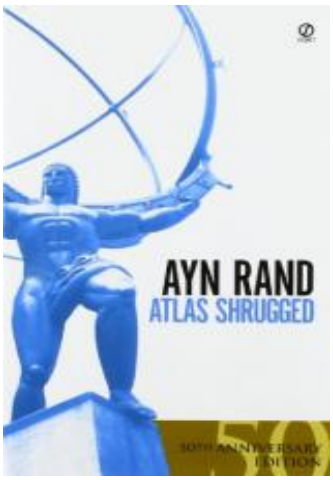
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Atlas Shrugged

by Ayn Rand



About the Book

Atlas Shrugged (1957) is a mystery story, Ayn Rand once commented, "not about the murder of man?s body, but about the murder?and rebirth?of man?s spirit." It is the story of a man?the novel?s hero?who says that he will stop the motor of the world, and does. The deterioration of the U.S. accelerates as the story progresses. Factories, farms, shops shut down or go bankrupt in ever larger numbers. Riots break out as food supplies become scarce. Is he, then, a destroyer or the greatest of liberators? Why does he have to fight his battle, not against his enemies but against those who need him most, including the woman, Dagny Taggart, a top railroad executive, whom he passionately loves? What is the world?s motor?and the motive power of every man?

Peopled by larger-than-life heroes and villains, and charged with awesome questions of good and evil, Atlas Shrugged is a novel of tremendous scope. It presents an astounding panorama of human life?from the productive genius who becomes a worthless playboy (Francisco d?Anconia)?to the great steel industrialist who does not know that he is working for his own destruction (Hank Rearden)?to the philosopher who becomes a pirate (Ragnar Danneskjold)?to the composer who gives up his career on the night of his triumph (Richard Halley). Dramatizing AR?s complete philosophy, Atlas Shrugged is an intellectual revolution told in the form of an action thriller of violent events?and with a ruthlessly brilliant plot and irresistible suspense.

We do not want to spoil the plot by giving away its secret or its deeper meaning, so as a hint only we will quote here one brief exchange from the novel:

"If you saw Atlas, the giant who holds the world on his shoulders, if you saw that he stood, 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 the effort the heavier the world bore down upon his shoulders?what would you tell him to do?"

"I?don?t know. What?could he do? What would you tell him?"

"To shrug."

Discussion Guide

1. What and where is the "utopia of greed"?

2. Why does Dagny Taggart, a woman of ruthless logic who passionately loves life, chase a mysterious stranger?s plane in her own plane when she knows it will lead to her virtually certain death?

3. Why do Dagny Taggart and Lillian Rearden?both highly affluent women?fight over a cheap metallic bracelet? Who gets to keep the bracelet, and at what cost? What is Lillian?s real motive in trapping her husband Hank in infidelity?

4. Why does Francisco d?Anconia, heir to the greatest fortune in the world and a productive genius with boundless ambition, seek ever more outrageous ways to destroy his own business empire? Why does he turn into a playboy who forsakes the woman he loves and instead seduces prominent women who are of no interest to him?

5. When an entire country tells them that their railroad bridge, constructed from a new ultralight metal, won?t stand under the onrush of a speeding train, why are Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden so confident that it will? Were you convinced by the arguments offered against them by their opponents? Whom did you side with? Why?

6. According to **Atlas Shrugged**, selfishness is both moral and practical. What does Ayn Rand mean by "selfishness"? Compare the actions and character of James Taggart, Hank Rearden, Orren Boyle, and Francisco d?Anconia: Who is selfish and who is not? Can you present arguments for or against AR?s view of selfishness? Contrast AR?s approach with that of the ethics of Christianity.

7. What basic motive unites people who brag about their sexual promiscuity and people who demand economic handouts from the government?

8. Explain the meaning and wider significance of the following quote from **Atlas Shrugged**: "The words ?to make money? hold the essence of human morality." Explain what ideas underlie the maxim that "money is the root of all good."

9. Capitalism is often defended by appeal to the "public good"; that is, solely because its economic efficiency benefits society. Contrast this with AR?s defense of capitalism, as dramatized in **Atlas Shrugged**.

Author Bio

Ayn Rand was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on February 2, 1905. At age six she taught herself to read and two years later discovered her first fictional hero in a French magazine for children, thus capturing the heroic vision which

sustained her throughout her life. At the age of nine she decided to make fiction writing her career. Thoroughly opposed to the mysticism and collectivism of Russian culture, she thought of herself as a European writer, especially after encountering Victor Hugo, the writer she most admired.

During her high school years, she was eyewitness to both the Kerensky Revolution, which she supported, and --- in 1917 --- the Bolshevik Revolution, which she denounced from the outset. In order to escape the fighting, her family went to the Crimea, where she finished high school. The final Communist victory brought the confiscation of her father?s pharmacy and periods of near-starvation. When introduced to American history in her last year of high school, she immediately took America as her model of what a nation of free men could be.

When her family returned from the Crimea, she entered the University of Petrograd to study philosophy and history. Graduating in 1924, she experienced the disintegration of free inquiry and the takeover of the university by communist thugs. Amidst the increasingly gray life, her one great pleasure was Western films and plays. Long an admirer of cinema, she entered the State Institute for Cinema Arts in 1924 to study screenwriting.

In late 1925 she obtained permission to leave Soviet Russia for a visit to relatives in the United States. Although she told Soviet authorities that her visit would be short, she was determined never to return to Russia. She arrived in New York City in February 1926. She spent the next six months with her relatives in Chicago, obtained an extension to her visa, and then left for Hollywood to pursue a career as a screenwriter.

On Ayn Rand?s second day in Hollywood, Cecil B. DeMille saw her standing at the gate of his studio, offered her a ride to the set of his movie The King of Kings, and gave her a job, first as an extra, then as a script reader. During the next week at the studio, she met an actor, Frank O?Connor, whom she married in 1929; they were married until his death 50 years later.

After struggling for several years at various nonwriting jobs, including one in the wardrobe department at the RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., she sold her first screenplay, ?Red Pawn,? to Universal Pictures in 1932 and saw her first stage play, "Night of January 16th," produced in Hollywood and then on Broadway. Her first novel, WE THE LIVING, was completed in 1934 but was rejected by numerous publishers, until The Macmillan Company in the United States and Cassells and Company in England published the book in 1936. The most autobiographical of her novels, it was based on her years under Soviet tyranny.

She began writing THE FOUNTAINHEAD in 1935. In the character of the architect Howard Roark, she presented for the first time the kind of hero whose depiction was the chief goal of her writing: the ideal man, man as ?he could be and ought to be.? THE FOUNTAINHEAD was rejected by 12 publishers but finally accepted by the Bobbs-Merrill Company. When published in 1943, it made history by becoming a best seller through word-of-mouth two years later, and gained for its author lasting recognition as a champion of individualism.

Ayn Rand returned to Hollywood in late 1943 to write the screenplay for THE FOUNTAINHEAD, but wartime restrictions delayed production until 1948. Working part time as a screenwriter for Hal Wallis Productions, she began her major novel, ATLAS SHRUGGED, in 1946. In 1951 she moved back to New York City and devoted herself full time to the completion of ATLAS SHRUGGED.

Published in 1957, ATLAS SHRUGGED was her greatest achievement and last work of fiction. In this novel she dramatized her unique philosophy in an intellectual mystery story that integrated ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, politics, economics and sex. Although she considered herself primarily a fiction writer, she realized that in order to create heroic fictional characters, she had to identify the philosophic principles which make such individuals possible.

Thereafter, Ayn Rand wrote and lectured on her philosophy --- Objectivism, which she characterized as ?a philosophy for living on earth.? She published and edited her own periodicals from 1962 to 1976, her essays providing much of the material for six books on Objectivism and its application to the culture. Ayn Rand died on March 6, 1982, in her New York City apartment.

Every book by Ayn Rand published in her lifetime is still in print, and hundreds of thousands of copies are sold each year, so far totalling more than 20 million. Several new volumes have been published posthumously. Her vision of man and her philosophy for living on earth have changed the lives of thousands of readers and launched a philosophic movement with a growing impact on American culture.

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