

Ayn Rand's Selfless Woman
Anonymous

Dominique Francon is not a person; she is a barometer. The only significant woman character in Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*, she serves solely as an indication of her current husband's success. While she is Mrs. Peter Keating, her husband is at the height of his architectural career. When Keating trades her to Gail Wynand, it is then Wynand who is at his best, having secured as wife the woman he desperately wanted to possess. As Mrs. Roark, finally, Dominique signifies the victory of the virtuous egoism that her husband represents over its antithesis, evil altruism. Dominique herself, however, does not adhere to this same virtuous egoism, instead becoming, paradoxically, selflessly dependent upon others in her need for fulfillment from the men whom she embellishes. Thus, in her portrayal of Dominique's relationships in *The Fountainhead*, Rand suggests that women are not people in and of themselves; they require men to worship and so are unable to achieve Rand's ideal of pure egoism.

Rand first indicates that women are not self-contained people when she has Dominique relish in the memory of her rape at the hands of Howard Roark, the man who will become her long-term partner. Dominique, Rand writes, does not feel as if she has been violated following the assault but rather experiences "the same kind of pleasure she had felt in [Roark's] arms" (Rand 188) when thinking of it. Roark, Rand's protagonist and ideal man, cannot bear for his buildings to be built in any way other than that which he specifies, as evidenced by his dynamiting of Cortlandt Homes. But according to Rand, Dominique, *The Fountainhead's* only candidate for the ideal woman, not only suffers but savors the desecration of her own body. Here, Dominique is captivated by an experience that Roark, had he been the victim rather than the rapist, would have considered a repulsive evil. But because Dominique is a woman, she is not sufficient alone, so Roark's rape is considered a gift to complete rather than an infringement upon her ego.

Rand reiterates women's lack of independent ego when she marries Dominique to Peter Keating. Dominique does not choose this marriage out of love for her groom but out of a need to suffer in a way commensurate to the pain of her hero, Roark: If he cannot create the buildings that are his passion, then she, because she is his dependent, must be similarly hindered. Thus, she marries Keating, Roark's opposite and the archetypal selfless man. Keating, Dominique observes, is one of the people who "want nothing but mirrors around them. To reflect them while they're reflecting too" (370). He has "no center and no purpose" (370), or in other words, no ego. Therefore, by marrying him, Dominique puts herself in as close proximity as possible to the "blank death" (370) of collective thinking that she so despises. Here, it nearly seems as though Dominique has an opinion of her own. Nevertheless, she does not, as her hatred for those who think the thoughts of others—or even engage in collaboration and cooperation with their fellow humans—is identical to Roark's. Even in her resolve, she is an echo of her first lover, a version of him without agency: Roark would scorn the idea of wounding himself in response to harm

wrought upon another. Yet, Dominique forces herself into misery because of her connection to Roark, living as Mrs. Peter Keating for many years. Again, Rand subordinates women to men and, in doing so, implies that women are given their sense of self by the men with whom they are affiliated.

In her most blatant denial of self to women, Rand makes explicit her view of women as creatures without ego during the sex scene between Dominique and her second husband, newspaper editor Gail Wynand. In this scene, Dominique is, out of fidelity to Roark, resolved not to enjoy the sexual act. However, even the self that has been imparted to Dominique is, here, compromised, as Dominique does experience pleasure: “She thought that [her “answer of hunger, of acceptance, of pleasure”] was not a matter of desire, not even a matter of the sexual act, but only that the man was the life force and woman could respond to nothing else” (427). With this scene, Rand furthers her refusal of self to women, arguing that women are not even bound to a particular man who embodies the self that they desire to possess. Instead, women are objects that exist merely to respond to men, without the agency to decide whether or not they wish to do so. Sex, the act that Rand portrays as defining a woman's life insofar as it joins her to the man who supplies her sense of self, and the enjoyment derived from the act are involuntary for women. Thus, women's lives are dictated entirely by their sexual partners, in that their sexual partners perform the necessary function of completing women's egos and do so regardless of whatever degree of will a woman might possess. Rand deprives women of not only innate but assumed self.

Throughout *The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand argues that women are selfless dependents of men by having her main woman character, Dominique Francon, rely upon a man, Howard Roark, to provide her with an ego. Dominique's actions throughout the next section of the book, particularly her marrying Peter Keating, are dictated by the sense of self Dominique has received from Roark. However, Rand then denies Dominique even this ego that has been forced upon her by having her succumb to the will of a third man, Gail Wynand. Through these interactions of Dominique's, Rand outlines her belief that women are lesser than men because they are incomplete without them, leaving women unable to achieve the ideal of pure egoism that Rand propounds.

Works Cited

Rand, Ayn. *The Fountainhead*. Twenty-fifth-anniversary ed, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943.