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**ATLAS SHRUGGED: FEMINISM DISCOURSE OR DISCOURSE OF  
FEMININITY**

*“The question isn’t who is going to let me; it’s who is going to stop me.”* This quote (original passage: *“Do you mean to tell me that you’re thinking seriously of building that way, when and if you are an architect?” “Yes.” “My dear fellow, who will let you?” “That’s not the point. The point is, who will stop me?”* [5; 347] has become everything, but an official slogan of feminism and turned Ayn Rand, an avowed enemy of feminism, into a celebrity of the fourth wave feminist. The exact time and way of the quote’s distortion are unknown facts, however these days it appears on a great many scientific, quasi scientific and fictional works in printed and online sources endorsing feminism. The research questions are to determine the differences between feminism discourse and discourse of femininity and to investigate the connection between feminism and objectivism.

Objectivism is the philosophy originated by a Russian-American writer and philosopher Ayn Rand (1905 – 1982), whose primary idea was rational individualism as long as the idea of happiness being achieved through bringing material things into the world. As Rand mentions in the appendix to Atlas Shrugged: *“My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute.”* [3; 1767] Thusly, objectivism and feminism, specifically radical feminism, are concepts which may rarely be put together, as far as objectivism is extremely about individualism, while feminism struggles for collective result. In its turn feminism, especially radical feminism sees a number of misogynistic traits in objectivism and perceives the latter as a ‘white male’ construct. Objectivism sees a woman as an able being capable of just as much as a man is, however it does not deny that a woman will have to fight as much to achieve her happiness and goals as a

man will have to; fight for the happiness in terms of objectivism equals to hard work and result unlike feministic screaming for attention and lack of struggle. Ayn Rand being a great supporter of American capitalism and a great admirer of male historical figures, who were among those builders of modern society, could hardly be called a feminist herself, moreover she tended to proclaim herself a “male chauvinist” [1] Rand believed that by denouncing men, women denounce themselves, however her classifying herself as a ‘male chauvinist’ is rather different from the current definition. Once she mentioned: *“I believe that women are human beings. What is proper for a man is proper for a woman. The basic principles are the same. I would not attempt to prescribe what kind of work a man should do, and I would not attempt it in regard to women. There is no particular work which is specifically feminine. Women can choose their work according to their own purpose and premises in the same manner as men do.”* The basic idea of Rand’s regarding the women rights was that women had not only rights, but responsibilities as well. In her viewpoint success of a woman did not depend on the career she obtained, but rather on the values she possessed. Essentially she tried to point out that women should develop themselves in the sphere where they may get optimal results, and they should chose not accordingly being women, but accordingly their abilities. From the conversation between Dagny and a woman from Galt’s Gulch reader may fathom the real thoughts of Rand’s on feminism: *“...They represent my particular career, Miss Taggart,” said the young mother in answer to her comment, wrapping a loaf of fresh bread and smiling at her across the counter.* *“They’re the profession I’ve chosen to practice, which, in spite of all the guff about motherhood, one can’t practice successfully in the outer world.... I came here, not merely for the sake of my husband’s profession, but for the sake of my own. I came here in order to bring up my sons as human beings”* [2: 989] She mentioned this idea once again in her Playboy interview, stressing that if a woman chooses a career at home, this career is no less important than any other, because a woman lives up to her values, so if a woman chooses to stay at home, she should treat this pursuit as a career one. [4] Rand believed parenting to be “a very responsible task”, which “should be treated as a science, not as a mere emotional indulgence” [4]

Thus, Rand believed not only the equality of men and women, but also the equality of professions they choose, the greatness and success are not achieved with obtaining a post, but rather with reconciling with reality and living up to one's values.

Another reason, which made Rand proclaim herself to be anti-feminist, was the second wave of feminism, which began approximately in the time when Rand was working on *Atlas Shrugged*. The leftists were on the rise and the voice of the second wave was loud and clear. As far as Rand by all means possible supported American capitalism, she could not be a supporter of the left wing ideologies, thus women rights were the aspect she denounced as a part of a bigger notion, which did not pertain to her ideology. She believed that feminists were parasites who preferred to thrive collectively, but every time rejected individual responsibility; they demanded privileges from the society they condemned and offered nothing in return; in her opinion feminists were similar to Lillian Rearden or Hank Rearden's mother – hypocritical human beings who thrived on the success of other people, despised them for being successful and did their best to hold the latter from their true potential, blaming own failures and incompetence on the competent and able ones. According to Heller "Rand wanted to be the architect of an American utopia that looked backward to the gilded age of American industrial titans. But like many of her Russian predecessors, she was a far shrewder social critic than she was a visionary." [2; 29] However, alongside the notion of feminism there exists the notion of femininity as well. The concept of the representation of the feminine self as a part gender studies becomes more and more acute; dealing with beauty stereotypes takes one of the prominent places in practically all the western cultures. The basic aim for a literary work is conveying some specific cultural ideas embodied in discursive peculiarities. However, it is important to understand that discourse cannot be regarded as a purely linguistic notion, it represents interests for psychologists, linguists, culture experts as well as scholars in the in the study of literature.

These days it is getting more and more unmanageable to characterize a woman as culturally and linguistically homogeneous, impregnable from different influences – historical, cultural and national ideologies. *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel by Ayn Rand,

first published in 1957 in the United States. As indicated by its working title *The Strike*, the book explores a dystopian United States where leading innovators, ranging from industrialists to artists, refuse to be exploited by society, where the power was usurped by the leftists unwilling to produce and caring solely for trading favors. The protagonist, Dagny Taggart, sees society collapse around her as the government increasingly asserts control over all industry, while society's most productive citizens, led by the mysterious John Galt, progressively disappear. Galt describes the strike as “stopping the motor of the world” by withdrawing the “minds” that drive society's growth and productivity; with their strike these creative minds hope to demonstrate that the economy and society would collapse without the profit motive and the efforts of the rational and productive. Dagny Taggart is the embodiment of the real woman for Ayn Rand. She, along with John Galt and Hank Rearden, is the hope for the society – she is able and capable of acting, she possesses great value, and what is even more important she is an example of utmost integrity of mind and body. Dagny is the personification of values of purpose, self-actualization and independence. She is an engineer and the operating vice-president of a transcontinental railroad – Taggart Transcontinental – she holds a responsible post in the company. Dagny obtained the post due to hard work and uncanny ability for management, apart from that she is a very talented and highly educated engineer, however, she is not acknowledged for her values, rather she is condemned for her gender by looters and losers: *“I think that your sister is awful. I think it's disgusting—a woman acting like a grease-monkey and posing around like a big executive. It's so unfeminine. Who does she think she is, anyway?”* [3; 134] In the eyes of the incompetent, competence is unjustifiable. Dagny Taggart embodies the success, which can be achieved by any woman, however Rand does not specify Dagny's struggle as a struggle of a woman; she describes it rather as a struggle of value against incompetence and indolence. *“They dislike me, not because I do things badly, but because I do them well. They dislike me because I've always had the best grades in the class. I don't even have to study. I always get A's.”* [3; 267] Dagny was a woman, a conscientious being, who, like like Ayn Rand herself, was the one pursuing her career, and for whom happiness

meant success both in professional and personal affairs. For Rand Dagny was a real woman, a personification of everything feminine, not feministic; Rand didn't deem professional success, success in top echelons of business executives to be exclusive for men, what she meant was success of competence, freedom of enterprise, free market. Dagny is a purposeful, strong, and passionately creative embodiment of mind-body unity. She understands that the world lives because of the work of the prime movers.

Through Dagny Rand portrays a new type of a woman – this is a woman who does not sacrifice her life to struggle against men; Rand's point is that the equality of men and women is a consummated fact; what the modern time faces is the struggle of mind and progress against ubiquitous backwardness. Rand's woman is a woman who has short haircut and practical dress, a woman who demands access to higher education in order to invest in the future development of the society, a woman who exercises her right to vote and make decent living, but what is more important, it is a woman who is ready to challenge accepted views of female sexuality. This woman is still a subject of fantasy personified in Dagny Taggart: *“Lillian moved forward to meet her, studying her with curiosity. They had met before, on infrequent occasions, and she found it strange to see Dagny Taggart wearing an evening gown. It was a black dress with a bodice that fell as a cape over one arm and shoulder, leaving the other bare; the naked shoulder was the gown's only ornament. Seeing her in the suits she wore, one never thought of Dagny Taggart's body. The black dress seemed excessively revealing—because it was astonishing to discover that the lines of her shoulder were fragile and beautiful, and that the diamond band on the wrist of her naked arm gave her the most feminine of all aspects: the look of being chained.”* [3; 352] Dagny's appearance is close to ideal; she is not only intelligent, she is beautiful and sensual at the same time, and these are the features that contradict feministic ideology and correspond with feminine core. The significance of this new woman cannot be underestimated. Dagny chooses romantic partners who affirm her positive sense of life, which involves the integration of values, love and sex. She understands that love is an emotional response, as are friendship and admiration, when one

encounters a person who embodies his or her values. Dagny's romances with Francisco, Rearden, and Galt exemplify what a relationship between two integrated and self-actualized persons can be. Her relationships illustrate that sex is the supreme form of admiration of one human being for another and that the values of one's mind are connected to the actions of one's body.

The notions of feminism and femininity, regardless of all possible definitions, are still intricate and vary. It is not inexplicable that Rand's idea of a new woman embodied in Dagny Taggart was misinterpreted: *"But, my good man, she's an unusual phenomenon in the field of economics, so you must expect people to talk about her. Your sister is a symptom of the illness of our century. A decadent product of the machine age. Machines have destroyed man's humanity, taken him away from the soil, robbed him of his natural arts, killed his soul and turned him into an insensitive robot. There's an example of it—a woman who runs a railroad, instead of practicing the beautiful craft of the handloom and bearing children."* [3; 118] On the one hand, the words are exact; on the other the implications are much deeper. Rand is above feminism, for one because she does not deem appropriate even to differentiate male and female professions. In her opinion Dagny is much more feminine, much more a woman, than, for example Lillian Rearden, who is the one indulging in figurative 'handloom'. It's not a profession or a post that constitutes a woman, occupation is irrelevant as long as a woman reveals her true identity through reaching happiness in all the spheres of life. As portrayed throughout the novel, for Dagny there is an inextricable connection among her values, the love she has for her work, the love she has for others, and the desires of her body.

What makes Dagny is yet even more feminine and Rand's discourse even more anti-feminist is Dagny's desire to find an equal – her great man at the end of the railroad track. Dagny is a woman ahead of her times with respect to freedom and independence. There are only a few men in the world to whom Rand's foremost, female, fictional hero could submit or surrender herself. Dagny is a one-of-a-kind woman of strength and courage seeking an extraordinary man like Galt, Rearden, or Francisco: *"Whatever I am, she thought, whatever pride of person I may hold, the*

*pride of my courage, of my work, of my mind and my freedom—that is what I offer you for the pleasure of your body, that is what I want you to use in your service—and that you want it to serve you is the greatest reward I can have.”* [3; 412] What feminism cannot stand is submission of a woman to a man, while Rand speaks of submission as of greatest happiness for a woman; sensuality is a great value for a woman; submissiveness and sensuality are deemed to be feminine.

In the conclusion we should assume that there is no place for feminism in objectivism, as far as feminism can be solely identified with collective ideals and goals, while objectivism places an individual in the centre; the success of the individual depends solely on their own abilities, rather than on concessions from the government or society. On the other hand there is difference between feminism and femininity as well. Ayn Rand, in her infamous 1979 interview with Phil Donahue, told women that if they wanted a job, they should fight for it like any man would have to. Donahue retaliated by asking Rand, “would you fight for anything?” Rand’s response: “How did I get here?”

### **References:**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current piece “Atlas Shrugged: Feminism Discourse or Discourse of Femininity” is an attempt to determine the differences between feminism discourse and discourse of femininity and to investigate the connection between feminism and objectivism. The authors talk about the concept of the representation of the feminine self as a part gender studies and the fact that it becomes more and more acute; it deals with beauty stereotypes and takes one of the prominent places in practically all the western cultures. They mention that the basic aim for a literary work is conveying some specific cultural ideas, discursive peculiarities; however, it is important to understand that discourse cannot be regarded as a purely linguistic notion, it represents interests for psychologists, linguists, culture experts as well as scholars in the in the study of literature. The research touches upon the philosophy of Ayn Rand’s, i.e. objectivism. Her philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute. Further the authors argue that objectivism and feminism, specifically radical feminism, are concepts which may rarely be put together, as far as objectivism is extremely about individualism, while feminism struggles for collective result. In its turn feminism, especially radical feminism sees a number of misogynistic traits in objectivism and perceives the latter as a ‘white male’ construct. The authors come to the conclusion that the basic idea of Rand’s regarding the women rights was that women had not only rights, but responsibilities as well. In her viewpoint success of a woman did not depend on the career she obtained, but rather on the values she possessed. Essentially she tried to point out that women should develop themselves in the sphere where they may get optimal results, and they should chose not accordingly being women, but accordingly their abilities.

**Key words:** feminism discourse, discourse of femininity, objectivism, culture, values.



## АНОТАЦІЯ

Дана стаття "Atlas Shrugged: Feminism Discourse or Discourse of Femininity" є спробою визначити відмінності між феміністським дискурсом і дискурсом фемінінності у творі Айн Ренд «Атлант розправив плечі», а також дослідити зв'язок між фемінізмом та об'єктивізмом. У статті автори говорять про концепцію втілення жіночого «я» як частини гендерних досліджень і те, що ця проблема стає все більш актуальною. Вони згадують, що основна мета літературної роботи – передача деяких специфічних культурних ідей, дискурсивних особливостей; однак, важливо розуміти, що дискурс не може розглядатися як виключно лінгвістичне поняття, він представляє інтерес для психологів, лінгвістів, культурологів, а також вчених в літературних студіях. Дослідження зачіпає філософію Айн Ренд, тобто об'єктивізм. Автори приходять до висновку, що основна ідея Ренд, щодо прав жінок, полягає в тому, що жінки мають не тільки права, але обов'язки, а об'єктивізм не сполучається з фемінізмом.

**Ключові слова:** дискурс фемінізму, дискурс фемінінності, об'єктивізм, культура, цінності.

## АННОТАЦИЯ

Данная статья "Atlas Shrugged: Feminism Discourse or Discourse of Femininity" является попыткой определить различия между феминистским дискурсом и дискурсом фемининности в произведении Айн Ренд «Атлант расправил плечи», а также исследовать связь между феминизмом и объективизмом. В статье авторы говорят о концепции представления женского «я» как части гендерных исследований и том, что эта проблема становится все более актуальной. Они упоминают, что основная цель литературной работы – передача некоторых специфических культурных идей, дискурсивных особенностей; однако, важно понимать, что дискурс не может рассматриваться как исключительно лингвистическое понятие, он представляет интерес для

психологов, лингвистов, культурологов, а также ученых в литературных студиях. Исследование затрагивает философию Айн Рэнд, т.е. объективизм. Авторы приходят к выводу, что основная идея Рэнд, касательно прав женщин, заключается в том, что женщины имеют, не только права, но обязанности, а объективизм не сочетается с феминизмом.

**Ключевые слова:** дискурс феминизма, дискурс фемининности, объективизм, культура, ценности.