

FIRST PLACE



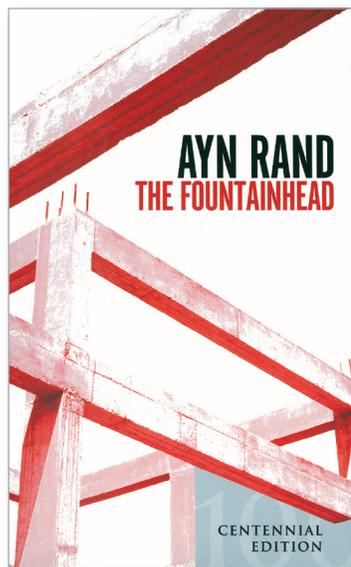
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Compare Howard Roark and Lois Cook. Are they both individualists? Why or why not?

What lies at the heart of each character of *The Fountainhead* is their own central principle, idea and drive. Roark, the hero and protagonist, embodies creativity, efficiency, independence, and reason. On the other hand, Lois Cook is the avatar of a notorious logical fallacy—the Appeal to Novelty. This fallacy states that because something is novel and never-before-seen, it is automatically better than an existing predecessor; the only criterion used to measure greatness is modernism. While this fallacy may be a rebellion against the familiar, conceivably stagnating “don’t fix it if it ain’t broke” mentality, it manages to be only a complete reversal of the philosophy, providing no further reasoning as to why the novelty is actually better. This is the same way that Cook compares to Roark regarding individuality. Roark is an individualist in what he stands for and who he is, but Cook is merely a maverick, a beggar of attention for the sake of being different. While their styles might be equally unique, their process of creation, their whole means to success, and their drives could not differ more.

In their respective fields of work, Roark and Cook have distinctive, pioneering ways of artistic expression. But whereas Roark’s structures are based on efficiency and creativity, Cook’s writings, even if as unique as Roark’s buildings, follow no logic, guiding idea, or rules of reason. As a self-professed individualist, she qualifies her inane and nonsensical books as a form of intellectual revolution, solely because she breaks “traditional” conventions of literature. However, these conventions, mainly grammar and logic, are not traditions blindly followed in writing the same way Ralston Holcombe fanatically obeys the aesthetics of the Renaissance. She does not stop following outdated traditions, but the rules that make literature effectual and operative. Instead of using all the literary tools at her disposal, Cook tosses all of them out the window in the name of ingenuity. In this sense, she goes further than Ralston Holcombe; she does not copy—she destroys. On the other hand, opposing both blind plagiarism and malicious destruction, Roark’s following of mathematical and physical principles, along with his own vision, allows him to design buildings with both efficiency and beauty. Essentially, the attractiveness of his buildings is due to not their novelty, but their rationality—unlike Cook, whose writings are seemingly significant precisely because of their lack of reason.

Lois Cook falsifies senselessness as complexity but in reality her books carry no weight or meaning of their own; their whole success depends on a mere fad perpetuated by the supposed intelligentsia. Foolish Peter Keating, in reading *Clouds and Shrouds*, “was certain it was profound, because he didn’t understand it.” (233) Cook’s books flaunt their absurdity as her sole means of expression and evidence of wisdom. But in fact, all the hype about them comes from the vigorous support of an unthinking, ignorant



crowd that used the fact that they read her as medals, “[flashing the titles of her books] in conversation like the diamond in the speaker’s intellectual crown . . . as if the speaker were being very brave . . .” (241). They didn’t understand the books, but pretending they did (even if there was nothing to understand), gave them power and recognition, effectively parasitizing off Cook’s popularity. This esteem relied solely on other parasites, namely The Council of American Writers. Spearheaded by Toohey, they rocketed Cook into the intellectual arena, and her works, as if by magic, became deep, meaningful, and genius—essentially putting a monkey on the throne. Conversely, Roark encounters success as an architect not by his connections or influence, but solely by his work. His clients understand, in their own way, his affirmative statement of creativity embodied in his buildings, take a personal liking to it, and seek him out because of this understanding. They like his style not because it is novel and inscrutable, but because it is practical, original, and attractive. Decisively, when comparing Cook’s alleged individualism to Roark’s, one can see they are clearly antipodes of each other. Keating himself recognized this, feeling “as if Lois Cook were his defense against Howard Roark” (234).

But what differentiates Cook and Roark the most is the degree to which they are influenced by their peers. As previously established, it is clearly evident that as one of Toohey’s pets, Lois Cook owes a great deal of her success to his backing. Sadly, Cook relies on others not just for publicity, but also for her actual *raison d’être*. She is nothing without the traditions she opposes, and amounts to nothing new without being compared to others— she is no one when she stands alone, unframed by the background of other people. But Roark exists as an individual by himself. What he does is a response to nothing but his own drive to build and to be. In his field of work, he does not seek to battle against Ralston Holcombe, Guy Francon, Peter Keating, or any other architect mired in past designs and established tradition. Just as he does not wish to plagiarize, rebuild or copy the Parthenon, he does not wish to improve it. He does not think of it at all; it has no relation to his buildings. Roark simply creates, and by his own creativity, in the end he proudly stands for something better than any other architect: himself. His victory over them as a better architect is not only evident in the complexion of his buildings but also by his refusal to play their game. While Roark acts, Lois Cook merely reacts.

While at first glance Howard Roark and Lois Cook seem to share the trait of individualism, upon further analysis one can see that they are quite the opposite. Technically speaking, both individuals are unique when compared to their contemporaries, but their similarities end there. While they both might have original styles, the place where their creativity is derived from—their fountainhead—starkly differs. Lois Cook depends on others for her individuality. She is only someone in comparison to others, and is only successful because of her dependence on others. Roark depends on no one to be who he is. Even at times when he had no clients and he could not build, he was still a great architect. His skill stands for itself, as does his identity. Whereas Howard Roark is defined by who he is and what he can do, Lois Cook is defined by what she is not and by what she can never do: stand as one.