

FIRST PLACE



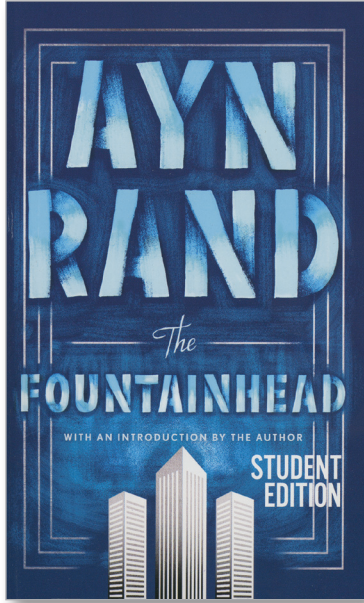
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Dominique says to Alvah Scarret: “I take the only desire one can really permit oneself. Freedom, Alvah, freedom. . . . To ask nothing. To expect nothing. To depend on nothing.” What does Dominique mean by this, and how does she act on her view over the course of the novel? What is Dominique’s perspective on this kind of “freedom” at the end of the novel, and why?

Dominique Francon and Freedom

On April 23, 1910, President Theodore Roosevelt delivered his “Citizenship in a Republic” speech, also referred to as “The Man in the Arena” speech, in Paris, France. In this speech, he illustrates the importance of true integrity and courage, stating, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again . . . and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.” In *The Fountainhead*, Dominique Francon defines freedom as asking, expecting, and depending on nothing, with no will to dare greatly. While her lover, Howard Roark, can be described as the man in the arena, Dominique chooses to live as a perfectly integrated member of society, remaining on the sidelines. Dominique is an individualist who believes in a world that lacks integrity, and those who live daring greatly, such as Roark, are destined to fail. However, her lifestyle in which she defines freedom, inaccurately reflects her true values in life—she admires and recognizes the authentic spirit of those in the arena. In many ways, Dominique chooses to dare greatly, failing by her own expectations, not according to society’s ideals. But rather than living in alignment to her own expectations, she chooses to conform and live miserably, a symbolism of her individual willpower. So long as her misery is by her own hand, she lives a life of freedom.

Throughout the novel, Dominique Francon is depicted as an independent, headstrong woman, which is highly unusual for a woman in her time. Despite her cold, fearless demeanor, the life she lives is dictated by the opposite—her fear of loss and pain is what defines her world and twisted definition of freedom. Dominique’s definition of freedom comes from her pessimistic mindset, a strong belief that good, individualists like Howard Roark, will be obliterated by evil, altruists like Ellsworth Toohey. To have freedom is defined as the power to act, think, or speak without restraint, yet she witnesses Roark and other individualists face constant rejection from society despite this apparent freedom. Their artistic prowess is restrained from the public eye, deemed preposterous and wildly eccentric. As an individualist herself, she instead chooses to live an ignorant, comfortable life as a writer for the

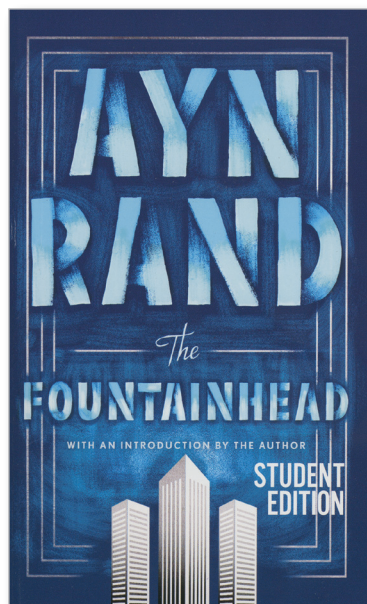


newspaper company, *The Banner*, rather than setting herself up for failure. This life is unfulfilling for her as she does not allow herself to experience true joy due to her undeniable fear of pain and loss stemming from her pessimism. Dominique believes that to ask, expect, and depend on nothing will save her the suffering when evil strips her of what brings her joy.

Dominique implements her definition of freedom to nearly all her relationships in her life, especially in her love for Roark. When discussing freedom with Alvah Scarret, he inquires Dominique on the chance she finds something she wants, in which she responds, “I won’t find it. I won’t choose to see it. It would be part of that lovely world of yours. I’d have to share it with all the rest of you—and I wouldn’t.” Through this statement, Dominique not only turns a blind eye to any possible earthly desires, she denies herself of having any at all. While her words are unfathomable to most, it echoes her extreme belief that her desires can never be fulfilled in a world where powerful altruists like Toohey exist. Toohey’s mission is to strip others of their individuality and create a perfect, collectivist world, with individual desires to be crushed by his will. To allow herself to desire would then risk her individuality.

Dominique’s romantic relationship with Roark directly mirrors her response to Alvah. Prior to discovering his career in architecture, Dominique falls in love with Roark during his time working at the quarry. Her summer in Connecticut with Roark revolves around the mystery of his identity; she refuses to ask for his name or any revealing information about him, despite her growing desire for him. “She had lost the freedom she loved. She knew that a continuous struggle against the compulsion of a single desire was compulsion also, but it was the form she preferred to accept. It was the only manner in which she could let him motivate her life.” Rather than accepting her compulsion for Roark, she instead turns to the struggle in resisting her desire for him. Although miserable, Dominique still holds onto her own autonomy and independence through this self-inflicted punishment. Based on her view of freedom, she is salvaging herself from the pain and loss, and in doing so, she inevitably loses him.

This application of freedom begins to expand from upholding Dominique’s mundane life into the desolation of Roark’s career. Later in the novel when Dominique discovers Roark’s profession as an architect, she immediately recognizes the limitless talent and integrity in his work. However, she condemns his work on the Enright house in her newspaper column the week after she reunites with him at Kiki Holcombe’s party. Her purpose in doing so is once again due to her extreme pessimism—individualists will be crushed by a society that values collectivism. Along with her own misery, Dominique takes it into her own hands to carry out Roark’s destined condemnation from society. In her eyes, it is best if she strips society of his work; otherwise, she will helplessly watch the world continue to reject his extraordinary talent. Dominique openly admits this to him: “I’m going to fight you—and I’m going to destroy you . . . I’m going to pray that you can’t be



destroyed—I tell you this, too—even though I believe in nothing and have nothing to pray to.” If Roark is to be destroyed, it is to be by the hands of someone who loves him rather than by an evil world. By destroying him herself, Dominique will deny the altruists the satisfaction of destroying Roark themselves. But secretly, she wants to fail in her pursuit of Roark’s destruction. While she wants to be pessimistic and take away society’s satisfaction, she still has hope that good can still survive in an evil world—but simply won’t admit it. Throughout the novel, she resists leaning into her hope and in doing so, she frees herself of pain that is out of her control.

After the Stoddard Trial, Dominique finds it unbearable to live among the mediocrity of humanity, and pursues a contemptible life. Her idea of freedom is her only virtue upheld, leading her to marry those she hates—Peter Keating and later Gail Wynand. Because of her contempt towards these men, she does not fear loss or pain in her marriages. Later in their marriage, Wynand reveals himself to be an individualist just like Dominique and Roark. Despite his competence, Dominique deems him worse than Keating, as he is aware of what he relinquishes, a life of self-fulfillment, for a life of success and approval. Unpredictably, Wynand, a man celebrated by society, and Roark, a man condemned by society, become good friends. The juxtaposition between their lives of individuality versus conformity serves to show the possible man that Roark could’ve been, a coward that remains on the sidelines. It isn’t until near the end of the novel in which Roark gradually becomes successful on his own terms, rather than following Wynand’s path.

Roark’s success is what causes Dominique’s perspective to change in regards to freedom. This change in perspective reflects her ability to think for herself, and without this, she would never be able to be with Roark. She realizes that despite his condemnation, Roark finds joy in his work, even when facing the risk of going to jail for blowing up the Cortlandt building; his happiness does not come at the expense of his integrity. With this realization, Dominique also witnesses firsthand that her hopeful wish of Roark somehow succeeding, has been granted. Even whilst in the face of constant rejection and failure, Roark lives a self-fulfilling life. Dominique learns through this that she had been proven wrong in her suppression of hope, and finally grants herself permission to lean into said hope. Before the Cortlandt trial, Dominique leaves Wynand and finally reunites with Roark as his lover. She calls the press for them to find her and Roark together, displaying her true spirit and happiness for the world to see. Throughout the novel, Dominique has chosen to enter the arena in her own ways. Her commitment to her twisted view of freedom led her to fail many times in her pursuit of living in accordance with this view. But because she continued to fail in regards to her own expectations, she failed with dignity, and thus, she failed greatly. At the end of the novel, Dominique does not suddenly enter the arena, her change in perspective of freedom simply allows her to live in the arena without the feeling of existential dread. With a new frame of mind, she grants herself the courage to be vulnerable and embrace the possibilities of both joy and suffering in one lifetime.