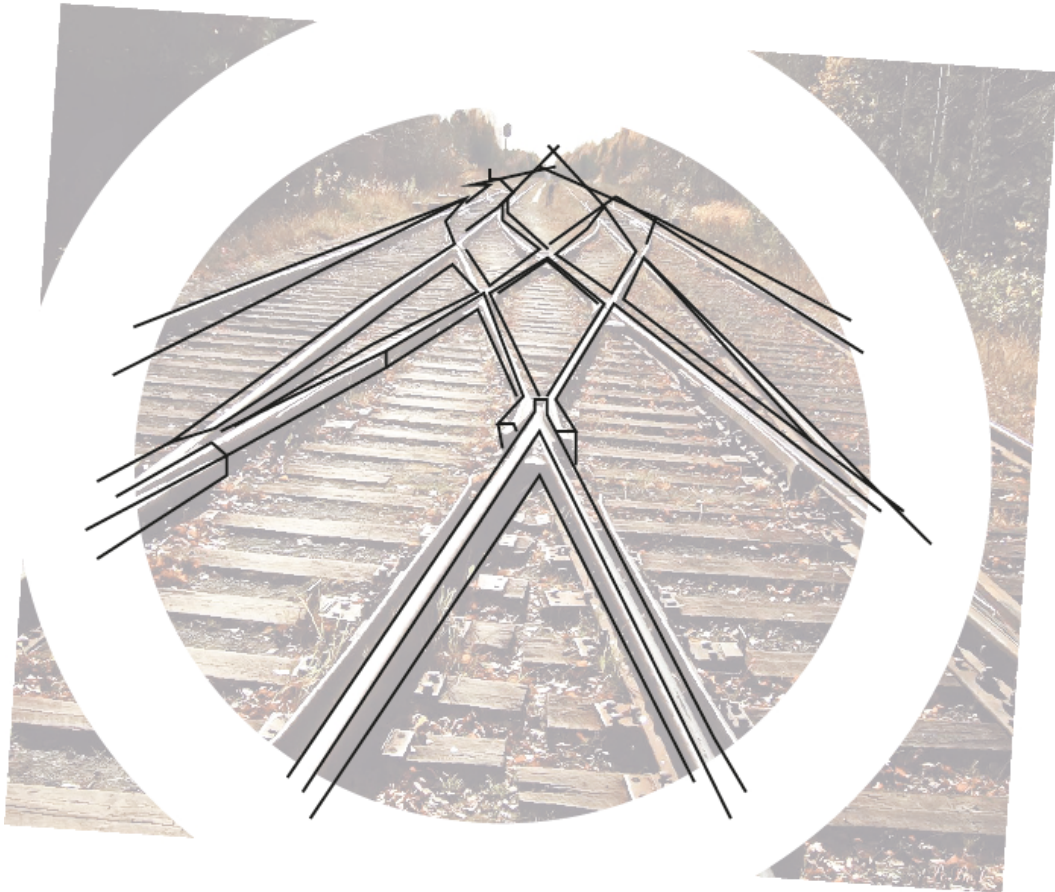


Undoing the Myth of Ayn Rand's Prescient Dystopia:
An Understanding of *Atlas Shrugged*'s Hegemonic Powers



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Introduction

“Everywhere we hear it said, all day long - and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength - that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neoliberal view, that it has succeeded in presenting itself as self-evident, that there is no alternative” (Bourdieu 29).

Although Pierre Bourdieu spoke the previous words in 1996, the dominant discourse Bourdieu refers to has maintained its authoritative position in the twenty-first century. David Graeber, in 2013, still writes that “in most of the world, the last thirty years has come to be known as the age of neoliberalism”, which “declared that economic imperatives are to take priority over all others” (5) and preached the virtues of an unrestrained free market. A crucial aspect of Bourdieu’s previously cited quote, which Graeber does not consider, is that it points out the significance of discourse and the force of repeating a certain narrative, whereby that story becomes “a real belief” (Bourdieu 29), a truth for many.

The importance of the performativity of language is often referred to in the debate on neoliberal hegemony. Besides Bourdieu, more recent thinkers, such as Nicole Aschoff and Naomi Klein believe that the stories we are being told heavily contribute to the perpetuation of our current economic and political world. Aschoff, in her work *The New Prophets of Capitalism*, shows how the story that has been told by major proponents of capitalism are “all-encompassing, [defining] a people, [...] a moment in history” (8). Klein, in *This Changes Everything*, demonstrates how this dominant discourse is devastating for the environment. According to Klein, the initiating factor of the Anthropocene lies within the beliefs as propagated by the story of capitalism: the belief in a rational man who exists to produce and gain profit; the belief of man as *homo economicus*, who only acts out of self-interest for financial gain. Thus, the story of neoliberalism, or capitalism in a broader sense, defines our reality and can be destructive for our surroundings and wellbeing, even without considering its more concrete political implications leading up to a declining welfare state and social

security. In order to fight the omnipotence of the neoliberal narrative, “this *doxa*” (31), by revealing how it is a constructed truth, a story, Bourdieu calls upon researchers to “[analyse] it and [try] to understand the mechanism through which it is produced and imposed” (31).

Hans Achterhuis in his work *Utopia According to the Free Market (De Utopie van de Vrije Markt)*, by showing how capitalism, or the broader idea of the free market that is key in neoliberal convictions, has strong Utopian underpinnings partially responds to Bourdieu’s demand, since he demonstrates, or reminds us, that neoliberal ideas are constructed, are not self-evident truths. As a point of departure for his reflection on the artificiality and forceful establishment of the current politico-economic hegemony, he uses Ayn Rand’s *magnum opus Atlas Shrugged*, which greatly contributed in shaping economic policies in the United States, and ultimately in strengthening neoliberal ideology. Choosing a novel that overtly preaches the virtues of laissez-faire capitalism, and was deemed by *Time* magazine to be the most influential book of the 20th century, after the bible (Achterhuis *Vrije* 7), certainly reveals how neoliberalism came forth out of subjective beliefs, a story. Achterhuis’ reflection, however, in demonstrating the latter conclusions, lays more emphasis on showing how the actualization of Rand’s ideas is undesirable and would turn out, and to a certain extent already turned out, to be disastrous. Within Achterhuis’ approach, the strength of *Atlas Shrugged* as a literary work, thereby, gets forgotten being overshadowed by the consideration of the direct implementation of the ideological stances the novel professes. Analysing a text as a means to unveil how its discourse gets circulated, is man-made, and is successful in imposing itself, equally, necessitates considering its specific characteristics as a piece of literature. Achterhuis seems to touch upon the latter methodology; by holding that *Atlas Shrugged*’s seductive powers are a direct consequence of the novel’s “Utopic underpinnings” (“Utopische onderbouwing” 41), which he never examines thoroughly. He does not explain what makes the Utopian especially attractive. Nonetheless, to question what makes a work attractive and appealing is to question

its influence in a larger sense, which cannot be studied by only looking at the novel itself, neither by merely looking at the broader dynamics of power relations that are at play.

In order to better grasp the novel's appeal, the work should continuously be considered within the context of larger discourses, philosophical debates and institutional contexts, whereby the concrete content of the text is of crucial importance and should never be overlooked. This thesis, therefore, identifies and examines three domains or elements, which help to understand how *Atlas Shrugged* managed to become the influential work that it is.

The first domain is that of the novel's genre, and more particularly its place within the Utopian canon. In an intriguing manner, Rand combines Utopia and Dystopia. The first chapter, hence, will question how Rand's work is a continuum of the traditional Utopian novel and how at the same time it plays with the common definitions of the genre. After having determined how she re-uses and bends the boarder between the Utopian and the Dystopian as a literary genre, it will be questioned how the novel positions itself in relation to the Utopian as an idea. Indeed, the Utopian cannot be reduced to literary expressions, as political movements, or whole bodies of thought like neoliberalism as such, can be deemed Utopian in nature, or could be said to, at least, possess Utopian characteristics. In order to grasp the latter inquiry, philosophically, the question of *Atlas Shrugged's* position within the Utopian tradition and the question of the novel's attractive power that is related to that genre-specific position, Achterhuis en Jameson will be compared.

The second element studied, is the role of the intellectual in the novel, as well as the concrete role that intellectuals played in establishing a hegemonic order in accordance with the ideas as professed in *Atlas Shrugged*. In the novel as such, intellectuals are the main driving force behind the creation of a new world order. The persuasive character of the novel, thus, aims at an intellectual readership able to identify with the most powerful characters

presented. The second chapter will look into the dynamics between power relations and the course of accession to power in the novel and outside the novel. It will become clear that the position of the intellectual within the literary work itself exactly mirrors the position of the intellectual in the actual process that enabled *Atlas Shrugged's* success and influence. The latter resemblance between the fictional and the actual will all be considered within the Gramscian understanding of how hegemony function.

The last element that helps to understand the work's literary persuasive qualities is its mythologizing aspect. *Atlas Shrugged* creates a neoliberal ideology, mainly, through the use of sexuality and redefining the meaning of sex, semiologically. Redefining meaning and the naturalization of that meaning is one of the aspects Barthes considers a key feature of the mythological. In addition, Lowell Edmunds' perspective on myth will be discussed. Edmunds stresses how the manner in which myths were performed, publically, is part of their authoritative nature: an aspect that can also clearly be identified in *Atlas Shrugged*. Thus, in the third chapter, taking into account the importance of sexuality and performance, it will be discussed how Rand's *magnum opus* functions as a myth, whereby, it succeeds in being a fairly convincing narrative.

The problem of genre, the position of the intellectual, and the naturalization of an ideological discourse are three different aspects of the novel. However, these three distinct facets, taken together, enable to better grasp the question of how the novel succeeded in becoming such an influential work, politically, economically and ideologically. This thesis, therefore, does not look at the work using only a single theoretical framework, but chooses to use a more eclectic approach, which will enable to study the novel as a literary genre, as functioning as an almost religious text for a select group of intellectuals, and as a myth-making instrument. All these three elements, taken together, are what made *Atlas Shrugged*

the cornerstone of current neoliberal hegemony. Every chapter will, thus, besides their literary or textual and semiological approach, also be considered in philosophical terms.

Consequently, this thesis will function as a complement to and a continuation of Achterhuis' work as it will question *Atlas Shrugged's* seductive powers in view of its purely literary features; while at the same time responding to Boudieu's call by showing how the ideas as professed in *Atlas Shrugged* were imposed and are constructed.

Chapter 1. Genre-definitions of Utopia and Dystopia

Because Achterhuis holds that the novel's seductive powers are a direct consequence of the work's "Utopic underpinnings" ("Utopische onderbouwing" 41), this chapter will examine his claim by discussing *Atlas Shrugged* as a Utopian piece. Its place within the Utopian canon will be determined in accordance with its literary and its political views, while at the same time questioning what the Utopian means as an idea. Firstly, the novel's Utopian and Dystopian characteristics will be identified in strictly literary terms and in terms of the canon's political tradition. Secondly, it will be questioned whether Rand's work should be considered a Utopian or a Dystopian narrative from a philosophical point of view, by opposing Achterhuis' understanding of the Utopian to Jameson's.

1.1. Utopia as a literary genre

The typical Utopian narrative structure, which largely obeys the tradition that "More established", is described by Fátima Vieira as followed:

[I]t normally pictures the journey (by sea, land or air) of a man or woman to an unknown place (an island, a country or a continent); once there, the utopian traveller is usually offered a guided tour of the society, and given an

explanation of its social, political, economic and religious organization; this journey typically implies the return of the utopian traveller to his or her own country, in order to be able to take back the message that there are alternative and better ways of organizing society.

In addition, Utopian accounts are stereotypically given from a detached point of view; that of the visitor, the passer-by. When looking at these structural and literary features, it becomes quite easy to place *Atlas Shrugged* within the Utopian tradition.

The manner in which Dagny attains *Atlantis* perfectly corresponds to the Utopian narrative structure that Vieira describes. When Dagny follows Quentin Daniels by plane, the engineer who is her only hope to solve Taggart Transcontinental's need for engines, she crashes in the valley of Galts's Utopia. After the accident, the first thing she sees "when she open[s] her eyes [is] a man's face" (701): Galt's. Galt was the man who took Daniels to his Gulch. The habitual tour given to the unexpected visitor, the protagonist, found in traditional Utopian narratives, is also given to Dagny; whereby, she learns the virtues of the valley:

[Galt] sat looking at [Dagny] for a moment, studying her face, as if deliberately letting her see the amusement in his. "Miss Taggart," he said, "we have no laws in this valley, no rules, no formal organization of any kind. We come here because we want to rest. But we have certain customs, which we all observe, because they pertain to the things we need to rest from. So I'll warn you now that there is one word which is forbidden in this valley: the word 'give'." (714)

Like in other Utopias, Dagny goes back to the larger world where people are still unaware of the existence of a secluded world where life is fundamentally different. She, however, does not return home to tell her story, like Hythloday's endeavour is in More's *Utopia*. The message is brought to the U.S., much later in the novel, via Galt's own radio speech.

Although it slightly differs, the voyage plot of *Atlas Shrugged* largely corresponds to the elements specific to the Utopian novel.

Rand, thus, clearly uses characteristics of the Utopian novel. She, however, is the first to readapt the genre to serve as a plea for capitalistic ideals. Indeed, besides having specific literary qualities, Utopias and the Utopian canon are strongly associated with socialist thought. *Atlas Shrugged*, praising the virtues of money, work and industry, on the other hand, presents the antithesis of the traditional political ideology of the genre. Most Utopias, on the contrary to Rand's, depict a world that has been cured from the burden of superfluous working hours, selfishness, and greed as a way to provide for the basic needs of everyone. In most cases, money is abandoned. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example, it is only used in order to maintain diplomatic order. The Utopians, because "[t]hey hold their own people dear," "hire mercenary soldiers from" (632) other peoples. The latter is one of the single usages the island's inhabitants make of money. Even if More is often considered to be the father of Utopia, since he coined the term in 1516, "and a [whole] genre of literature developed from his book, the idea of utopia is much older" (Sargent *Utopianism* 24). The Utopian narratives that precede More's canonical work mostly put an emphasis on "pleasure, and bodily pleasure in particular" (24). The medieval myth of Cockaigne, describes a land where there is no disease, no death, where food is abundant and work unknown. "There are rivers broad and fine / Of oil, milk, honey and of wine" (ll. 45-46).

In addition, when looking at the concrete realizations of Utopian literature and desires in the form of "communal ventures" (Pohl 75), Rand clearly breaks with the tradition. Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Saint Simon, for example, tried to establish and established communities as a reaction against the industrial revolution. They tried to offer an alternative way of living to the one that developed out of the new mechanized modes of production and the rise of capitalism. Another example would be Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*: a

Utopian work of fiction, which got worldwide support from clubs dedicated to spreading and concretizing the “ideas [the novel] contained” (Sadler 535). *Looking Backward*, perfectly, corresponds to the canon in terms of its political claims. In Bellamy’s work, in the Utopian society that is being portrayed, “[a]ll business—production and distribution as well—is nationalized” (531). “There is no money. The products of the industrial army are distributed by the nation directly to the consumer. Each person receives a yearly credit card, honored by the great national stores, which is generously ample for all needs and many luxuries” (532-33).

Rand, hence, dislocates the Utopian discourse. She turns it around, both structurally and ideologically, as a consequence of which it gets redefined. The Utopian is no longer the socialist dream, but the libertarian vision that discards the Dystopian protagonist, or the insignificant and powerless individual, as will be seen in the next section, which further explains how socialist Utopia is presented in Dystopian terms.

1.2. Dystopia as a literary genre

As has been shown above, *Atlas Shrugged* presents many Utopian elements. However, the novel also counts significant characteristics that typify the Dystopian genre. The Dystopian plotline, generally, depicts its protagonist trapped in an overwhelmingly powerful political regime, which the main character cannot escape. It is often love, like in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* or in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, that brings a spark of hope in the mind of the protagonist. Subsequently, he or she tries to defy the system, but ultimately fails.

Dystopias are mainly conveyed via the perspective of an inhabitant of that society, and thereby give a more personal look into its ills. Indeed, when looking into the purely literary characteristics, it becomes quite easy to identify dystopian elements in *Atlas Shrugged*.

Besides the numerous descriptions of apocalyptic decay, of “civil war” (1108) in

California, of “office building[s] [being reduced to their] naked steel skeleton[s]” (176), Dystopian features can be distilled from the novel in strict literary terms. Most of the narrative follows the protagonist’s, Dagny Taggart’s, perspective. Thus, just like in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, *Atlas Shrugged*’s readers get a far more subjective and direct account of living in the world that they are being presented than they would when reading a classical Utopia.

When looking at its plotline, *Atlas Shrugged* is quite similar to the traditional Dystopian genre, while at the same time deviating from it. In Rand’s novel, state interventionism is seen as an oppressive power, which paralyses investment and personal desires to achieve in the domain of commerce and manufacture. Hank Rearden: the inventor of the lightest and most resistant type of steel, dreams of establishing a business empire. One evening, when he observes his factory grounds and sees the neon sign that says “REARDEN METAL”; he thinks of expansion:

He thought that in the darkness of this night other signs were lighted over the country: Rearden Ore—Rearden Coal—Rearden Limestone. He thought of the days behind him. He wished it were possible to light a neon sign above them, saying: Rearden Life. (32)

Several executives that are passed, however, make it impossible for Rearden to continue his enterprise of which the *Equalization of Opportunity Bill* is an example. Because “opportunities to make a living” (130) are vanishing, the official explanation for the new policy is that it serves to increase the chance for people to engage in business again by making it impossible for someone to “hoard several business enterprises” (Younkins 134) simultaneously. As a consequence of which “Rearden is stripped of his ore mines”. Losing his mines, Rearden cannot assure his production of metal. Whether the official intentions to pass the *Equalization of Opportunity Bill* are sincere or not, as will be discussed later on, or

whether central planning is counter-efficient or not, is not decisive for the novel's Dystopic elements, which lie above all in the restriction of individual freedoms preventing people from pursuing their goals. Dagny, Rearden, Francisco D'Anconia, i.e. all the characters who manage to built up successful companies, are continuously restrained by the government in continuing their entrepreneurial ambitions. Just like Winston Smith cannot escape the tyranny of Big Brother, Rearden cannot circumvent governmental decisions¹. The larger world, the world outside Atlantis, therefore, is greatly associated with the Dystopian.

Furthermore, within *Atlas Shrugged's* Dystopic narrative of helpless individuals' facing an oppressive state, Rand intentionally employs intertextuality; whereby, the novel's Dystopian elements get emphasized while simultaneously being undermined. A clear reference to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is made, when the rulers of the country are torturing John Galt at the State Science Institute. Dr. Floyd Ferris, the head of the institute, does not wish for his detainee simply to obey, but wants him "to believe! To accept! To want to accept!" (1142), which is exactly what O'Brien achieves by torturing Smith. O'Brien makes Smith truly love Big Brother. Similarly, Ferris wants Galt to voluntarily work for the government and have faith in its purpose.

However, as Achterhuis notices: "on the contrary to Orwell's protagonist, Rand's does not succumb" ("in tegenstelling tot Orwells hoofdpersoon bezwijkt die van Rand niet" *Vrije* 79). Galt does not give in to the so-called *looters*, and in the end it is suggested that he and his followers have free play to take over the control of the U.S. and establish their Utopia. On the contrary to most Dystopias, the resistance wins the battle against the larger oppressive power or powers. The hopelessness of the protagonists that is sensed throughout the story, hence, is overcome at the most crucial moment of despair in the traditional Dystopian novel; whereby,

¹ It has to be admitted that Rearden, via clever manoeuvres, tries to circumvent the law. However, in the end it is made impossible for any big enterprise to continue to produce and provide services.

the smaller world of Utopia, or Atlantis, gains the upper hand over the larger Dystopic society.

Thus, from a literary perspective, *Atlas Shrugged* represents a hybrid form within the genre, the novel being defined by its suggestive nature: a prescient quality, which prophesizes the victory of a smaller Utopian world over an omnipresent and global Dystopic threat. When considering *Atlas Shrugged*, therefore, its complex manner in adapting the Utopian genre should be taken into account, and should not be reduced to a simple statement that the work fits either in one category or the other.

1.3. The Utopian and Dystopian: a philosophical perspective

The definitions of Utopia and Dystopia based upon literary conceptions of the genre have been given above. However, Rand explicitly positions *Atlas Shrugged* within a philosophical debate. In fact, rather than trying to write a strictly literary Utopia or Dystopia, Rand also tried to introduce a new form of Utopian thinking. A Utopian thinking that would be more in accordance with and serve her ideological and political convictions.

Within the recent philosophical tradition concerned with thinking about the Utopian, two broad currents are to be distinguished: the liberal current, which Achterhuis represents and the Marxist current, which Jameson represents. Both schools of thought question Utopian thinking as such, not necessarily Utopia as a literary genre. They try to define what makes something Utopian, what its essence is. Achterhuis, above all, sees an inherent danger to be the defining characteristic of the Utopian, whereas Jameson lays the emphasis on Utopia's essence as characterized by the capacity of peoples to think alternative futures and worlds, which according to him is being reduced, if not annihilated entirely, by capitalism. The question that here will be looked at is how *Atlas Shrugged* could be placed within these two

currents of thought, and whether the two different philosophical traditions take into account the hybrid genre that the novel represents.

Starting with Achterhuis: his aim is to answer the question: “is capitalism [like socialism] also profoundly motivated by a Utopian source of inspiration?” (“wordt het kapitalisme niet evenveel gedragen door een diepe utopische inspiratie?” *Vrije 7*). Like Slavoj Žižek, Achterhuis agrees that the people, or texts, that could function as an explanation of the Utopian underpinnings of capitalism are not easy to identify, unlike it is the case with socialism. Citing Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*, for example, immediately demonstrates how Utopian socialist thought is largely and easily recognisable. On the other hand, the Utopian authors and thinkers of the liberal tradition, which today mainly lives forth in neoliberalism, are less self-evident to pinpoint.

Achterhuis, therefore, chooses as his subject of study *Atlas Shrugged*: a self-proclaimed capitalistic Utopia. By the means of this explicit right-wing expression of Utopian thought, he can efficiently show that capitalism also is largely inspired and driven by Utopianism. The core focus of his study, thus, is the spirit of capitalism, whereby links between the general economic organization of life and production and the literary work are drawn.

Like other philosophers, such as Emil Cioran (85-6), Herbert Marcuse (62) and Ernst Bloch, Achterhuis, equally, judges one of the key functions of Utopian thinking to be the historical advancement² of society that can only be brought about by changes within society. The following quote, by Oscar Wilde, sums up the general argument of the historical importance of Utopianism:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And

² The latter idea, of the advancement of history, or the possibility of history, is of course derived from Hegel’s idea of dialectics that he developed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.

Progress is the realization of Utopias. (qtd. in Sargent *Three Faces* 27)

Within this idea that Utopianism is crucial to historical development, Achterhuis considers Utopia to be needed for mankind to keep looking forward, and to shape the future, which he thinks can only be attainable if the *principle of hope* is kept alive. The latter principle is a concept by Bloch, encompassing his idea that “the principal energy of utopia” (Vieira 7) is hope.

Although Achterhuis explicitly takes into consideration a Marxist intellectual, Bloch, and unwittingly acknowledges the Utopian to dispose of the same qualities as Marcuse does, Achterhuis’ ideas, above all, belong to the liberal tradition of thinking about Utopianism, which is marked by fear. Like Karl Popper in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Achterhuis sees the realization of any Utopian desire, which can be seen as one of “the function of utopia” (Vieira 6), as a threat. In fact, he believes that all Utopian aspirations, when realized, end in Dystopia.

Therefore, in his view, literary Dystopias are not distinct from Utopias, but are merely glimpses we get into what seems to be an “outwardly harmonious society” (“Violent” 160): a Utopia. In this manner, “George Orwell’s *1984*,” according to Achterhuis, is not a Dystopia; it is just a Utopia viewed from “the inside”. A similar usage of point of view, as found in Orwell’s work, would transform More’s *Utopia* into a Dystopia, claims Achterhuis. As Floris van den Berg points out, Achterhuis ultimately wants to warn us against the dangers of implementing Utopian ideas. His negative view of concretizing Utopia is, chiefly, developed in his work *Utopia’s Heritage* (“De Erfenis van de Utopie”), in which he warns against the dangers of socialist Utopias, and even small communes (Poldervaart 18; Van Raak 110).

Even though, throughout his work, he looks at a variety of specific Utopis expressions, his undertaking of imagining Utopian narratives and desires once realized is,

above all, a way to show that materializing Utopia will always result in Dystopic outcomes, whether it supports left-wing or libertarian ideas. In other words: the whole genre-distinction in Achterhuis's understanding becomes irrelevant; a consequence of his theory that he himself does not point out, as he consistently uses the two terms as separate and distinct. Because all Utopian aspirations are in fact a seed waiting to germinate into a Dystopian landscape, he also agrees with Rand's warnings against communist and socialist aspirations. Due to his fear of Utopianism, consequently, he also is of the conviction that Rand's alternative neoliberal utopia will turn out, and in many regards already did, into a Dystopia. All Utopian thought, thus, loses its rhetorical and philosophical attraction. However, it was exactly the Utopian aspect of the novel that Achterhuis claimed to be the novel's forte and persuasive factor. Taking into account that Achterhuis undermines his own explanation of why *Atlas Shrugged* possesses attractive qualities, his particular theory does not seem to be very viable.

In addition, Achterhuis' method to determine whether a work can be called Utopia or not, which is different from holding that all Utopian aspirations when realized turn out into Dystopias, is utterly subjective. In both the *Free Market* (Berg 40), and in *Heritage* ("De Erfenis"; Berg 11) he holds that in order to determine whether a work can be called Utopian or not, readers need to ask themselves whether they would like to live in the imaginary world they are being presented. In the secondly mentioned work, Achterhuis examines the work *Ecotopia* and considers that it is not agreeable to be a citizen of Ernest Callenbach's Utopic world. Berg, very accurately, manages to identify the arbitrariness of Achterhuis' criterion of categorization. Berg's first counterargument points out that it is very unlikely for someone, when reading a thorough analysis of today's reality, to find the Western world of the twenty-first century very attractive (12). Berg, however, does not mention that in Achterhuis's thought the contemporary world, equally, presents some Dystopic elements; an argument that he did not only develop in the *Free Market*, in which case Berg could not have been aware of

Achterhuis' views, but which he also brings to light in his essay "Violent Utopias."

Berg's second counterargument seems, therefore, to be more valuable. He remarks that when he asks himself the question Achterhuis estimates fundamental, he concludes that, on the contrary to Achterhuis, he would like to live in *Ecotopia*, or at least give it a chance (12). Certainly, when taking into mind *Atlas Shrugged*, the secluded community of hardworking people is paradisiacal from a libertarian³ or neoliberal point of view. Thus, Berg's comment sheds light upon how utterly subjective Achterhuis' methods of classification are. The distinction between the Utopian and the Dystopian, hereby, become entirely based upon personal preferences and could be reduced to the simple phrase "one man's utopia is another man's dystopia" (Rothstein 4). Achterhuis' view on the Utopian could, thus, be summarized as followed: a Utopia is a Utopia when the reader would like to live in that specific world that is presented to him or her, and at the same time a Utopia will always turnout into a Dystopia when actualized. Consequently, the question of the work's attractive forces cannot be resolved using Achterhuis' theory, as it is subjective and annihilates its own standpoints by contradictory conclusions.

Jameson, on the other hand, has a view that sheds a better light upon the implications of the novel's Utopian characteristics. According to Jameson, it is not Utopian thought that threatens humanity, but an impossibility or eradication of utopian thinking. Jameson proposes to seek the decisive elements of the Utopian in its interplay between the imaginary and the real, or the political. According to Jameson "Utopia is to be defined as what we can not imagine within this society" (9:28- 29), which, at the same time, is its political aim. The Utopian needs to be "critical and [...] subversive," (*Archaeologies* XV) by offering an alternative to the status quo. However, claims Jameson, Utopias are not there in "helping us to imagine a better future, [but] our imprisonment in a non-utopian present without historicity or

³ In this case, the right-wing variety is, of course, meant.

futurity —so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined” (“The Politics of Utopia” 46). In order to achieve the latter, the Utopian identifies a “problem to be solved” that is present, and invents “a series of solutions” (*Archaeologies* 11) in the form of “an imaginary enclave within real social space” (*Archaeologies* 15). What makes something Utopian, therefore, as can be inferred from Jameson’s view, is its ability to imagine a world that is radically different from social reality within a space that is set apart from the wider world that is being put into question.

Jameson, being a Marxist theorist, of course, sees capitalism as the status quo that needs to be overcome. The Utopian, thus, within his view, should challenge the current politico-economic organization of life. However, Jameson is very pessimistic about the possibility for Utopian discourses to exist during times of advanced capitalism, because “it has become too complicated and too omnipresent to begin to imagine replacing it” (Jameson and Aronowitz 00:10:30-42). If Utopia stands for the possibility to envisage the unimaginable, the impossibility to think beyond a certain social order must be the Dystopic.

In addition, as has been pointed out above, Utopias offer solutions. Consequently, the Dystopian is the inconceivability of an absence of problems; it is the hopelessness that a world without radical imagination brings about. The ultimate cry of the Dystopic feeling being: I love Big Brother. Living in Oceania, there is no other alternative possible than to love the oppressor. The Dystopian, thus, marks the absence not only of alternatives, but also the impossibility to conceive them.

From this Marxist perspective, it can be inferred how Rand’s novel can be seen as a Dystopian work. On the one hand, Rand’s ideology helps to create a world, or seeks to create a world in which Utopian thought is impossible, as its characters aspire to export the Utopian model to the scale of the U.S., and perhaps even beyond. Achterhuis points out that it is overtly implied towards the end of the novel that the Utopia of Atlantis is going to thrive over

the Dystopic life caused by state interventionism. “The denouement insinuates that John Galt will obtain the necessary sovereignty, in order to re-built the whole nation in the image of Atlantis” (“De suggestie waarmee het boek eindigt, is dat John Galt alle macht krijgt om zijn Atlantis uit te bouwen naar nationale proporties” *Vrije* 193). The Dystopian element of the narrative, therefore, does not reside within the inherent ideas that Galt professes, but stems from the avid persistence that he shows to prove his right to the world by going as far as to let it collapse and rot away. No compromises are possible to be reached with Galt. He refuses the offer to get “total power over the sphere of economics,” (1099) since the deal’s condition is that he leaves the “sphere of politics” in the hands of his opponents. When Galt is in power, it is hereby implied, plans will go according to his singular vision of the correct and most efficient organization of life. The omnipresence of capitalism that Jameson detects in our current era corresponds to what Galt is trying to achieve in the novel: a world in which it becomes impossible to think differences, to think of an alternative to his law. The Dystopian element of the novel, thus, stems from the main character’s aim to govern the whole of the society as they see most adequate, without opposition or discussion. Within the society as modelled on Atlantis the population’s political freedom will be reduced to the cry: I love John Galt⁴. On the contrary to the traditional Utopian novel there is no return to the society the adventurer left behind. The Utopia the traveller, or Dagny, visited in *Atlas Shrugged* supplants the old world. *Atlas Shrugged*, and even the microcosm of Atlantis, therefore, cannot be considered as Dystopian as such, but encompasses an announcement of a future Dystopia.

On the other hand, the novel also insists on the possibility of a Utopian escape. By framing socialism as a Dystopian force, Rand makes the capitalist mode of thinking come

⁴ To a certain extent the American people as depicted throughout the novel already are reduced to this single expression, as the *Atlas Shrugged* largely conveys the idea that people are only able, if they want to live as human beings and prosper, they have to follow the leadership of Galt.

across as an alternative: a vision of true visionaries striving towards a radically new world order. The novel, in that sense, gives the reader a Utopian *panacea*, making the reader believe Utopia is possible. It is exactly within this dynamics of presenting a Utopian alternative that a certain perversity lies: the work presents an ideal future that the protagonists have in mind, which is claimed to be a Utopia, whereas that same seemingly Utopian vision makes Utopian thought impossible. In the latter sense, the problem of *Atlas Shrugged* is not only that it presents something as a Utopia, whereas it is a prescient Dystopia. The problem is, above all, that it fools the reader by presenting something as Utopia, whereas, in turn, that very Utopia effaces or annuls the possibility for the continuation of Utopian thought.

It can, therefore, be said that the persuasive power of *Atlas Shrugged* partly resides in its misleading promise of a Utopian escape. It presents hope, a promise, and yet it possesses a form of perversity that easily goes unnoticed, is hidden. However, as has been seen throughout this chapter, the novel's place within the Utopian canon is extremely complex, both in literary and philosophical terms. The question regarding what renders Rand's *magnum opus* such an appealing and popular work, hence, needs to be further explored. As has been suggested earlier on, the answer is to be found, among other aspects, in its role within the hegemonic process that helped to established neoliberal discourse.

Chapter 2. A Narrative Establishing and about Establishing Neoliberal Hegemony

Atlas Shrugged cannot be studied as a work existing in a void; hovering alone in space without any connections to the political and the ideological. The success of Rand's *magnum opus* cannot be determined by merely looking between the covers, as the work was part, and remains to be part, of a network of concrete power relations. This chapter, therefore, will examine how *Atlas Shrugged* managed to become a very influential work in ideological and political terms, which gives an additional factor in understanding the work's attractive powers as a whole. The framework that will be

used in order to understand how power relations function, how they establish themselves and maintain themselves, is Gramsci's theory of hegemony.

Gramsci's insights on power and ideology are especially adequate to examine *Atlas Shrugged* as it is a novel that accords great importance to intellectuals and their role in society. In fact, it will be shown that the manner in which Rand attained an influential status, whereby *Atlas Shrugged* was a central factor, exactly mirrors Gramsci's theory of the hegemonic process. Thus, this chapter will firstly present Gramsci's theory of hegemony in detail. Secondly it will be seen how, in concrete terms and within the Gramscian framework that this chapter maintains, Rand's novel managed to put itself into the service of concrete politics and ideology formation. Finally, it will be shown how the novel itself is a narrative about a hegemonic shift: a hegemonic shift that in reality was actualized by the concrete hegemonic process that Rand as a person was involved in.

2.1 Hegemony and the Role of the Intellectual

Having established how Rand's novel can be seen as a Dystopia due to its universalizing features and misleading Utopian promise, its tremendous success and concrete political influence raise questions and appear incongruous. Achterhuis, also, is puzzled at seeing how the ideology of the free market that is professed in *Atlas Shrugged*, even after the financial crisis of 2008, still benefits from major support (*Vrije* 41). Although he is surprised by the persistence of Rand's ideas, Achterhuis is not concerned with finding an explanation. The biography he traces of Rand's life, however, might offer a structural answer to her impressive ascendancy, which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. Her ambitions to make her philosophy have an impact upon the world reveal the hegemonic process, along

Gramscian lines, that underlie the success of her aspirations, which she achieved with the help of renowned economists possessing a position of authority in American politics.

Hegemony is the process through which a group in society acquires and maintains a “position of leadership in the political and social arena” (Hoare and Smith 4). The hegemonic process, therefore, is dynamic, as it can allow for subordinate or “nonhegemonic” groups to overthrow the superior position of another class. This position needs to be assured by ““spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci 12). Although hegemony is “a process [of shifting power relations] without an end,” (Jones 48) ““the function exercised by the leading group [always lies] in the decisive nucleus of economic activity”” (47). Hegemony, thus, theorizes relations of power, whereby ideology plays a more crucial role than within Marx’s thought. Indeed, Antonio Gramsci’s writings are part of the Marxist tradition; nonetheless, he distinguishes himself from Marx’s conceptualization of power relations. Marx views domination, above all, as a two-fold hierarchy of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The ownership or the non-ownership of the means of production, in his view, determines the domination of one class over another: of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat (Marx and Engels 219). Whereas Marx, thus, views ownership of the means of production to be crucial for maintaining one group’s authoritative position, Gramsci considers ideology⁵ to play a more essential role in maintaining hierarchical structures.

In Gramsci’s view the struggle for domination, thus, is, above all, ideological, whereby intellectuals are of great importance. Gramsci states: “[all] men are intellectuals, [...] but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (9). This statement suggests that

⁵ In *The German Ideology*, Marx already conceptualizes the question of ideology, which is seen as a consequence of the material conditions of production. The ideological worldview of the dominant class does not play a role within the process of becoming a dominant group, but is merely imposed upon the proletariat by the dominant class as a means to maintain their position.

Gramsci sees the status of a person to be defined by his or her societal role, rather than by the essential qualifications a certain function requests the subject to possess, since all forms of work demand intellectual effort to a certain degree. The same counts for the distinction he makes between *organic* and *traditional* intellectuals. “[T]radition intellectuals, such as teachers, priests, and administrators [...] perform the same functions from generation to generation” (Abu-El-Haj and Chilcote 5). Although Gramsci indicates “scholars, [...] scientists, theorists,” (Gramsci 7) “philosopher[s], [and] artist[s]” (9) to be *traditional* intellectuals, a teacher could also be an *organic* intellectual, as the distinction is not dependent upon the skills or knowledge that a certain activity requires, but upon its position within the hegemonic process itself. On the contrary to *tradition* intellectuals, the *organic* intellectual is “directly related to the economic structure of their society” (Ramos), and emerges from within a change of power relations, which is dependent upon the ownership of the means of production. Gramsci describes the previous process as followed:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political field. The capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organiser of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc. (Gramsci 5)

The important aspect to note in the previously cited passages is the example of the capitalist entrepreneur who is part of and gives rise to a new set of intellectuals. The capitalist entrepreneur, of course, represents the new productive order from which the *organic intellectual* springs. In turn these intellectuals have “their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong” (Hoare and Smith 1). For a

hegemonic process to be successful both, groups of intellectuals need to be incorporated by the new social and productive order:

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals. (10)

The order in which a hegemonic shift appropriates *traditional* intellectuals and gives rise to *organic* intellectuals; thus, is not strict but fluid. Even though the hegemonic process is largely a question of establishing a new belief system, “coercive power” (12) is; also, made use of to “legally” [enforce] discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively”.

2.2. *A circle of neoliberal thinkers and the hegemonic process*

Considering that the hegemonic struggle is a struggle for fostering general consent to a certain belief system, Rand’s conquest for power needs to be defined ideologically. It is, however, very problematic to claim that *Atlas Shrugged* presents the neoliberal ideal per se, since her ideology can be identified to borrow from and correspond to a broad spectrum of different schools of thought ranging from classical liberalism to individualist anarchism. In addition, the endeavour to categorize Rand’s political alliances becomes extremely challenging when taking into account that her followers, who implemented her ideas to a certain extent, did not always fully agree with her regarding certain issues, mainly, those concerning the degree of state interventionism⁶. Here, it will merely be shown how Rand’s ideas correspond to those

⁶ Greenspan in particular is a good example of Rand’s disciples who does not fully adhere to her philosophy. On the contrary to Rand, Greenspan does not consider it immoral of the state to tax private property (Achterhuis *Vrije* 50). Achterhuis also acknowledges the difficulty of

upheld by neoliberalism without claiming that they belong to one political conviction or the other; since the aim of this thesis is to investigate how *Atlas Shrugged*, as a work of literature, managed to shape politics and common beliefs regarding the organization of life that typify the neoliberal era. Indeed, holding that certain characteristics of her thought correspond to ideas that are also found in neoliberalism is distinct from trying to categorize her ideals in terms of a specific political ideology.

Atlas Shrugged advocates a strong belief in self-regulating markets, rugged individualism, private property, trickle-down theory, and the primacy of economics in all political decision-making, which is also a key feature of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as David Harvey states it “values market exchange as ‘an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action’ (3). It “is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating Individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). All of the latter specificities are also essential in Rand’s philosophy.

Until the 1970s Keynesianism was the dominant economic doctrine. This, however, changed by the late 1970s and the early 1980s. A radical hegemonic shift towards neoliberalism became apparent with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher’s political success: a shift to which Rand wittingly contributed with her novel. The conquest for the dominant position in society, as Gramsci perceives it, necessitates conscious action on behalf of the prospect dominant group.

classifying Rand’s political ideals, and his way out of thoroughly discussing the work in terms of its political ideology, which perhaps is, above all, a task for political scientists, is to recognize one aspect that is common to all the schools of thought Rand could be held to support. This shared aspect is the idea of the free market. Yet, without really offering an explanation, he still deems her to be part of the neoliberal camp, while at the same time discarding the theories he refers to which consider *Atlas Shrugged* to be a plea for anarcho-capitalism (*Vrij* 88-9).

A crucial figure in bringing about the latter hegemonic shift is Friedrich Hayek. He is considered by Cathérine Audard to have greatly contributed to the “neoliberal revolution” (“neoliberale revolutie” qtd. in Achterhuis *Vrije* 88). He organised annual conferences in Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland, in order to develop a “liberal Utopia” (“liberale utopie” Caré qtd. in Achterhuis *Vrije* 34). I.e., Hayek called upon fellow liberal-minded intellectuals to develop a manifesto for their shared ideology, as a means to compete with socialism: a political ideology that already possessed an important body of Utopian and imaginative texts. “Foucault, just like Caré, points out how Hayek designed neoliberalism as a equivalent to communist Utopias” (“Foucault wijst er netals Caré op dat Hayek het neoliberalisme ontwierp als een tegen hanger van de communistische utopie” Achterhuis *Vrije* 101).

Sébastien Caré names various renowned and authoritative neoclassical economists who attended the conference in Mont Pèlerin: Milton Friedman and his Chicago boys, Ludwig von Mises and the Austrian School. The term Chicago Boys refers to a group of Chilean economists who were being schooled in free-market ideals at the University of Chicago under Friedman. The programme that the Chicago Boys benefitted from was specially conceived for them, because the U.S. government considered the strengthening of socialist ideas in their backyard as a serious threat that needed to be contained. The initial idea was to educate Chilean students as a way to spread neoliberal ideas in Latin America. The latter, however, did not turn out to be very successful. Subsequently, when Richard Nixon was elected a CIA-backed coup was carried out. In 1973, when Augusto Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende, the Chicago Boys got a key position in devising the country’s new economic agenda (Achterhuis *Vrij* 242-5).

However, it is, above all, Rand who reacted to Hayek’s request (Achterhuis *Vrije* 34). *Atlas Shrugged*, as Slavoj Žižek sees it, can be considered as a “capitalist manifesto” (“kapitalistisch manifest” qtd. in Achterhuis *Vrije* 28). Indeed, Rand herself perceived her

novel as a tool for creating consent. The aim of her *magnum opus* is “to combat [...] leftist hegemony [...] “as the Reds do ... in the form of fiction ... because it arouses the public” (Rand qtd. in Burns 92). In addition, she wrote John Galt’s excessively lengthy politico-economic and moralizing speech in close relation with Alan Greenspan, president Gerald Ford’s economic advisor, who provided her with a “weekly commentary” on the text (“wekelijks commentaar” *Achterhuis Vrije* 17). Greenspan, in turn, was part of the group of admirers she had, who “[w]ith cheerful irony, [...] called themselves “the Collective”” (Heller 294). They saw each other every weekend. These encounters included sessions during which parts *Atlas Shrugged* were being read (*Achterhuis Vrije* 84). Greenspan himself acknowledges that Rand is one of the two most important protagonists of free market capitalism, the other one being Nobel-prize winning economist Friedman. Rand, also, had close personal ties with Von Mises, who considered *Atlas Shrugged* as a coherent analysis of all the “evils of the welfare state” (“analyse van alle kwalen van de welvaartsstaat” *Achterhuis Vrije* 31-2). As the sympathies and close ties between these neoliberal thinkers suggest; they were consciously engaged in the pursuit of ideological power, during which Rand functioned as their prophet.

Besides the deliberate nature of Rand and her followers’ acts to initiate a revolution, their individual roles within this process is also indicative of the hegemonic property of the rise of neoliberalism. Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas and Sarah L. Babb briefly refer to the Chicago Boys, or those who worked to implement neoliberal policies in Chile, *organic* intellectuals (557). Although the main focus of their article is far from examining how the Chicago Boys could be considered as *organic* intellectuals in view of Gramsci’s theory, per se, Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb’s observation, nevertheless, could shed a light upon not only how the Chicago Boys can be viewed as *organic* intellectuals, but equally upon what role Rand and her influential followers played in Gramscian terms.

Indeed, the Chicago Boys can be viewed as *organic* intellectuals as they “[directed] the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong” (Hoare and Smith 1). They are clearly the “specialist[s] in political economy,” (Gramsci 5) that Gramsci names. It, however, becomes more ambivalent when wanting to categorize Friedman and the other neoliberal economists who supported Rand’s cause, such as Greenspan. On the one hand they can be considered *traditional* intellectuals, because they are clearly carrying out the conventional task of the academic. On the other hand, they can equally be seen as *organic* intellectuals, since the new economic organization of life imposed by advanced capitalism determined the paradigms of their field and even their discipline as a whole. Their functions could, thus, be said to have changed, due to the emergence of a different type of mode of production.

Rand’s case, on the contrary, is quite clear. She undeniably is the *traditional* intellectual, who is already won over by the dominant fundamental group, as her activity formally is identical to writers and philosophers of prior generations. All the previously given examples of Rand’s direct connection with influential figures in the U.S. economy⁷ and politics insinuate how the conjunction of *traditional* and *organic* intellectuals managed to implement their political ideals in accordance with Gramsci’s view on how a new hegemonic order gets established.

““Freedom” in a political context means the absence of coercion exercised by the government,” (*Answers* 2) states Rand. Even if her ideology holds freedom, or at least individual freedom, high, Rand does not object to the “deposing of Allende” in Chile by the military coup, which the U.S. government enabled. In fact, Friedman and his Chicago Boys were directly involved, before and during the dictatorship, in the country’s new economic

⁷ Certainly, the U.S. should not be the only country mentioned. Thatcher, for example, asked Friedman to pay a visit to Downing Street, in order to convince the cabinet of Rand’s ideas about economics (Achterhuis *Vrije* 233). In addition, Pinochet could be mentioned.

planning⁸. “Chile became the first country where the free market politics that Friedman professed were tested” (“Chili werd he land waar de vrijemarktpolitiek die Friedman vanuit Chicago predikte, als eerste werd uitprobeerd” Achterhuis *Vrije* 242). Achterhuis uses the examples of Pinochet, above all, to show how the Utopian vision of the free market can lead to extreme violence. Pinochet, however, can also be seen from a different perspective. It shows how during the hegemonic process coercion is made use of to “legally” [enforce] discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively” (Gramsci 12) Violence did not only occur during the 1973 coup, in order to remove the democratically elected socialist president Allende from the backyard of the U.S., but was also used against civilians. Opposition to the regime was brutally repressed: “3200 citizens were killed; 80.000 were imprisoned” (“3200 vermoorde en vermiste burgers” Achterhuis *Vrije* 247). Of course, it cannot be claimed that Rand holds direct responsibility for the Chilean dictatorship, even if having personal ties with the people involved. It can, however, be asserted that her ideals as professed in *Atlas Shrugged* contributed to a general strengthening of neoliberal hegemony; a strengthening that was clearly formed using coercive hegemonic strategies of which Pinochet is an example.

2.3 Atlas Shrugged: the hegemonic process reflected in fiction

Although *Atlas Shrugged* should never be one-dimensionally equated with Rand’s life and vision, it is true that her biography, regarding many aspects, merges with those of her fictional characters. The latter is perfectly illustrated in a collection of the “question-and-answer periods” that followed “most of [the] lectures” (Mayhew ix) Rand gave after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. When she is asked: “how can you use reason to prove that reason is valid?” She answers by referring to “Galt’s speech” (159). Equally, when she explains her

view on “romantic relationships,” (139) she uses the characters of her novel as well as her own experience and philosophy. Her answers, thus, convey the idea that Rand directly used her personal life as an inspiration for *Atlas Shrugged* and saw it, at least, partially as a pamphlet for her political and philosophical ideas. Indeed, she declares that “[t]he motive and the purpose of my writing is the projection of an ideal man. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal...” (qtd. in Cox 20). In addition she also admitted that “laissez-faire capitalism constituted the only moral social system” (Sechrest 190), which her fictional work also conveys. The novel, therefore, presents an ambiguous and continuous flux between fiction, what Rand wants the real to become, and the consequences her fiction exerted upon reality.

The hegemonic strategies, as described in the previous section, of Rand and the economists who shared her ideas are fictitiously mirrored in *Atlas Shrugged*. Initially, Galt refuses to share his knowledge with the world beyond Atlantis. He and the other inhabitants of Rand’s Utopia perceive themselves as being exploited to feed those who are “incapable of working” (740). Galt calls the people who do not have the same standards of work ethics, who do not produce or provide any services, “cannibals,” since “[t]hey are counting on you to go on, to work to the limit of the inhuman and to feed them while you last—and when you collapse, there will be another victim starting out and feeding them”. Galt’s Gulch is a refuge for those who are on “strike” against “those who believe that one man must exist for the sake of another”. Galt, when explaining the reasons behind his retreat from society to Dagny, claims that he “[does] not seek to force [Atlantis’s] code upon” the outside world”. “They are free to believe what they please”. Midas Mulligan, the valley’s banker, likes the idea of living in Atlantis “the rest of [his] life and never [having] to see the face of a looter” (747).

However, when the economy of the U.S. is collapsing to the point railway traffic becomes impossible and people are dying of hunger in big cities, the enemies are considered

beaten by their own errors. At this moment, Galt's tolerance vanishes. He openly starts his conquest for power by hijacking the radio frequencies, which ought to have been transmitting "Mr. Thompson's report on the world crisis" (1004). By the use of intertextuality, Rand symbolically declares a hegemonic victory of the ideals Galt's speech stands for. The character of Mr. Thompson, who in the novel manages to become head of state, is an overt allusion to E.M. Thompson, a leading figure of the New Left; a movement she violently opposes. According to Rand, the New Left are hypocritical "hippies" (*Answers* 78), who are the liberals' "Frankenstein monster" (79). By silencing Mr. Thompson, Galt overpowers the previous hegemonic order that socialism, or Keynesianism in 1957 in the U.S., represents. Galt's speech, which is a summary of the ideals preached by the novel as a whole can, thus, be seen as functioning in the same manner as *Atlas Shrugged* does in reality: as a tool for creating ideological consent in the battle against "leftist hegemony" (Rand qtd. in Schleier 310).

The function of intellectuals in *Atlas Shrugged* is similar to the role Rand played in contributing to neoliberal hegemony. As Gramsci explains, in order to gain hegemonic control, the prospect dominant group needs to gain the support of *traditional* intellectuals. In the novel, the teacher and philosopher Hugh Akston represents the latter social category. Even if he was originally Galt's teacher, he in turn became a full adherent of Galt's ideas. Besides the fact that the *traditional* intellectual, Akston, already supports Galt's ideas, the process of winning over another academic is literally described. Dr. Stadler, who equally was Galt's mentor, chose to work for the government, which resulted in his research being used, against his will, for the manufacture of a weapon of mass destruction: Project X. When Stadler hears his former student on the radio, he gets emotionally unstable: "[h]e did not know whether the next sound, part-gasp, part-scream, part-laughter, started rising from him or from the radio—but he heard the click that cut them both off" (1126). Galt's words make Stadler realize that

he is “through with that Washington gang” (1129) and he subsequently decides “[t]o seize control, to rule” (1127) by taking over Project X. Even if Stadler dies trying to get mastery over the sound-ray weapon, Galt wins the ideological battle, hereby, equally emphasizing the importance of Galt’s speech in the hegemonic process⁹. Both Stadler and Akston, just like Rand, are *traditional* intellectuals who by the means of reason concluded that leftist ideals are to be overcome. Whereas Stadler does directly contribute to establishing a new hegemonic order, Akston is the philosopher fighting Galt’s battle just like Rand stands on the front line together with liberal economist.

Even if the previous example of Pinochet, which was given to illustrate the role of coercion within the hegemonic process, took place after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, the novel still portrays violence being used as an effective tool in the conquest for domination. Although Galt claims that he and his followers “do not seek to force [their] code” upon the outside world” (740), destruction is a strategy that is often employed in order to deprive the world from any of the products that Atlantis’ entrepreneurs manufactured. In this manner, “Ragnar Danneskjöld always seize[s] the cargoes of relief vessels, but never touched the copper: he sank the d’Anconia ships with their loads; he let the crews escape in lifeboats, but the copper went to the bottom of the ocean” (500). It is, however, strongly stressed that Danneskjöld does not commit real crimes, as he appears as an inverted Robin Hood figure. He “attacks only the convoys of goods that the looters had stolen from the producers, and always with the purpose of returning the wealth to its creators” (Stolyarov 103). Even though Gennady Stolyarov II supports the non-condemnation of Danneskjöld as portrayed in *Atlas Shrugged*, obstructing decisions made regarding the redistribution of vitals for people in need

⁹ In this paragraph Akston and Stadler are discussed. Another character who perfectly incorporates the hegemonic process is the Wet Nurse. The Wet Nurse is not discussed in this thesis, since an extensive paper, “In the Beginning was Thought: The Story of the Wet Nurse” written by Jomana Krupinski, makes an in-depth analysis of the character, although without adopting a Gramscian theoretical framework.

does imply using violence, as it makes it impossible for others to organize life in the manner they judge just. Danneskjöld's actions thereby are oppressive; they repress any possibility of multiplicity.

The inhabitants of Atlantis could have avoided Danneskjöld's violence. If Galt's claim that the only way to save the economy is by abiding to the rule of the free market is true, within the framework of the novel, it can very well be imagined that instead of wanting to conquer the world by oppressive power the inhabitants of Atlantis could peacefully and gradually integrate larger amounts of people into their capitalistic haven. The universalizing features that characterize the Dystopian are, thus, also immanently part of the Hegemonic process, may it be achieved by force or by creating consent. The hegemonic process as such offers an explanation on how the neoliberal discourse managed to present itself as singular, omnipresent, and as the only narrative that can be followed for the organization of life. It also clarifies *Atlas Shrugged's* success and appeal. However, to further understand how Rand's work attained authoritative heights, its attractive powers need to be studied in terms of its literary form as such, and how it adopts myth-making techniques.

Chapter 3. Atlas Shrugged as Myth

A hegemonic process as such cannot be the sole responsible mechanism for a work, whether it be fiction, a set of essays or rules, to gain an authoritative status. No matter which work aspires at becoming a vehicle for a new ideology, the arguments that it proposes still need to be believable, seemingly true and convincing. The aim of this chapter, thus, is to show how the political rationale that *Atlas Shrugged* upholds achieves to appear extremely convincing. Indeed, when a narrative advocates for societal change that seems to be based upon true assumptions, that particular piece of literature becomes an extremely appealing work.

Firstly, Barthes' understanding of how myths function, semiologically, will be explained. Because, it will show how discourse is mythologized in *Atlas Shrugged*, as a result of which Rand's version of the truth, or at least the truth as conveyed in her novel, appears undisputable, is naturalized and seems self-evident. Lastly, the question of the importance of performance, and the act of speaking, will be discussed as it contributes the acceptability of the novel's message.

3.1 Myth: language & performance

Barthes perceives myth as “a system of communication[:] a message” (107). By describing myth as “a message,” (108) Barthes seems to suggest that his thoughts are only concerned with written text. He states, however, that the mythical “can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity,” and even “gesture[s]”. What makes considering the mythical as a type of language a useful departure for study, is that it causes a broad spectrum of objects of inquiry to be susceptible to semiological analysis. According to Barthes “myth robs language” (134); it takes a signifier that already signified something, casts off its previous meaning so that it can signify something that lies within the interests of the myth-maker. In his *Mythologies*, he gives the example of the phrase: “*because my name is lion*” (114). The latter sentence is a “grammatical example meant to illustrate” a rule in Latin. The sentence “tries very little to tell [...] something about the lion and what sort of name he has”. The lion, or the signifier hereby, has been used to illustrate another signified, or meaning: a model phrase for language teaching. The previous mechanism of form incorporating a different concept than it did initially is what Barthes judges to be specific to myth.

The semiological working of myth, in addition, is characterized by the signifier's ability to depoliticize speech. According to Barthes “mythology *harmonizes* with the world,

not as it is, but as it wants to create itself” (157). In the continuum of the previous consideration, myths are always motivated; the mythical has a certain aspiration to re-fashion the real in accordance with its own intentions. However, in order to successfully influence the real, myth needs to present itself as being unmotivated, innocent, and non-political. As a means to achieve the latter, a myth needs to “naturalize” (142; 5) itself; it needs to manifest itself as the absolute truth, as self-evident. Myth, thus, is depoliticized speech. As a means to appear as such, the mythological is inscribed within a logical system of causality. By appointing itself as a crucial step within a causal relationship that explains an event, a myth conveys itself as an incontestable fact. Myth “is not read as a motive, but as reason” (128). Barthes’ consideration of the mythological as re-invented reality implies that the mythic always needs to convey itself as the truth in opposition to the non-truth. The latter entails a struggle for power, which Richard Martin also recognizes in myth. When analysing Homer’s *Iliad*, he comes to the conclusion that “muthos [...] is always the speech of one in power, or of someone, for example a boasting warrior who is laying claim to power over his opponents. The word muthos implies authority” (22). Although Martin’s example of the warrior gives the impression that the underlying power relations of myth are internal to the narrative, Edmunds points out that the authoritative power of myth, above all, lies in its exteriorization, its performance. This suggests that the performance itself, of telling a myth, which in ancient Greece mostly took “place in public,” (Edmunds 10) is an attempt to “lay claim to power” (22), whereby the narrator places the truth of the myth he or she tells above the truths accounted for in other myths. The previous relation between the teller and the listener is summed up in Edmund’s statement: “Greek myths were never told without a motive, which was often competitive” (14). According to Edmunds, therefore, myth should be mainly understood as a power relation actualized in the performance of storytelling or giving a speech.

3.2. *Atlas Shrugged: a linguistic robbery*

“Atlas Shrugged [is] a novel that in its basic conception and overall structure involves a deliberate recasting of mythical material,” (131) says Kirsti Minsaas. Since “myths in their early forms are stories about deities and supernatural beings that serve to explain the nature of the cosmos and to set down rules about human conduct,” Rand’s reinterpretation of the mythical serves to “challenge these truths,” as a way to make myths “[embody] [...] a new and radical vision of the world”. Indeed, the latter interpretation is very valid. However, Minsaas, in her analysis of *Atlas Shrugged*, only looks into how Rand uses specific myths, such as the Prometheus and Atlas myth, as an exemplum in order to show that man is capable of heroism. However, in order to understand, structurally, how Rand manages to create a new truth for the world, it is also essential to look into the work’s mythical aspects in terms of the semiological mechanisms it employs.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, the actions that are associated with egoism, which implies that these acts signify greed semiologically, are re-used to denote virtue instead of vice. Throughout the novel, Rearden makes it clear that everything he undertakes is for his own sake. Early on in the narrative, he admits that his “only goal is to make steel and to make money” (39). Indeed, when Dagny asks Rearden to become an investing stakeholder of her business, he makes sure to stress the reason why he signs a “\$1,000,000” cheque: “I don’t expect to lose this money. I am aware of the conditions under which these bonds can be converted into stock at my option. I therefore expect to make an inordinate profit—and you’re going to earn it for me” (202). Rearden is willing to help Dagny only out of self-interest. His gesture towards Dagny, therefore, is not even perceived as help. It is precisely Rearden’s “rational code of egoism,” which all the inhabitants of Atlantis adopt, that makes them “[l]ike the Greek Titan, [Atlas]” (Minsaas 131). “[T]hey are the giants who carry the world on their shoulders,” and without their self-interestedness the world is doomed to perish. These prime

movers are perceived in the novel as the saviours of the poor and the less fortunate by virtue of their own selfishness. One evening, Rearden thinks back on the moment he just acquired his plant. The following description, of what he sees during this moment of reminiscence, is given:

He saw the day when he stood on a hill and looked at a grimy wasteland of structures that had been a steel plant. It was closed and given up. He had bought it the night before. There was a strong wind and a gray light squeezed from among the clouds. In that light, he saw the brown-red of rust, like dead blood, on the steel of the giant cranes—and bright, green, living weeds, like gorged cannibals, growing over piles of broken glass at the foot of walls made of empty frames. At a gate in the distance, he saw the black silhouettes of men. They were the unemployed from the rotting hovels of what had once been a prosperous town. (31)

It is strongly implied that Rearden's business changes the whole aspect of the landscape and gives a future to the unemployed. By the virtue of Rearden's egoistic desire "to make money," (39) he provokes the wealth produced by his investment to trickle-down upon the lower classes. The latter causal effect makes acts of selfishness pragmatically desirable, as they lead to the reduction of poverty due to the inherent redistributive qualities of laissez-faire capitalism. Rand, thus, changes the signified of selfish action from vice into virtue. She robs the form of egoistic acts by undoing them from their previous pejorative meaning, as defined by ethics, and imbues it with positive connotations.

3.3. *The depoliticized speech of the capitalists*

In addition to changing the initial signified of selfish acts, Rand depoliticizes egoistic action by presenting it as the ultimate truth. Making something appear as true, and as the only truth, can be achieved by employing various techniques. A strategy Rand uses is to parallel natural phenomena to the man-made, as a way to show how big business and investment are life giving, whereby the latter logic is literally being naturalized. When “Eddie Willers [looks] at a map on the wall of [Taggart Transcontinental’s] office,” (7) he perceives the “Transcontinental Railroad” as a “network of red lines slashing the faded body of the country from New York to San Francisco”. To Eddie it looks “like a system of blood vessels”. Just like Rearden’s business, Taggart Transcontinental pumps life into the continent by enabling other businesses to develop, whereby more jobs are created. Dagny’s expertise is what permits people to get food shipped to their hometowns, and without her the U.S. would be a “faded body” drained from its life elixir: capital investment. The previous biological metaphor naturalizes the causal relationship between free enterprise and the possibility for human life to exist. The causal relationship that Rand’s naturalizing metaphor implies is the following: only when able men like Nathaniel Taggart, d’Anconia, Galt and able women like Dagny are in charge of production, mankind can continue to live in prosperity. When great minds like Dr. Thomas Hendricks and Mulligan go on strike and disappear, the world gets drained of its vital fluids like a body bleeding to death.

Rand, equally, depoliticizes her speech by using naturalizing comparisons that put love on the same footing as economic mechanisms and other factors such as money and the desire to obtain it. D’Anconia reveals his understanding of love and sex to Rearden in d’Anconia’s suite in New York. He claims: “a man's sexual choice is the result and the sum of his fundamental convictions” (489). Indeed, the only successful relationship described in the novel is Dagny and Galt’s, implying that those who share the same ideological beliefs can

attain true love, or at least a very passionate liaison. On the contrary to Dagny's intimate life, the couples that do not share the same ideas about human existence, and above all concerning the political and economical organization of the world, fail drastically in finding a *modus vivendi*. Rearden and Lillian Rearden are the perfect example of the latter type of relationship. Lillian, besides supporting the political views of the government in power, equally, is economically dependent on Rearden. She denies what is seen in the novel as a moral act: the love for money and the profit motive. "To love money is to know and love the fact that money is the creation of the best power within you, and your passkey to trade your effort for the effort of the best among men" (412). By denying certain economic mechanisms that are held for truth in *Atlas Shrugged* and by preferring to be economically dependent, Lillian will always be in shackles, unable to be free and equal to her partner. Consequently, her marriage is a failure, of which the signs are dramatically shown in her unfruitful sex life. The latter shows that whereas d'Anconia holds that desires emerge from the philosophical views of a person, which therefore can be interpreted as being plural, the novel implies that the success of those desires to be consummated are not diverse. The possibility to physically enjoy the body stands in direct relationship to the economic principles advanced by the work. In addition, by denying the impossibility of the irrational to be part of love, i.e. that "love is blind," d'Anconia suggests that human emotions do not differ from anything else that can be found on the market. He rationalizes love to the point that it becomes calculable in terms of its success and could fit efficiency schemes. By equating economic principles, the rational, and love, capitalism appears to be a phenomenon as natural as sexual impulses and all other human bonds, whereby the political convictions it upholds become self-evident, seemingly unavoidable, inscribed in nature.

Another strategy Rand uses as a means to convey her politico-economic view as the ultimate truth is by silencing any voices that oppose her convictions. The absence of opposing

economic positions, for example, strengthens the apparent exactitude of the causal relationships that are implied by her usage of the previously discussed metaphors. Alan Clardy, while giving a summary of *Atlas Shrugged*, tells that “[t]he story plays out in the context of an American society that is increasingly following the rest of the world into economic and moral collapse, as the state is taken over by bureaucrats driven to hamstringing the economy and redistribute the wealth, while the culture is brought under the sway of intellectuals who emphasize mysticism and socialism” (239). Clardy, in the previous description, fails to see that, although People’s States dominate the world, real socialism is inexistent. Rand’s novel is, certainly, an attempt at proving that socialism is erroneous. However, she does not carry out an immanent critique, which is understandable in view of her conception of mankind. According to Rand, as Clardy notes, “[h]uman nature is fundamentally selfish” (255). Altruism, therefore, is simply inconceivable. Those in favour of government intervention only support policies that control the economy as a means to profit from it personally. The earlier mentioned *Equalization of Opportunity Bill* is not, as it claims to be, anti-trust regulation, but is merely implemented for the individual gain of Orren Boyle. The bill “prevents Rearden from owning the mines that supply him with the resources that he needs,” (Younkins 133) whereby Boyle’s company gets an advantage. The bill makes it more likely for Boyle’s business venture to survive.

Moreover, those in favour of government intervention are always portrayed as traitors of their own welfare state ideals. Lillian, Rearden’s wife, for example, organizes richly decorated parties during which she likes to display her costly jewellery: “a diamond necklace, earrings, rings and brooches” (131). However, despite her fierce defence of the state policies wanting to reduce social and economic inequalities, Lillian refuses to give up on her high society lifestyle of feasts and important companionship, when Rearden is in financial trouble due to those very policies she claims to support. Lillian holding on to her luxurious lifestyle,

of course, is incongruent with her alleged loyalty to the government. Would Lillian really have believed in the virtues of altruism, she would have renounced to her privileges as a means to redistribute wealth in the name of the general well being of her fellow citizens. Rand, hereby, stresses that human nature is inherently selfish and that people are unable to truly care for others. Lillian, like anyone else in the work, is inherently egoistic. By portraying everyone in the novel to seek personal gain, there stands nothing in the way for accepting Rand's economic views, as the nature of things makes every political system based upon Altruism bound to fail. The acceptance of man's selfishness, which is the premise of Atlantis' organization as an alliance between individuals who only by the means of trade interact with each other, therefore, comes across as politically unmotivated, as the truth.

Equally, no opposition to trickle-down theory is voiced on behalf of the working class. On the contrary, the proletariat supports Dagny's and Galt's views, whereby only one politico-economic reality becomes possible to think within the framework of the novel. Clardy states that "[Rand] would probably retch at the notion that there would be a proletarian working class who would organize to protect their own class-based interests in her capitalist utopia" (252). Whereas Clardy only considers Atlantis when phrasing Rand's incapability to imagine different views, the same holds true for the external world. Indeed, as Paul Krugman phrases it, *Atlas Shrugged* presents a "vision of society, in which a handful of heroic businessmen are responsible for all economic good, while the rest of us are just along for the ride" (*New York Times*). It is not surprising that the working class, for that matter, is not the main focus. The workforce greatly remains on the background and is only discussed when hands are needed to keep a business running. However, when the proletariat is mentioned, they are all in favour of the "heroic businessmen [and women]'s decisions" (Krugman *New York Times*). When a governmental institution, the *Union of Locomotive Engineers*, wants to safeguard the security of the railways' employees, since the bridge made out of Rearden

Metal is considered untrustworthy, by forbidding Dagny to “allow our men [the Union’s] to run your train” (231), she decides to ask for volunteers.

The anteroom of the office was full. Men stood jammed among the desks, against the walls. As she entered, they took their hats off in sudden silence. She saw the graying heads, the muscular shoulders, she saw the smiling faces of her staff at their desks and the face of Eddie Willers at the end of the room. Everybody knew that nothing had to be said. (232)

The workers are very willing to help the capitalist geniuses, since they are the only ones who provide work in the novel. The only people who disagree with Dagny’s convictions use the workers as an excuse to push through policies that are only beneficial to themselves. The worldview and the truth according to unionists, both within the fictitious context and in reality, therefore, get entirely discredited, which again, makes Galt’s and his followers’ truth appear as singular.

3.4. *The importance of performance: John Galt’s speech*

Achterhuis considers Galt’s lengthy speech to be superfluous in the novel. Because he sees it as “the most important source for Rand’s Objectivist philosophy” (“de belangrijkste bron voor haar filosofie van het Objectivisme” *Vrije* 78), he judges it, above all, as an individual source for the understanding of Rand’s worldview, which, within the work itself, due to its length hinders the fluidity of the narrative. Galt’s broadcast, therefore, could be easily omitted, he claims. Achterhuis’ remark that *Atlas Shrugged* possesses attractive powers, however, can be better clarified by taking into account Galt’s speech.

When reconsidering Martin and Edmunds’s approach to myth, the radio broadcast is crucial as it asserts a position of power, not only symbolically, by silencing a major player of the New Left as previously discussed, but by its very significance as performance. By

hijacking the radio station Rand gives her hero the possibility to express himself without limits, and without having to meet counter-arguments. Offering a character a chance to express him or herself by the means of a monologue resembles the myth-telling tradition, as practiced in ancient Greece, which Plato describes in his *Symposium*¹⁰. During the party, Aristophanes tells the famous myth of the androgynes. Man, he claims, has known a former and radically different bodily appearance: an “androgynous” (22) corporality. In forlorn times, according to his story, human beings were not one, but were connected to one another.

Once upon a time our anatomy was quite different from what it is now. In the first place there were not merely two sexes as there are now, male and female, but three, and the third was a combination of the other two [...]. [T]he form of every person was completely round, with back and sides making a circle, and with four arms, the same number of legs, and two faces exactly alike set on a round neck. There was one head for the two faces (which looked in opposite ways), four ears, two sets of genitals and everything else as you might guess from these particulars. (22-3)

The androgynous physicality of mankind was put to an end when they tried to challenge the authority of the gods. Zeus punished the androgynes for their hubris by “[cutting] them in two” (23). The significance of Aristophanes’ speech, however, when comparing it to Galt’s, lies in how and why it is being told. Aristophanes shares his story to a company of friends who all, like Aristophanes, are given the time to express themselves freely on the topic discussed: love. By narrating the story about the once united bodies, Aristophanes wants “to take a different line from” (22) the other people present. His speech, about the existence of true love, which can be found in “our other half,” (24) as a way of finding back our original

¹⁰ A drinking-party; a convivial meeting for drinking, conversation, and intellectual entertainment: properly among the ancient Greeks, hence generally. (OED)

anatomy, therefore, claims to hold a superior truth over the truth presented by the others, regarding the understanding of love. Indeed, he says: “I am going to try to explain [Love’s] power to you all, and then you in your turn can teach everyone else” (22)

In a similar manner to Aristophanes, Galt gets to express himself freely, without limits, while reaching a nationwide audience. Additionally, Galt’s speech starts in a teaching-like manner: “I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world, and if you wish to know why you are perishing—you who dread knowledge—I am the man who will now tell you” (1009). Galt, just like Aristophanes, offers a key to understanding a problem. The former gives the listener an understanding of true love and the latter of the decline of civilization in economic and moral terms. Both position themselves as teachers providing their vision of the truth. Stolyarov claims that “Rand exhorts her readers to enter into a process of continual thought and continual refinement of their ideas” (106). The manner in which the performance of a monologue is being used, however, suggests otherwise. The act in itself, of delivering a long speech wherein a certain truth is being professed as an ultimate explanation does not, on the contrary to what Stolyarov holds, offer space for reflection, but tries to impose itself as a given worthy to be taught, to be repeated, and to be heard by as many ears possible, either via the usage of a medium that enables to reach a broad audience, either by having the message spread by the means of word of mouth communication. Galt’s speech, thus, is a true act of claiming a position of power in the same manner as found in ancient myth telling.

Hence, *Atlas Shrugged* manages to portray a certain worldview, which has a strong political meaning, as the only ultimate existing truth by myth-making strategies, whether conscious or unconscious, whereby it depoliticizes itself. The truth that the novel creates is that the only manner for an economic system to persist and be efficient is to base it upon the premise of man’s selfish nature. When it is considered impossible for man to survive under

any other financial organization of life, it can be concluded that left-wing policies, which claim to be carried out in the name of altruism, are inherently fallacious. By silencing essentially conflicting voices, and effectively using performance, Rand¹¹ creates a myth for her own economic creed and those who support her vision.

Conclusion

The explanation, or a possible understanding, of *Atlas Shrugged's* attractive forces, which can be said to have contributed to the work's own becoming as a key factor in the strengthening of neoliberal hegemony, is multifaceted. Achterhuis' single conclusion that Rand's novel disposes of seductive qualities, because it presents a Utopia is far from inclusive enough and even erroneous as the work evades categorization within the Utopian canon. *Atlas Shrugged* encompasses Utopian as well as Dystopian elements, while at the same time presenting a recipe for the annihilation of Utopian thought, which the novel, misleadingly, presents as a Utopian vision for the future. The complexity in the novel's appropriation of the Utopian genre makes it hard to support Achterhuis' stance. The reason why Rand's *magnum opus* achieved to become greatly influential within the politico-economic discourse and concrete policymaking stems from its role within the larger conquest for ideological dominance of laissez-faire capitalism, as well as from its inherent literary and semiological workings as a myth-making narrative. I.e. *Atlas Shrugged* was consciously used as a tool to cause a hegemonic reversal, while at the same time being very appealing, as a work of literature, by portraying a mythical discourse depicting a one-dimensional vision of the truth, which in turn makes its political message very convincing.

¹¹ In this remark Rand as the author should not be considered as a means to give meaning to the novel in terms of details regarding her personal being. Here, Rand, is just taken as the author who has strong political convictions that cannot be denied to be favourable to right-wing politics.

Atlas Shrugged, thus, is certainly a very persuasive novel for reasons exterior and interior to itself. However, its announcement of a Dystopic future and its overt support for that future needs to be countered. This thesis, therefore, apart from trying to grasp how a single work of literature managed to shape reality, equally, tries to undo the neoliberal myth that *Atlas Shrugged* created and still helps to maintain. By showing how it engages in a myth-making process, by unveiling its constructedness, and by pointing out how the text forcefully, within a conscious struggle for ideological power, obtained its seductive halo, the narrative will, hopefully, be demystified and lose some of its appeal.

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