work that she does for the orphan children.

Peter-Dominique relationship fails because both are not interested in each other. Gail-Dominique relationship also fails because Gail finally succumbs to the wish of the masses.

Ayn Rand seems to be making the point that a person can be happy and can bring happiness to others around him only when he places his own interests above that of others. Miss Louisa Keating, who has devoted her whole life her mediocre son become a success, does injustice not just to herself but also to her son, his beloved, and to his wife. Ayn Rand is deadly against giving up one's desires and wishes for the sake of others. She is also against all the notions of 'the good of the masses'. That is why, Catherine is unhappy; Peter is unhappy; Gail is unhappy. These people have become unhappy because they have not realized 'the virtue of selfishness'. These unhappy people are not ideal people and cannot create ideal relationship either with the sexual partner or with their parents or with their children.

According to Rand, the only ideal man-woman relationship in the novel is that of Roark-Dominique. Roark has always known what he wants from very young age and is completely focused on getting it. He is not concerned with the expectations of others from him or of the values of the society around him. He wants to satisfy only himself. And hence, he is happy even in difficult times. He is also a talented artist who disagrees to make compromises with his talent. Rand thinks he is the ideal man. However, he is not able to develop an ideal relationship with the ideal woman Dominique, for a long time in the novel, because, she has to learn a lot and change herself before she can be ready for the ideal relationship. Rand unites them finally only when Dominique gives up her desire to destroy Roark and to punish herself. Ultimately when she realizes the futility of the attempt and accepts the truth of her happiness in being with Roark, she is ready for the ideal relationship.

Wendy McElroy, a freelance writer and a feminist lecturer, argues that Dominique is of course an ideal woman and represents a third alternative to 'the Madonna/Whore' and 'politically correct' paradigms of woman in the form of women who revel in cardinal pleasures but can be sexually approached only by the ideal man. She also argues that Dominique is a role model of strength, intelligence, and independence, 'yet her finest moment lies in the arms of man'. Don Berton Johnson argues that the purest act of worship for Randian heroine is when she overcomes her own strengths and surrenders on the altar of sex to the appropriate hero.

The present researchers can't agree with these arguments of her fans and a few researchers like McElroy and Johnson as their arguments reduce women to the status of a sex object and strengthen their inferior position vis-à-vis men. We do not agree with Rand's perception of man-woman relationship in which the role of the ideal woman is to be the perfect priestess of the ideal man. This perception, in spite of all the talk of self-respect, self

value, and individualism in Rand's Objectivist philosophy, approaches the reality of Rand Cult and seems not much different from Mills and Boon's romances.

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