

## Selling *The Fountainhead* Three Men Who Made A Difference

*The story of the sale of The Fountainhead mirrored the book itself. Success hinged on finding people with integrity who stood by their own judgment of Ayn Rand's writing. She found three men who believed in The Fountainhead—or rather, these three found her. They were: Richard Mealand, Archie Ogden, and Alan Collins.*

*We close out this, the 50th Anniversary year of The Fountainhead's publication, with a reminiscence culled from early interviews with Ayn Rand.*

It was 1934 and *We the Living* had been completed. Ayn Rand asked an admirer, a well-known screenwriter named Gouverneur Morris, if he knew a literary agent who could send the book around to the New York publishing houses. He recommended his own agent, Jean Wick.

Wick took the job and promised to let Ayn Rand know the outcome. "The terrible part of that period for me," said Miss Rand, "was waiting for those letters [from Miss Wick];" it was one rejection after another. Miss Rand later discovered that the agent disliked the book and, sight unseen, her. Needless to say Wick was unable to sell *We the Living*. Miss Rand recalled her as "a despicable woman."

It was at that time, early 1934, that Ayn Rand got the idea for *Second-Hand Lives*, her working title for *The Fountainhead*. She started making her first notes in 1935 and by 1940, Part 1 and a section of Part

2 had been completed. By this time she had a new agent, Ann Watkins, who told her after reading the first few chapters that the book was so good that she could get a big advance to complete it. But after Watkins had sent it around to publishing houses and gotten multiple rejections, the agent began to question the book's value. "What I hold against her forever," said Miss Rand, "is that instead of standing by me, her own opinion [of the book] changed."

### Richard Mealand

After *Second-Hand Lives* was rejected by 12 publishing houses Ayn Rand, short on funds, wrote *Think Twice* with the idea that it would sell quickly. But although it generated interest, it never sold. In 1941, desperate for money, she got a job as a story reader for the New York office of Paramount Pictures. Richard Mealand, head of the reading department at Paramount had already read *Second-Hand Lives*; Ann Watkins had sent it to him because Paramount was looking for novels to finance. But the "coast" wasn't interested, even though Mealand had recommended they buy it.

When Ayn Rand went to work for Paramount, Mealand asked if *Second-Hand Lives* had been sold yet. When he discovered that not only had it not been sold but that

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A final sampling of excerpts from Ayn Rand's unpublished correspondence to admirers of *The Fountainhead*.

### June 3, 1944:

You asked me why *The Fountainhead* is a best seller. Do you want my sincere answer? Because there are more people of intelligence and good taste in the United States than I expected to find. I don't think of it as "I have lived up to the public." I think: "The public has lived up to me."

### August 5, 1944:

...Do I want to sell individualism to people? Why, certainly. And if *The Fountainhead* sells it to them—fine. But that is only a secondary consideration, a side-issue, "pure gravy" as my Ellsworth Toohey said. I'm glad if people can grasp the idea of my story. I'm glad if they like the sex. I'm glad if they buy the book at all. But none of this has anything to do with my book. All of this is a personal indulgence which I can permit myself after the book is written and published. I can then permit myself to enjoy all those secondary things, if they happen. I cannot think of them when I write the book.

Do you know something else? I cannot even think of them when I re-read the book now. I cannot read it and say to myself: "Isn't it wonderful that this was successful?" I can't. Not while I'm reading it. What there is between an author and his book is more personal—and well, yes, sacred—than the privacy of a romance between a man and a woman. Nobody else can enter. No readers, publishers, critics or box-offices.

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## Three Who Made A Difference: Mealand, Ogden, and Collins

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she no longer even had an agent, he offered to submit it to any house she wanted.

She chose Little Brown because "it was famous as a good house for intellectual or serious novels." The editor at Little Brown told her that the book was a work of "almost genius" but that it wouldn't sell. "They rejected it because it was too good. That was the worst of all the rejections," said Miss Rand.

### Archie Ogden

Mealand insisted that she choose another house. Ayn Rand, grateful to Mealand for the extent to which he was willing to work for the book, chose Bobbs-Merrill, and Mealand called Archie Ogden. In Ogden's letter introducing himself to her, he wrote, "Mealand is serving as my ear-to-the-ground department by reporting that you are at work on a novel in which he thinks we would be particularly interested."

Archie Ogden read the manuscript, recommended it to his editors, and they rejected it. Although he had been at Bobbs-Merrill only a few months, he wrote back to them

saying, "If this is not the book for you, then I am not the editor for you," and the Bobbs-Merrill editor responded: "Far be it from me to dampen such enthusiasm."

While the contract was being drawn up, Pearl Harbor was attacked. If Bobbs-Merrill had taken a week longer to buy the book, Ogden would later tell her, its length would have kept them from accepting it because of war-induced paper shortages. Although she received an advance of \$1,000, it was not quite enough to allow her to devote all her time to writing, so she continued reading for Paramount on weekends.

Ayn Rand's contract said that she was to finish the book, which was now called *The Fountainhead*, by December 1942. She worked all night December 30 to complete it. "I remember walking in a kind of drunken exhilaration on the morning of the 31st," she said, "and I delivered the script to Archie myself."

To prove that he'd received it, Archie Ogden penned this light-hearted note:

*To whom it may concern—in particular, Ayn Rand.*


*This is to certify in no uncertain terms that the final complete ms. of "The Fountainhead," written by the aforementioned Ayn Rand, was delivered into my hands in the New York office of the Bobbs-Merrill Co. 468 Fourth Avenue, at 10:38 A.M., Dec. 31st 1942—Thereby fulfilling the terms of the contract (in the nick of time).*

Signed

Archibald G. Ogden.

### Alan Collins

A few days before publication of *The Fountainhead*, the agentless Miss Rand was approached by literary agent, Alan Collins, of Curtis Brown, Ltd., asking if he could represent her. "I don't know how he heard of it," said Miss Rand. "But what I always gave him credit for, is that he approached me before the book was published. I always gave him credit for using his own judgment."

For the rest of her life, she stayed with Curtis Brown, and Alan Collins handled all of her literary output, including *Atlas Shrugged*, until his death in 1968, when his successor Perry Knowlton took over. 

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*From the time Alan Collins died in 1968 until Ayn Rand's death in 1982 Perry Knowlton was her literary agent. Here, from a recent interview with ARI, are some of his memories of her.*

When Alan died, Ayn Rand called me up and said we should meet. I said, "Well, O.K." I didn't know her at all at that point and I was not sure whether it would work out because my politics didn't really match hers.

So we had lunch and I told her that. She said, "No, that has nothing to do with it." She said, "You must have beliefs of your own, which I call philosophy." And I said, "Yes." And she said, "As long as you have them, and you live by them, that's all that counts." So, I was really quite impressed.

### Perry Knowlton Chairman and CEO of Curtis Brown Ltd.

We got along fine.


We met quite often since she lived in Manhattan. When she wanted to meet, we met. I went to her apartment for dinner occasionally. Frank [O'Connor] was always there. A very quiet person.

Some time after *Atlas Shrugged* had been published, I had just sold a book for the highest advance anybody had ever gotten at Curtis Brown—\$50,000.

Alan Collins asked me one day that if Ayn Rand were to write another novel, did I think we could

get as big a contract as that one. I said "Oh, yes! With Ayn Rand's following you could get five times that." He said, "A quarter-of-a-million dollars?"

At my suggestion, he called Victor Weybright, head of New American Library, and asked for a \$250,000 advance. Victor said, "Sure." Although she intended to write it, the book never was written and in the end the small signature advance was repaid to NAL. The book was officially listed as the John Doe novel.

The most distinctive thing about Ayn Rand was her consistency. She had her own ideas. She totally lived by them and there was never any wavering. 

**March 4, 1945:**

If you want the key sentence to *The Fountainhead*—it's in Roark's speech. "I wished to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others. It had to be said. The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrificing."

Everything that *The Fountainhead* is about is right there, in that sentence. All the rest of the book is a detailed illustration of the various aspects of this statement, a picture of how the abstract principles of egoism and altruism work out in people and in the events of concrete reality....

As to my title—well, isn't it implicit in my theme? Man is the source of every achievement, of everything high, noble and great on earth. Man, not men. Man, not society. Man, not the collective. Man's EGO is the source, the dynamo, the prime mover—*The Fountainhead*. **ARI**



**Ayn Rand and Tartallia II**

This photo accompanied a feature article on Ayn Rand in the *New York World Telegram* on June 7, 1943. It was part of the ARI banquet displays in Los Angeles and Boston.

## An Objectivist Weekend In Boston

A packed banquet hall of 190 people, lively bidding, and a surprise auction item highlighted the November 6 ARI banquet in celebration of the 50th anniversary of *The Fountainhead*. The banquet kicked off a "weekend of Objectivism" hosted by the Institute, Second Renaissance Books and the Ford Hall Forum.

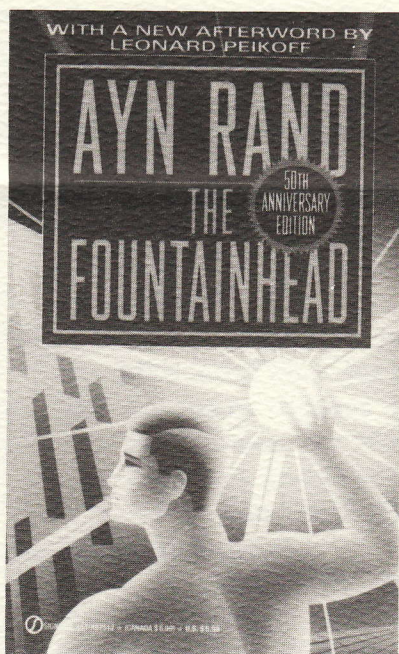
Making great use of historical anecdotes involving the auction items, auctioneer John Ridpath conducted most of the bidding for the 28 items. Income from the auction totaled \$93,700.

In his first guest appearance as an auctioneer, Harry Binswanger conducted the bidding for "The Sanction of the Victims," a hand-written manuscript, which brought the

evening's highest amount—\$25,000. Dr. Binswanger had accompanied Miss Rand on the train ride to New Orleans for this, her last speech.

A surprise item to raise money for the Ford Hall Forum was offered after all other bidding was completed. The item consisted of correspondence between Miss Rand and Ford Hall on the occasion of her first talk in 1961, plus other Ford Hall-related memorabilia.

Many of those unable to attend the Saturday night banquet attended the Second Renaissance open house on Sunday afternoon. The roomful of guests, many renewing old friendships, had to be evicted at 4:30 p.m. The weekend culminated that evening with Leonard Peikoff's talk "Modernism and Madness." **ARI**




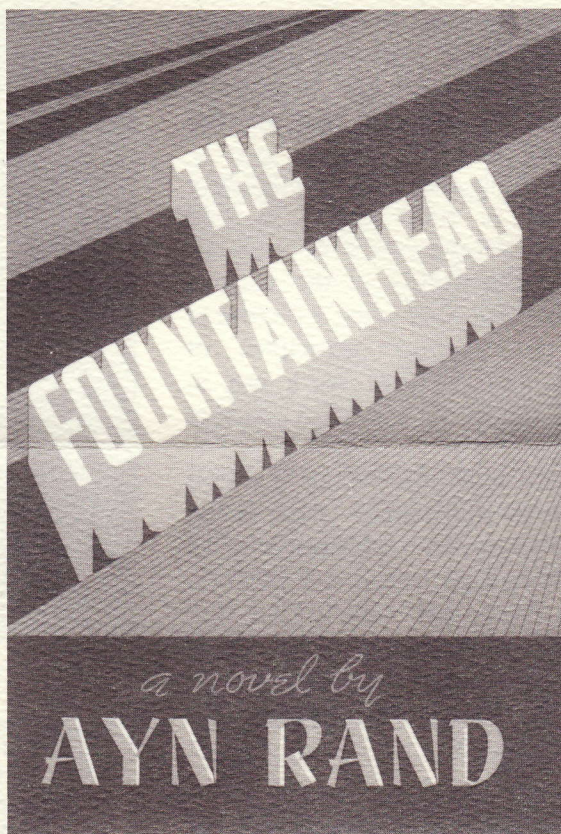
## The Fountainhead: Book of a Lifetime

The Book of the Month Club alternate selection for December is a special 50th anniversary edition of *The Fountainhead*. Although the text is drawn from the 25th anniversary edition, the dustcover is reproduced from the first-edition dustcover.

The BOMC full-page announcement of this "literary landmark," said in part:

*"The Fountainhead is that rare phenomenon in modern literature, a book that has been equally revered as a brilliant novel of ideas and condemned for its uncompromising philosophy. . . . [The novel] is at once dramatic, poetic and demanding, a courageous statement of principles and a champion of individualism.*

*The author felt her novel was 'a confirmation of the spirit of youth, proclaiming man's glory, showing how much is possible.' The Saturday Review of Literature called it 'a novel of remarkable vigor and interest.' Its place among the century's perpetual best sellers is testament to the abiding power of The Fountainhead to touch deep chords in every reader."* 



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