Science Fiction and Economic Disparity

A Study of Utopian Longings

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IV

Abstract

This study looks at how Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy (1993-96), Iain M. Banks's Culture novel *The Player of Games* (1988), and John Ringo's novel *Live Free or Die* (2010) work within the genre of SF to establish and upset economic norms present in society today. This study considers these contemporary SF novels alongside recent economic research to explore how SF directly and indirectly portrays the growing trend of economic disparity. I show how these representations engage the reader to question and resist established aspects of economic exploitation and, more broadly, contemporary capitalist ideology in general. The cognitive estrangement of current socio-historical conditions allows readers to identify and consequently analyze established norms (ideology) from alternative perspectives. Within this context, I argue then that cognitive SF can utilize its popular generic trappings to both interrogate and reimagine real-world economic disparities.

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Introduction

Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. There is nothing academic about those struggles, and we forget this at our cost.

-Terry Eagleton

This study looks at how Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy (1993-96), Iain M. Banks's Culture novel *The Player of Games* (1988), and John Ringo's novel *Live Free or Die* (2010) work within the genre of SF to establish and upset economic norms present in society today. Recent research by economists like Thomas Piketty has shown that economic disparity is a rising global problem and I believe that science fiction (SF) can establish a strong critical connection between this problem and the tropes common to popular SF. I believe that SF can play an active role in this issue as it encourages readers to think about the more normalized aspects of capitalism in new and different ways, making people more aware of the dominant ideology in which they live. In this way, SF functions as a privileged genre to both spark debate and encourage alternative thinking in ways not possible in other forms of fiction. The cognitive estrangement of current socio-historical conditions allows readers to identify and consequently analyze established norms (ideology) from alternative perspectives. This study will discuss how economic disparity is directly and indirectly portrayed in contemporary SF and then attempt to show how these representations engage the reader to question and resist established aspects of economic exploitation and, more broadly, contemporary capitalist ideology in general. Within this context, I argue then that cognitive SF can utilize its popular generic trappings to both interrogate and reimagine real-world economic disparities.

This thesis project has been an attempt to combine two areas of interest: socio-political economics and SF. The former because increasing economic disparity is becoming ever more evident in many parts of the world today. The latter because I believe that SF is the genre most equipped to explore, re-imagine, and ultimately undermine this socio-political trend. In undertaking this study, I have drawn heavily from Darko Suvin's early research on the genre of SF. He has mapped out the genre's utopian roots and established the theoretical framework of "cognitive estrangement." Cognitive estrangement is the most potent aspect of SF's socio-political commentary; Suvin defines it as the dynamic transformation of the author's environment into an aesthetic representation that often reflects critically on that original environment (*Metamorphosis* 10). All of the SF texts discussed herein mobilize cognitive

estrangement in depicting their respective "utopic" worlds. While none of these texts are strictly speaking utopias, they all feature narrative constructs with idealized socio-political settings usually focused around more collective and egalitarian norms. I explore these texts in conjunction with contemporary economic research to help discuss their more ideological aspects, particularly from the perspective of rising economic disparity. While I am aware that any form of economic research can itself be considered ideological, these reports help provide a socio-political backdrop to many of the more aesthetic facets of SF discussed in this thesis. The juxtaposition of SF and macro-economic theory is also useful for identifying trends in the cultural circulation of ideas around rising economic inequality.

Theory and Methodology

SF is a genre particularly suited to opening up spaces of resistance where the text directly or indirectly calls into question many norms of society today. In this sense, it is vital that we first understand some theoretical aspects of SF that I will be using and discussing in the following chapters. In order to highlight some of these aspects, I would like to spend some time analyzing *Elysium*, released in 2013. I use this film because it provides a simple platform for visualizing some of the more cognitive and aesthetic facets of SF, while still emphasizing the more consumptive nature of this popular genre. Many blockbuster SF films are, after all, inspired by novels and ideas within the SF universe. This film also serves as a fitting example of the ideology-disrupting reach of such texts and its popularity emphasizes the necessity of looking at the circulation of ideas within SF literature to understand the fertile ideological field more visual SF mediums draw from.

    Elysium was a box office hit and has generated approximately 286 million dollars in gross revenue to date ("Elysium"); this profit is most certainly due, in part, to the consumerist soma of flashy marketing, slick graphics, and myriad explosions that boost ticket sales. This film depicts Max Da Costa's frantic race to secure medical treatment before he dies due to radiation poisoning; in the process he sacrifices himself to secure universal healthcare for the entire global population of Earth. *Elysium* emphasizes the extreme costs and limited access to quality medical treatment for the working class, thereby commenting on the reification of health and more broadly, economic disparity. While a rather heavy-handed film (if for no other reason than that healthcare is visually represented by private regeneration stations housed on an orbiting space station out of reach of anyone without a space-ship), it does stake a very strong political claim and forces the viewer to actively reflect on current access to

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health-care in the US. Indeed, one could argue that any complete understanding of *Elysium* requires a knowledge of the current struggle over American healthcare; hence to appreciate the plot requires the viewer to confront the dissonance between the present socio-political situation and the imagined future. It is this dissonance which prevents the film from being pure escapism or fantasy. I argue then that this process of reflection combined with a near-revolutionary narrative denouement detailing the acquisition of "universal" healthcare forms a didactic process that interrogates hegemonic norms of social control (the current state of capitalism and profit-generation). Simply put, *Elysium,* despite its many flaws, shows how popular SF can not only superficially appeal to the masses with a shiny techno-veneer, but also, even more importantly, help undermine economic norms of which the process of film (or literary) production is a part, thereby serving a direct activist role in current day socio-political situation.

The first theoretical concept I would like to highlight from the above reading is that of Suvin's "cognitive estrangement." He derived the term from Bertolt Brecht and Russian Formalism. One particular Russian formalist, Victor Shklovksy, believed that the purpose of art is to make the familiar unfamiliar in a process called defamiliarization (estrangement), so that one can remove objects from the automatism of perception to better experience their "artfulness" (18). Shklovksy emphasized that our perception of reality becomes so automatic and so familiar that we no longer consider it, and thus no longer give it our full attention. The "automatism of perception" is a phrase that defines how we perceive our existence on a day-to-day basis. We are arrested in our automatism only if something new or different figures into our perception, something that complicates this familiarity. It is through art's aesthetic estrangement of the more mundane facets of existence that we are forced to consider them in new and intriguing ways.

If we take this definition beyond the range of pure art for a moment, we can consider this same estrangement serving a political purpose. If we consider *Elysium* a moment, the milling masses we encounter at the start of the film are almost exactly similar to people we see on TV or in newspapers every day. However, the estrangement is created through their portrayal as chattel, or as little more than worthless creatures. When the camera pans to the more regal citizens of Elysium, we see the contrast and we must then consider the socio-political ramifications of this contrast. This binary impinges on our normalized views of society and makes us reconsider extremes of wealth and poverty. This juxtaposition may even force us to ask some troubling questions: *Is this commenting on America? Can it happen to*

me? Is my lifestyle forcing this on other people? Should I really have voted for George Bush in 2000? This estrangement need not necessarily even be coaxed from in terms of SF; the masses of people (when divorced from the sprinkling of advanced technology) could be taken from any history, drama, or political film. Thus, as Shklovksy states, "The technique of art is to make the objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (18). I have, in a way, corrupted a bit of Shklovksy's original meaning in both focusing too much on the object (in this case, economic disparity) and also by referencing a work of mass media consumption; these are two facets in which I hope I am forgiven. Regardless, his process of estrangement shows how readers spend more time "experiencing" defamiliarized aesthetic perspectives, allowing for new and alternative perspectives to once-familiar objects.

Suvin adds to this concept of "defamiliarization" or estrangement the dynamic of "cognition." He states that cognition "implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than a static mirroring of the author's environment" (*Metamorphosis* 10). In this sense, the estranged "object" is not just a static reflection of a real-world object approached through novel narrative techniques and imagery, but instead actively changed into something different, like a spaceship substituting for a car or a planet for an island. As in the reading above, healthcare is not some familiar socio-political issue, but an instrument that can only be accessed by the rich citizens of Elysium. This reimagining of the pervasive socio-political debate into an ornate gilded machine with mythological imagery forces the viewer to reconsider what healthcare truly represents to both herself and society as a whole. It becomes a gilded symbol of privilege. It is different, yet still familiar because of associational constructs.

Suvin emphasizes that the cognitive aspect of SF is the reflection not only *of*, but *on* reality (*Metamorphosis* 10); hence there exists a two-way relationship that allows the estranged object to also reflect back on the familiar object. Thus, this form of cognitive estrangement is a slightly more involved process than other forms of political commentary; the regeneration station is not a one-to-one representation of healthcare as in realistic fiction. It makes us wonder why we, as a society, do not have such a box (or system) right now. One almost has to wonder whether SF really has to do with advanced technology at all. In this sense, the cognitive estrangement can be said to evoke the more relevant question about the fairer distribution of services and technologies that exist *today*. The reader or viewer becomes

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an active participant in the socio-political commentary and must make the connection herself. In this way, the familiar has then become unfamiliar, and thus been rendered more aesthetically critical or "cognitive." In summation, the technique of cognitive estrangement essentially pulls everyday objects from their unconsciously automatic (familiar) state and forces readers to consider them in their transformed/estranged/unfamiliar state, which then engages the reader to cognitively reflect back on the original (now defamiliarized) object in new and critical ways.

This grounding in and consequent reflection on the familiar is a vital aspect to the SF genre. For example, if we once more consider *Elysium*, the spaceships meant to ferry illegal non-citizens (the working class) to the orbiting station can be interpreted as a causal dystopic warning: *If* society does not deviate from its current socio-economic path, *then* our future society will turn out like this. However, the estrangement functions on multiple levels here. Spaceships are not simply symbolic vehicles; in the current economic climate they are incredibly expensive objects to produce and operate. A quick search on NASA's website reveals space shuttles to cost $1.7 billion each with individual launches costing $450 million (Bray). Hence, the absurd cost of space travel reflects back on just how absurdly difficult these voyages are for actual immigrants crossing American boarders every day, usually with borrowed funds that can, should anything untoward happen, force these same immigrants into economic slavery to vicious creditors. In addition, these same spaceships are blown up, much as immigrants are continuously found dead attempting to cross the US boarders; these are risks people are willing to take for what they construe to be a better life. In many ways, the generic tropes of SF, here the hyperbolic and ridiculous CGI objects (the futuristic guns, the ships, the robots), shown on screen actually help emphasize the real object (an alienated working class). The absurd generic tropes then actually make the viewer even more acutely aware that what she is viewing is simply narrative fiction; hence, the constructed narrative reality can be said to be self-critical and negates itself. This criticality further exemplifies the underlying themes of immigration policy and health reform. The cognitive estrangement goes far beyond simply predicting or warning against the future then; the estranged objects become reflections on the serious reality of the current socio-historical situation and helps formulate the narrative into a form of social critique.

Cognitive estrangement can be either extrapolative or analogical; most forms of SF, like *Elysium* above, use a mixture of both. While my first two chapters will explore these two theoretical aspects in detail, I will briefly explain them here. Appropriated from the field of

mathematics, extrapolation seeks to determine the value of an unknown variable based on its relationship with another known variable. In terms of SF, an author will take a series of known socio-historical variables (political, technological, social, environmental, etc.) and then postulate a temporal and/or spatial socio-historical setting based on those variables; thus aligning SF to a complex mathematical modeling equation. For example, *Elysium* is set in the "near-future." In it, much of Earth remains similar to our own world (if overpopulated). Many futuristic objects we do encounter (like robots, guns, armored suits, and spaceships), are actually not that strikingly "different" and are modeled on current-day technologies or theories. Even the floating space station "Elysium" is pulled from theoretical engineering. In Suvin's words then, *Elysium* would be considered extrapolative in that it "has come to be considered as starting from certain cognitive hypotheses and ideas incarnated in the fictional framework and nucleus of the tale" (*Metamorphosis* 27). This focus on a cognitive hypothesis becomes even more apparent in "hard" SF where a strong emphasis is laid on the plausibility of the narrative, a theme I will be discussing more in my first chapter on Robinson.

The other form of cognitive estrangement is analogical. Here there is little rational variable mapping between the current socio-historical situation and the presented estranged environment. As Suvin states, "The objects, figures, and up to a point the relationships from which this indirectly modeled world starts can be quite fantastic (in the sense of empirically unverifiable) as long as they are logically, philosophically, and mutually consistent" (*Metamorphosis* 29). In this sense, SF becomes more symbolic and less grounded in the author's socio-historical condition. A good example of analogical SF would be *The Matrix* (1999). In this film, the entire setting is strongly removed from our reality, both temporally and spatially. The protagonists do not even know what century they live in. They are, in many ways, removed from their historical condition on Earth. However, this is not to say that the movie has lost its cognitive connection to either the reader or the socio-political condition of ideological manipulation. The matrix itself represents ideological control, it a system that benefits the machine overlords as humankind have been turned into batteries. Machines require the humans to be ignorant of the truth or whole "crops" will be lost. The parallels to capitalism are obvious; individuals seem to be exploited for their inherent existence wherever we turn. In addition, the narrative construction is based on technologies and theories not entirely divorced from society today; this is especially apparent if we consider the matrix as cognitive symbol of the internet or other mass media consumption. The narrative world also maintains a logical consistency within itself, while still positing its connection to our own

world. It is, after all, still on (or under) Earth the action takes place. Somewhere. This is a theory I will explore further in my second chapter on Banks.

Both analogical and extrapolative cognitive estrangement are central theories in understanding how SF can work to undermine ideology. The last theory, or rather idea, I wish to explore before moving on to my chapter summations is that of utopia. In my introduction, I stated that none of my texts are strictly speaking utopias. This is true. However, they all feature narrative constructs with idealized socio-political settings. In order to understand the role of these socio-political constructions within culture, I feel it vital to understand the nature of utopia. Let us first define it. Suvin states that utopia is a:

> quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized on a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis. (emphasis removed, *Positions* 35).

By implying that utopias are organized on a "more perfect principle," utopia is framed as subjective. In this sense, the utopic author seeks to represent a world inherently improved upon her own. Whereas dystopias may use cognitive estrangement to directly highlight society's flaws (Big Brother for example), utopia then provides an implicit criticism of society's flaws by organizing a "better society" to rectify those flaws. This ideal organization can be considered a cognitive estrangement in itself. This way, we, as readers, have to make the cognitive connection between what this "utopic" society has achieved relative to what our society lacks, thus making us consider how our society has failed (perhaps due to some socio-political or inegalitarian aspect) and what we can do to make it "better." Suvin also emphasizes the historicity of utopia; he wants us consider how utopia emerges from a series of narrative events based on a "historical hypothesis." Utopia then does not erupt spontaneously from the earth, but is instead crafted through people and interaction, through planning and hard labor. This concept of historical movement through time, resulting in a utopic community "superior" to our own, is an important concept synonymous with "extrapolation" and is an idea I will explore in depth in my first chapter.

With the emphasis above on the historical development of utopic civilizations, we can begin to understand why Suvin grouped 'utopian studies' in with his study of 'SF'. While utopia may initially seem to have little to do with contemporary SF, Suvin argues that utopia is actually the "sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction" (emphasis removed, *Metamorphosis* 61). This statement boils down the very nature of estrangement in SF. By positing an alternative historical hypothesis, any SF author, whether good or bad, cognitive or

non, is making a distinct commentary on society. By talking about the future of society, one can only organize that aesthetic creation better or worse than existing society. To borrow some of Suvin's language then, society can only be "more or less perfectly" organized than it exists today (*Metamorphosis* 62). In this sense, as Suvin states, "For all its adventure, romance, popularization, and wondrousness, SF can finally be written only between the utopian and anti-utopian horizons" (*Metamorphosis* 61-62). This study will explore both horizons, always keeping in mind that these representations either reinforce or undermine existing ideologies. Before discussing the genre's history below, I would like to spend some time outlining my chapters.

Chapter Outline

This thesis will be broken into five parts; an introduction, three chapters covering one SF author each, and a concluding note. I would like to say a few brief words on text selection before delving into each chapter individually. Firstly, these texts are all contemporary SF, published within the last thirty years. I wanted these texts to express the connection between economic disparity happening now and the general politics that occurred around the 1980s. By expanding my selection to the late 1980's, I attempted to capture the more utopian hope that struggled to reveal itself in fictional form in the wake of the Thatcher and Reagan years; a hope that is still very relevant today.

All three sets of texts share some generic features relating to SF. Firstly, they all postulate alternative (futuristic) historical hypotheses. They also all feature utopic and dystopic socio-political constructions, usually placed in conflict with each other. While Ringo's text might be the most militaristic, they all share military themes and feature "invasion"-type scenarios. It should also be stated that these authors come from different countries (Ringo and Robinson are American, while Banks is Scottish), however, as a genre, SF has a tendency to cross national boundaries in a way perhaps other genres cannot. The theme of economic disparity is a broad and unifying one regardless. I try to avoid overly specific mentions of national policies and politicians, and in all cases I attempt to draw any economic attention back to the literary text. All three writers are heavily political and each text just oozes with commentary, some of it absolutely overt and much covertly injected between the narrative lines, character relations, and in the imagery.

Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy will be the first set of texts discussed. This series has been crowned the most important SF work of the 1990s (Booker and Thomas 82).

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The first novel, *Red Mars* (1993), received the Nebula Award, and the following novels, *Green Mars* (1994) and *Blue Mars* (1996), each won Hugo Awards (White 578). This series depicts the colonization of Mars over the course of two hundred years and centers around a series of colonists known as the "First Hundred." This chapter will explore how Robinson structures his texts in a way that illuminates the inequalities of current economic disparity through his portrayal of Martian society relative to that of Earth's.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the conception of diversity in utopia. Robinson does not go about creating a single utopic society on Mars, but indeed expands the colony of one hundred settlers into an epic and highly diverse civilization. While being based on a multiplicity of individual ideas and individual utopias, Mars still forms a cohesive body that diametrically opposes the larger capitalistic society of Earth. It is in this way both a multiplicity and yet a singular entity; it shares a diversity of individual utopias, while still maintaining a unified egalitarian platform. My second section will explore the ways in which Mars functions as a utopic contrast to the more dystopic Earth. I argue here that the Earth-Mars binary functions as a form of Marxian dialectic, in that Mars represents a socio-economic system that both resists and yet ultimately engages with Earth's capitalism, a historical facet in its own creation that it cannot escape. I will discuss how this gradual societal development between Earth and Mars is represented in the passage of narrative time. My third section will focus on the problematic aspect of narrator privilege: I will be interrogating whether the use of privileged individuals as narrative focalizers undermines the broader normalization of egalitarian ideals achieved in the text. Privilege, I show, can be moderated by the fair distribution of labor and societal resources like education. Thus, this chapter will argue that Robinson's *Mars Trilogy* undermines capitalistic norms as evidenced in the dialectical relationship between Earth and Mars and Mars's movement towards socialistic utopia.

My next chapter will focus on Iain M. Banks Culture civilization, paying specific attention to his second SF novel, *The Player of Games* (1988). While more whimsical than Robinson's text, Banks's work is no less political; he also wrestles with socialistic ideals in his fiction. While Robinson represents one of the strongest examples of utopic writing to emerge from the United States in the 1990s, Banks is the strongest utopic writer to come from the UK in the same time frame, a period generally known as the "British Boom" (Booker and Thomas 82). His utopias are achieved through analogic representations of advanced technology merged with egalitarian social norms.

In my first section of this chapter I discuss the Culture-wide novum of post-scarcity as a cognitively estranged representation of the social state. I do this by situating the concept of post-scarcity within the analogical form of SF used by Banks. I then trace some cognitive associations of post-scarcity through the work of two well-known economists; Keynes and Piketty. In my second section I discuss how the novum of post-scarcity is then used to contrast the more dystopic aspects of the Azad Empire in order to undermine certain ideological norms of economic exploitation. I use the third and final section to comment specifically on Gurgeh, the protagonist in the story and a Culture citizen. I explore how his development through the novel represents a progression from capitalistic to socialistic thinking. Hence this chapter will argue that Banks's novel *The Player of Games* challenges the assumptions of conventional economic disparity through the Culture's analogical representation as a social state and the socialization of the protagonist Gurgeh.

My third chapter will focus on the popular SF author John Ringo and his novel *Live Free or Die* (2010), the first part of his *Troy Rising* (2010-11) trilogy. The novel depicts the rise of entrepreneur and capitalist, Tyler Vernon, as he conquers the consumer markets of space, defeats the invading hordes of Horvath aliens, and builds a military empire out of America. The novel depicts the larger interactions of galactic civilizations and is rooted in the rhetoric of science, politics, and economics. However, it also problematically encourages an ideology that increases economic disparity. Ringo's political convictions lean distinctly to the right and he produces perishable texts in rapid quantity. This chapter then is a cautionary reading of contemporary SF and will attempt to show how genre can directly reinforce capitalistic norms. While this chapter functions as an individual reading, it also works as a synthesis of some of the major ideas and themes from my previous two chapters.

As Ringo's work follows in the tradition of space opera, particularly in regards to alien invasion, my first section will be discussing its generic ties to SF history. This will allow me to explore how the novel falls victim to the older generic "pulp" tendencies of demonizing the "other," in this case, the most vulnerable, unseen, and marginalized economic demographics in society. In my second section, I argue that this novel develops America into a form of conservative utopia. The utopia this text posits is a subjective longing for individual and societal improvement, however one that actually winds up benefiting only a select group of wealthy individuals to the detriment of the broader whole. I argue that this American utopia models itself on the "regalian" state, a form of feudal system with low taxes and high property protection. In my final section, I briefly visit two financial reports that warn against the

problems of severe economic disparity. They help highlight and call into question the more ideological aspects of the novel's socio-political system. Thus, this chapter will seek to prove that *Live Free or Die* conforms to the more culturally regressive heritage of SF in that it reaches towards a regalian utopia that ideologically reinforces existing norms of severe economic disparity.

In structuring this thesis I have drawn some small inspiration from Suvin's book *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (1988). Like Suvin, I have placed my harshest ideological critique towards the back, and am perhaps a bit more harsh than Suvin is. Each chapter will attempt to address a separate, but complimentary aspect of my main core thesis, ultimately (and hopefully) resulting in a piercing cultural study of economic inegalitarianism and the transcendence thereof in contemporary SF.

Genre and History

Before wading into the sticky area of the SF's origins or make-up, it should be stated that I am not seeking to take a combative stance in this argument over definitions, labels, or historical origins, but merely mapping the generic overview so as to give the reader a broad orientation for later discussions. This stated, SF has seen a relative explosion of interest in the last few decades. According to Scott McCracken, "Science Fiction is enormously popular. It accounts for one in ten books sold in Britain, and in the United States the number is as high as one in four" (qtd. in Roberts 30). This research helps emphasize SF's popular role as an active part of mass-market literary culture. Much of this literary production is, however, of regrettably poor quality.

Since publishers seek to generate profits from the sale of SF novels, they are more concerned with texts that produce a capital return than they are with texts that produce enduring legacies. As emphasized by Suvin, "90 or even 95 percent of SF production is strictly perishable stuff, produced in the view of instant obsolescence for the publisher's profit and the writer's acquisition of other perishable commodities" (*Metamorphosis* vii). In this sense, one can visualize a consumption loop between writers, publishers, and readers that focuses around certain tropes of SF (alien invasion, time travel, galactic empires, etc.). Publishers know that readers purchase SF conforming to these established generic tropes; they are therefore only willing to pay writers for SF that conforms to these tropes. Thus writers are "encouraged" to write specific forms of SF in the hopes of earning an income. Readers interested in SF then browse the "SF" section of the local bookstore (or Amazon website) to

purchase books labeled and marketed as SF. This emphasis on profit generation functions as part of the broader "culture industry," which seeks to commodify artistic or cultural production. As Suvin states:

> What will in our days come to be called the 'culture industry' concerns itself mainly with the maximal diffusion of the texts' mechanical reproductions. To that end, it needs quickly revolving, paradoxically transitory novelties that catch the eye but do not threaten the framework of revolving, the politico-economic presuppositions of market circulation. (*Positions* 9)

In this mechanical reproduction, the SF text then becomes little more than a physical product, priced to sell at a profit. These texts are then necessarily bland enough to pass generic muster (thus they can effectively be marketed as SF), but usually include some novelty that encourages reader consumption (a new particle ray gun, porcupine people on Venus, a plague that makes you grow extra arms, a spaceship discovered buried in Oklahoma).

More often than not, these "novelties" or nova as Suvin calls them, are uninspired and lack much of the radical difference from established society to make them effective vehicles at combatting or even identifying prevailing capitalist ideology, hence market circulation continues unabated. Profit generation then comes down to a debate between difference and familiarity. If the SF work is too different from generic SF tropes, then it excludes a large swath of the SF-buying population. If the SF work is too familiar (akin, say, to realism), then it cannot be marketed as SF. By toeing the fine line between these two distinctions, SF risks perpetuating too many familiar norms evident in society today, including patriarchy, racism, and even economic exploitation. By not working to reveal or cognitively estrange prevailing ideology, many of these texts simply wind up reproducing prevailing ideology instead. While all my texts discuss this problem in one form or another, my third chapter will discuss this point in detail.

However, despite this general cognitive malaise, SF's sheer popularity exerts a tremendous amount of ideological influence. In this sense, it is worth studying the range of SF produced, not simply the "best" SF texts. This is why I place Robinson, often considered one of modern SF's best writers, alongside Ringo, a popular, but more conservative military writer who has received little critical attention. This logic makes sense in terms of the spread of ideological beliefs; it would be unwise to disregard such a large segment of literary consumer culture when one considers the spread of ideology that reinforces norms of economic disparity. This thesis then risks discussing perishable-quality SF literature precisely because it makes up the vast majority of SF distributed. Economic disparity is on the rise and

researching this popular cultural form gives us an idea of how capitalist ideas are normalized and propagated in society. In regards to SF's reach, we should also consider the demographic make-up of this large SF-consuming population. As Suvin notes, it is generally students, graduates, and other "key" members of society who read SF (*Metamorphosis* vii). In this sense, my study has a mild degree of additional sociological relevance as it concerns the interests of an educated demographic who can most easily acknowledge and initiate change in society.

The consumerist nature of SF helps explain some of the problems people have had in defining the genre. The very semantics of the label "Science Fiction" is highly disputed. In addition, there is also a more-than-mild stigma associated with the term. As Ursula K. Le Guin so eloquently puts it:

> I don't think *science fiction* is a very good name for it, but it's the name that we've got. […] I'm a novelist and poet. Don't shove me into your damn pigeonhole, where I don't fit, because I'm all over. My tentacles are coming out of the pigeonhole in all directions. […] For most of my career, getting that label—sci-fi—slapped on you was, critically, a kiss of death. It meant you got reviewed in a little box with some cute title about Martians—or tentacles. (Wray)

Thus, many critics and writers prefer the more encompassing acronym "SF" which generally stands for "Speculative Fiction." Confusingly, it can also stand for "Science Fantasy," "Space Fiction," or even "speculative fascism" in the case of certain right-wing texts (Aldiss and Wingrove 157, Broderick 3). This thesis uses the acronym SF mainly for its simplicity, yet draws its inspiration from Suvin who equates *science* with cognition and *fiction* for estrangement (*Metamorphosis* 13).

Despite, or perhaps because of, Le Guin's criticism above, SF remains a very difficult genre to define. Part of the problem with SF is that, as James Gunn explains, it has no singular characteristic action or setting. He uses the examples of detective stories and westerns to support this point; he states that detective stories unravel mysteries while westerns are typically set in the American Wild West and Mexico. As Gunn explains, SF is not as easily described; it is more a mode of writing based on trying to understand the universe and one's place in it. In this way, SF's approach is broad enough to encompass westerns, romance novels, detective stories, and even high fantasy, so long as the narrative world is approached in a systematic and rationalistic fashion (Gunn 82-83). The focus of SF then becomes less about actions or settings and more about critically exploring concepts or theories.

Defining SF is no easier than labeling it; almost every serious SF critic and many authors have had a hand in attempting to lock down a specific meaning.[1] In keeping with our Marxist trend of literary production, perhaps Lance Parkin's definition is one of the most relevant. He states that, "SF is a notoriously difficult term to define, but when it comes down to it, a book appears on the SF shelves if the publisher thinks they will maximize their sales by labelling it as such" (qtd. in Roberts 2). Miming the same profit cycle discussed above then, this definition acknowledges that publishers only pay for texts that they expect will sell well with consumers, hence perpetuating a cycle of generic tropes and themes in what is distributed and consequently consumed (Aldiss and Wingrove 150). Alternately, Damon Knight said in one particularly famous quote that, "Science fiction is what I point to when I say it," which is a statement that both broadens and dilutes the genre immensely (qtd. in Gunn 82). I find this one of the less constructive, but more thought-provoking, definitions of SF. As Gwyneth Jones defines it, SF is a controlled laboratory experiment to explore specific ideas; a well-supported definition in the socio-political and utopic texts we will come to explore (Roberts 10). Despite these different meanings then, including Gunn's generic explanation and even Le Guin's rather acerbic comment above, I feel that all SF shares a common focus on merging estrangement with cognition. This thesis then firmly aligns itself behind Suvin who states that SF is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (emphasis removed, *Metamorphosis* 7-8). This definition helps point us away from the purely productive aspects of publishing pressures towards the more cognitive relationship between the foreign and familiar.

Easing away from SF's definitions and labels leaves us only with its history, another rather contentious debate. Most critics credit Suvin's *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction* (1979) as providing one of the earliest and most far-ranging histories of SF. He devotes some 200 pages to tracing the genre's genealogical roots. In terms of SF's origins, he credits Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) as the pinnacle of most ancient SF tropes (*Metamorphosis* 92). As Suvin states, "It fuses the permanent though sometimes primitive folk longings for a life of abundance and peace—that is, communist—human relations known from antiquity on"

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[1] I list some definitions here, but Gunn and Candelaria's *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction* (2005) provides a large overview of essays exploring various facets of SF as a genre.

(*Metamorphosis* 92). Suvin touches on everything from Homer's oral traditions, to the *Cockayne* peasant dreams of fat feasts and fowl, to the more brutal satires of Jonathon Swift.[2]

Transitioning from popular oral traditions and the more "upper-class" written traditions, Suvin credits H. G. Wells's "destructive newness encroaching upon the tranquility of the Victorian environment" as the more modern birth of SF (*Metamorphosis* 205-6, 208). Here Suvin is referencing Wells's brutal depiction of industrialized capitalism in such novellas as *The Time Machine* (1895) and the inverted imperialism of *The War of the Worlds* (1897). Jumping back a hundred years, Brian W. Aldiss is credited as one of the first individuals to tie SF to the Gothic Fantasy of the 1800s, where literature wrestled with even earlier social changes emerging from industrialization (Kincaid 41, Aldiss and Wingrove 151-52). While Aldiss has thrown his weight behind Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818), other critics have endorsed the works of Jules Verne later in the century as the birth of contemporary SF (Roberts 5, Kincaid 41).

Following in the wake of Verne and Wells's popular fiction were the pulps of the 1930s. These stories were generally printed on cheap paper and had a bad reputation for being "kinetic, fast-paced and exciting tales that are also clumsily written, hurried in conception, and morally crude" (Roberts 68). Pulp SF was the new space frontier, characterized by masculine heroes and wild galactic adventures. Since I consider Ringo's work a direct a descendant of the pulp traditions, I will be discussing this historical period in further detail in my third chapter on *Live Free or Die*.

Emerging concurrently with SF's early and rather non-cognitive pulp fiction was an incredibly cognitive wave of dystopian fiction, exemplified by Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). These texts were highly socio-political and, respectively, criticized the Soviet Union's postrevolutionary system, Western capitalism, and the combination of capitalism and socialism (Booker and Thomas 66). Emerging from the broader tradition of the pulps came the Golden Age in America; writers like Asimov and Heinlein marked the point where American SF finally reached its more mature complexity (Roberts 75). In the tail end of the Golden Age came McCarthyism where a fervent anti-communism began seeping into the

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[2] I use mainly Suvin here, but there are a series of more modern critics who provide historical overviews of SF. Adam Roberts provides an excellent introduction to this debate in his book *Science Fiction* (2000). M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas also have helpful historical overviews of many specific sub-genres of SF in their book *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009).

narrative strata of SF (Roberts 79-80). New Wave SF emerged in the 1960s and 70s; this shift marked an exploratory time of "soft SF" where writers starting playing with and undermining many of the more science-oriented, masculine, and adventuring tropes of earlier traditions. This period was ushered in by the strong emergence of female authors like Le Guin and Octavia Butler (Roberts 83). SF, at this point, became more diverse and cognitively productive in its approach to race, gender, and sexuality.

Finally, in what was generally marked as the decline of American SF in the 1980s, the more dystopically charged cyber punk sub-genre emerged. SF here took on the edge of rampant computerization and corporate industrialization characterized by writers like William Gibson. In 1989, the Berlin Wall finally fell and the Soviet Union crumbled, opening up the semantic field of SF to explore more Socialistic utopias (Booker and Thomas 82). This timeframe marks the rebirth of contemporary SF and is heralded by the emergence of two writers discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, namely Robinson in America and Banks from Scotland, among myriad significant others. John Ringo, despite following on the heels of authors like Robinson, shows that capitalist writing is still very much alive and that SF is still a feverish ideological battleground. In one way then, especially considering the rather static global situation of capitalism in these post-Reagan and Thatcher years, I consider these three authors as part of the current era of SF.

Ideology

Firstly, it should be stated that I consider literature to be a product of the historical conditions that produce it (Eagleton, *Marxism* vi). As Karl Marx states in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life." The economic base of any society determines the superstructure, and ultimately the literature produced in that society. However, as a product of a particular social condition, it can also function as a commentary on aspects of that condition. This claim is substantiated in part by Friedrich Engels in a letter to J. Bloch in 1890 where he states, "The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of superstructure […] also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*" (qtd. in Eagleton, *Marxism* 9). While it would be naive to suggest that SF can ultimately overthrow capitalism and ameliorate severe economic disparity, I find that it interrogates aspects of our

current socio-historical situation and potentially even suggests methods of reasoning about economic disparity that could eventually help draw us out of our current exploitative era.

This thesis is, in part, also inspired by the Frankfurt School, whose criticism "ranges from critical examinations of mass culture, which it sees as a realm of domination, to celebrations of high art, which it sees as a realm of social critique" (Rivken and Ryan 239). Their accepted assumption is that mass culture reinforces norms of society that keep people happy and compliant, while high art disrupts cultural norms and undermines simplistic linear meanings. As discussed in my "Theory and Methodology" section, SF is absolutely a part of mass culture; it is a profit-generating facet of the culture industry. In this sense, the broad focus of my thesis is in determining whether the degree of cognitive estrangement evidenced by each text is such that the work overcomes the constrictive nature of profit-generation. By undermining broader ideological conceptions relating to capitalism, the text cuts into the very system its publishers seek to propagate. While SF functions as a part of the "domination" of mass culture, this thesis will attempt to redeem critical aspects of it which help interpellated subjects (the unwary reading public) resist the very ideological dominance capitalism seeks to impose. One goal of this study then is to analyze how SF calls into question the normalcy of profit generation and the worker's place at the bottom of that inherent hierarchy.

To explain the exploitation of one class of people by another is a broad theme best approached through the concept of ideology. This essay leans heavily on Marxist critic Luis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." His conception of ideology assumes that you are, before birth, indoctrinated into a system of control meant to keep you in a position that is detrimental to your personal interests. Althusser defines this representation as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (294). In addition, he argues that there are physical manifestations of ideology called Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as schools, police forces, armies, or religious institutions that function in a top-down basis; they enforce accepted norms in the broader population (299-300). ISAs function through interpellation, whereby concrete individuals are recruited as concrete subjects through actions, such as saluting an officer (301). While this is a strong symbolic action, we tend express interpellation even amongst ourselves, perhaps best exemplified when responding to a friendly neighbor's hearty "hello!" This stated, Althusser also believed that one always-already was a subject, even before birth, as ideology is pervasive and self-reinforcing. Not only is ideology top-down then, but also laterally reinforced between subjects.

If we consider Althusser's conception of ideology as a foundation for approaching literary content, then it is John Fiske who provides the delicate steel latticework that emerges from that solid foundation; he provides an excellent critical structure for interpreting films that I will adapt to literary analysis. He asserts that there are cultural "codes" which act as intertextual links between producers, texts, and audiences, and that it is the critic's job to interpret the natural unity of these codes (1090). These codes can be organized into a three-stage hierarchy. The first level constitutes the superficial aspects of reality, such as the characters' appearances, speech-patterns, settings, behaviors, etc. The second level constitutes the representation of this reality, or, considered another way, how the narrative constructs or frames this reality; this influence is evident in, for example, heavy-handed dark imagery, curt narrative descriptions, narrative flow and style, which all impact reader perceptions of the first level. The third level represents how the prior two levels are then organized into coherent and socially acceptable ideological codes, such as those of patriarchy, race relations, and, particularly for the purposes of this study, materialism, class, and capitalism. As Fiske states:

> The process of making sense involves a constant movement up and down through the levels of the diagram, for sense can only be produced when "reality," representations, and ideology merge into a coherent, natural unity. Semiotic or cultural criticism deconstructs this unity and exposes its "naturalness" as a highly ideological construct. (1090)

Thus, when I mention how any one particular novel "normalizes" certain elements of capitalist ideology throughout this thesis, I am making a direct reference to Fiske's idea of how a narrative can appear to create a natural unity of a situation that is perhaps more exploitative than it initially appears. By naturalizing certain ideas of economic disparity as normal or accepted, especially regarding broader socio-economic polices and ideas that work against the interests of the broader population, the text is creating an ideological reinforcement. Thus, I will be looking to deconstruct the naturalness of this presentation in an attempt to reveal this ideological level of control.

However, it should be noted that Fiske's research here serves another purpose. Many of the themes discussed in the following two chapters will be of a more utopic or socialistic nature. In this sense, these texts are already cognitively estranged from the broader range of readers (as most readers already exist in the dominant system of capitalism). These authors are then attempting to insert something radically different into the text, while normalizing it as something absolutely natural. Thus, part of the estrangement, in this case, is the very normalization of a uniquely different socio-political system. By presenting an alternative system (or set of polices) that both advances the material existence of collective society and

also stands contrary to prevailing ideology of exploitation, then the normalization can be said to offer an alternative to capitalism, one that fundamentally makes us reconsider our role in capitalism's hierarchy. In doing this cultural analysis, one that often swings between utopic socialistic representations and more dystopic capitalistic representations, I will be drawing on a series of economic texts and studies, some of which I will now discuss in the section below.

Socio-Historical Context

With the above terminology, theorists, and theories in mind, I wish to take some time addressing why I am specifically targeting the problem of economic disparity. In this section I will provide an outline of the economic crisis that faces contemporary society. In the past five years a lot of academic and political attention has been focused on the increasing income and wealth disparity between the wealthiest and poorest segments of the American and European demographics. Simply put, there is an emerging crises at hand for the working class which has increasingly placed at risk certain unalienable rights such as education, health-care, and social welfare; this is despite vast corporate profits, increasing national GDPs, and ever increasing concentrations of wealth. Products and profits are being generated, and they are simply not being distributed to those who need (or created) them.

I believe that SF provides a medium to help resist this trend by targeting the ideological place of individuals in society. As I will argue, cognitive SF makes individuals more aware of their ideological position at the bottom of society's hierarchy. The following economic research papers and books will help point at some key socio-economic issues and trends this thesis will discuss in the coming chapters. While this section may become a bit dry, I wish to point out that while Marx utilized Robinson Crusoe in his work to emphasize certain aspects of political theory, I have here turned back to political and economic theory to help emphasize literary content. Such is our hermeneutic nature, cycling from cultural facet to facet in our ever-spiraling quest for understanding.

That stated, I think the Oxfam report by Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva and Nick Galasso from January 2014 raises some good key starting points to consider. For example, they state that about half the world's wealth is now owned by 1% of the population (2). They also note that seven out of ten people are living in countries where economic disparity has increased in the past thirty years (3). However, in light of the Great Recession of 2007, perhaps their most scary statistic is that the top 1% in America has captured 95% of the financial growth from 2009, whereas the bottom 90% of the population has gotten poorer (3). They note that when

the rich are benefitting from financial markets, they tend to bend political rules to their own interests, as seen in the massive lobbying efforts of corporations in the US (11). There is then a predatory aspect to economics where the rich prey on the lower classes, and that predation then propagates itself through increased control of government policy. The report indicates that increased economic disparity works to diminish the rights to a fair wage, an education, health-care, and social equality between genders (27); all fundamental aspects to consider if we are to discuss variations of socialistic utopias like those in Robinson and Banks. This research should be kept in mind when we identify key elements in SF narrative that extrapolate from and comment on our own current socio-economic condition.

Another recent paper, written by Federico Cingano in December 2014 and published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that income inequality negatively affects GDP growth in OECD countries (15-17). This is a paper that is widely cited in the academic community. His research indicates that redistribution efforts such as higher taxes for the wealthy and increased benefits for the poor and middle class have no significant negative impact on GDP growth. Worker "benefits" are listed as health care, education, social housing, unemployment, and better labor-market regulation (16). He suggests there are possibilities for looking at concrete solutions to current problems that both alleviate economic disparity and still promote growth; this paper points to very real policy aspects possible even within the existing ramifications of capitalism (19-20). Again, we should consider the paper's attention to policy changes and how government actions can impact disparity. Cingano emphasizes how this is a top-down process that needs to be addressed at the governmental level. We should also be aware this paper indirectly opposes the myth of natural self-regulation proposed by laissez-faire capitalism.

However, no other recent economic work has raised so much global furor than Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013). His work is based on "data covering three centuries and more than twenty countries" and assembles one of the most extensive historical and comparative data sets ever compiled (8). Piketty is the most public and leading voice in the discussion on income and wealth disparities right now. Piketty's argument can be summed up by the following equation, R>G; this means that when the rate of return of wealth (R) grows faster than the economy (G), it creates an unbalanced cycle whereby the top earners generate a higher income from their existing capital than the bottom 90% can with their labor. As argued by Piketty, "When the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of growth of output and income […] capitalism automatically generates arbitrary and

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unsustainable inequalities that radically undermine the meritocratic values on which democratic societies are based" (8). If not corrected by government policy, Piketty argues that society enters a patrimonial or oligarchical state where the top decile (the wealthiest 10%) then maintains control over a larger and larger percentage of a nation's income and wealth, eventually leading to "unsustainable inequalities."

As we can see then, Piketty's research ties into the themes of exploitation and the emphasis on market regulation discussed above; this is not a singular discussion. This thesis will rely on two of Piketty's main conclusions. One, that the history of wealth distribution is deeply political and that our current situation is based on policies initiated around the time of the Reagan and Thatcher-era of the late 1970s to 1980s. Two, that there is no natural process to prevent inegalitarian forces from prevailing permanently; hence government regulation is key for preventing exploitation of the working class (24). These ideas merge Piketty with a chorus of voices in combatting inegalitarian norms. Whether he has read (or reads) SF is irrelevant beyond the fact that these two mediums are culturally porous; they draw on and from each other. One fuels the general imagination of the population, and one seeks to economically liberate that freedom to imagine. I will periodically reference some of the ideas and texts above throughout this thesis. I will also introduce new financial texts or theories as appropriate, mainly in an attempt to emphasize certain views or ideas that should be considered in tandem with specific socio-economic normalizations or SF themes.

With the above stated, I would like to now transition into the more historical and cultural conceptions circulating around economic disparity. As Piketty states, the global upheavals of the first and second World Wars led to a period of strong global growth and low inequality; he calls these years the "Trente Glorieuses" or the thirty golden years from 1945 to 1975 (16, 24). This period came to a gradual close in the 1980s due to changes in taxation and finance (24). Reagan and Thatcher's rise to power marked the beginning of conservatism and modern-day capitalism. In describing the rising inequalities of these years, I find it revealing to drift outside of hard-economic perspectives and move into the realm of literary and cultural criticism.

The Marxists Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton provide emphatic explanations of the exploitations undertaken during the period following the post-war boom. As Jameson states, capitalism began:

> tirelessly undoing all the social gains made since the inception of the socialist and communist
> movements, repealing all the welfare measures, the safety net, the right to unionization,

Jameson's stance on what constitutes "social gains" is made clear by his dismay over their consequent removal. In many ways, the economic reports I reviewed above are advocating the return of many of these socialistic rights. As Eagleton states, by the end of the 1970's "few at the time would have suspected that utopia had come and gone like a ship in the night, leaving the way clear […] for the long dark night of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher" (*Criticism* ii). Both Jameson and Eagleton then directly condemn the political years of 1980's. In the above case, when Eagleton mentions the end of "utopia," he is of course echoing the rollback of many of the same social reforms Jameson mentions above. Eagleton states that "the labour movement was bound and shackled by punitive legislation, unemployment allowed to soar, wage levels held down, welfare slashed and the market deregulated" (*Criticism* iii). That Eagleton and others acknowledge these policy changes as causal to rising inequality helps substantiate the more economic and statistical points made above.

The concept of utopia raised by Eagleton varies from generation to generation depending on socio-historical contexts, going back to Thomas Moore's *Utopia* and arguably Plato's *Republic*. Personally, as an American expat living in Oslo, I find utopia embodied in Norway with its strong emphasis on social welfare. However, despite successes such as the Nordic model, society's largest problem today is that capitalism has become so universal. As Jameson states, many individuals have simply accepted "that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically viable" (*Archaeologies* xii). This is a sad realization to read. In this sense, as Jameson continues, we more than ever need to explore utopic texts as:

> The Utopians not only offer to conceive of such alternate systems; Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet. (*Archaeologies* xii).

SF then is a privileged genre to explore these "sparks." With its emphasis on cognitive estrangement SF is, in essence, the essence of difference. I will emphasize the theme of radical difference in my first two chapters; while the works of Robinson and Banks differ from each other in form and address different socio-historical concerns, the very nature of their existence and consumption marks them as ideology-resisting precursors of change.

Conclusion

In material terms, SF utopic visions are not unlike economic research as they both explore various "sparks" from the social totality. However, while both amount to social tinkering, the latter tends to be based on concrete data. As Piketty emphasizes, while social science research may always be tentative and imperfect, by analyzing data and searching for patterns it can inform democratic debate and reveal preconceived and fraudulent notions (9-10). The concept of informed democratic debate is key for this thesis as this study looks at how SF functions as a didactic genre that encourages the reader to confront current day ideologies through cognitive estrangement. With the ideological reach of SF and the concrete grounding of social theory such as Piketty's, these two forms of theoretical production act in complimentary ways to confront inequality.

The economic research cited above helps establish a socio-political foundation to identify some causes of economic disparity. In many ways, this research helps ground this thesis in the practical reality of a dominant exploitative ideology and allows a firmer standpoint from which to approach the various social theories proposed by my selected SF authors (particularly Ringo); perhaps it even keeps my own fanciful utopic ideals in check when discussing Banks and Robinson. Radical difference in this sense might have to be taken down a few notches from the rather unlikely conception of a Marxist proletarian revolution to a more modified degree of political moderation and socialist evolution.

In conclusion, this thesis assumes that class disparity is increasing as a result of political changes in the 1970s and 80s. SF and socio-economic theorizing are two complimentary ways to help undermine the broad ideological reach of capitalism. As Piketty himself states, "the discipline of economics has yet to get over its childish passion for mathematics and for purely theoretical and often highly ideological speculation, at the expense of historical research and collaboration with the other social sciences" (33). This thesis is one such attempt to bridge two perhaps otherwise contrary disciplines in an attempt to help collaborate on a broader economic and social problem. While Piketty himself looks towards the novels of Austen and Balzac for descriptive clues to the origins of class disparity and wealth generation, this study will focus more on the prescriptive genre of SF that envisions new methods to overcome inequality. These are methods that also force the reader to address disturbing aspects of current inequality.

While studying Austen's novels may give us an insight into class inequality of the early 1800s, looking at contemporary SF not only allows us to explore how literature reflects on the present day inegalitarian situation, but also how the author envisions the problems of inequality becoming resolved; usually hinging on technological, sociological or political solutions that reflect back on inegalitarian aspects of the present socio-historical climate. While other forms of fiction may explore class-based questions (*Breaking Bad's* social commentary on healthcare being perhaps one of the most contemporary and powerful examples), the cognitive estrangement of SF adds an element of implicit critical self-reflection in its theorizing that makes it a privileged vehicle for combating prevailing ideology. We are reaching a turning point in human civilization. A rising tide no longer lifts all boats; the rich can now afford to live in space stations.

1   The Mars Trilogy

Within this framework of diversity, it still must be guaranteed that all individuals on Mars have certain inalienable rights, including the material basics of existence, health care, education, and legal equality.

<div align="right">-Second work point of a Martian government in Green Mars</div>

Robinson's *Mars* trilogy (1993-96) is as complex as it is vast; thus it can be difficult choosing a starting point. This series depicts the colonization of Mars over the course of two hundred years and centers around a series of colonists known as the "First Hundred." While the initial colonists attempt to establish a utopia on their new world, Earth attempts to exploit Mars for its natural resources. This chapter will explore how Robinson structures the *Mars* trilogy in a way that illuminates the inequalities of current economic disparity through the portrayal of Martian society relative to that of Earth's.

The first section of my chapter will focus on the Martian utopia. While created from a multiplicity of strong individuals and ideas, Mars still forms a cohesive singular body. It is in this way both a multiplicity and yet a singular entity; it shares a diversity of individual utopias, while still maintaining a unified egalitarian platform. My second section will explore the ways in which Mars functions as a utopic contrast to the more dystopic Earth. I argue here that the Earth-Mars binary functions as a form of Marxian dialectic, in that Mars represents a socio-economic system that both resists and yet ultimately engages with Earth's capitalism, a historical facet in its own creation that it cannot escape. I will discuss how the gradual societal development that emerges from the interactions of Earth and Mars is represented in the passage of narrative time. My third section will focus on the problematic aspect of narrator privilege: I will be interrogating whether the use of privileged individuals as narrative focalizers undermines the broader normalization of egalitarian ideals achieved in the text. Privilege, I show, can be moderated by the fair distribution of labor and societal resources like education. Thus, this chapter will ultimately argue that Robinson's *Mars* trilogy undermines capitalistic norms as evidenced in the dialectical relationship between Earth and Mars and Mars's movement towards socialistic utopia.

This series has been crowned the most important SF work of the 1990s and has won several awards (Booker and Thomas 82). The first novel, *Red Mars* (1993), received the Nebula Award, and the following two novels, *Green Mars* (1994) and *Blue Mars* (1996), each won Hugo Awards (White 578). This trilogy, in many ways, marks a revitalization of American SF and utopic writing. As Booker and Thomas details, the 1980s were

characterized by the neo-conservative retrenchment of Reagan and Thatcher, in which the "cyberpunk" sub-genre of SF emerged (82). Cyberpunk was characterized by a latent cynicism with society; while the genre often portrayed "technology" as having advanced (one can then also add "productivity" increasing), the genre was unwilling to imagine a better future as social, political, and economic problems were not correspondingly resolved (Booker and Thomas 10). While the Soviet Union existed, utopianism was "vaguely associated with the presumed evils of the Soviet menace" (Booker and Thomas 82). Hence, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and a decade of socially pessimistic cyberpunk behind it, the climate was much more hospitable to utopian fiction (Booker and Thomas 82). Robinson's first utopic novel, *Pacific Edge*, was published in 1990 and discussed "humane environmental and social polices" (Booker and Thomas 171). This work paved the way for his later *Mars* trilogy published between 1993 and 1996.

The *Mars* trilogy has, by far, the largest critical reception of the three sets of texts this thesis will discuss. This section will provide a brief review of some of the more relevant publications in chronological order. Carol Franko published one of the first papers in 1997 and looks at how intertextual dialogization historicizes *Red Mars*. Robert Markley, who also published a paper in 1997, explores the trilogy's conflict between capitalism's more technocentric focus on production and the concept of a more nature-friendly and holistic ecotopia. He sees the trilogy less as a "utopia" and more as a thought experiment on the greening of science, economics, and politics (775).

Fredric Jameson, Robinson's former PhD adviser, brought a lot critical attention to this series in 2000.[3] Surprisingly however, he mentions neither Markley's or Franko's earlier research. Jameson's essay explores the generic tug-of-war between literary realism and modernity in Robinson's narrative reality; he ultimately argues that the *Mars* trilogy should be read allegorically. As he states, "any first scientific reading of the Mars trilogy must eventually develop into a second allegorical one, in which the hard SF content stands revealed as socio-political – that is to say, as utopian" (396). Jameson's analysis discusses the constructive ambiguity between Robinson's use of "hard" SF rhetoric and the more "modernist" approach that calls into question the very nature of the object being presented. In this way, despite all the trappings of science and technology, the narrative undermines its own "realistic" production. I will discuss this point in further detail below.

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[3] This essay from 2000 was later reprinted in his opus *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005). All citations in this thesis will be made to this later work.

Elizabeth Leane published an essay in 2002 that explores how Robinson's trilogy is able to overcome post-colonial views of the "other." She does this by depicting Sax Russell's development from hard scientist to one more capable of "refusing the colonial and patriarchal impulse to naturalize and objectify the other" (101). She meant this work as a supplement to Jameson's essay from 2000, and argued that the discussion of "hard" SF passages needed to also acknowledge the "discursive relationship between science and colonialism" (88). The concept of the "other" is an important point to address in socio-political theory, as economically marginalized demographics can quickly be left voiceless in political debates. I will discuss this point in detail further down.

From around 2003, the critical literature becomes more diverse as more critics attempt to slice off their own academic corners of research. For example, Eric Otto writes about how the *Mars* trilogy evokes an ecotopian Leopoldian land ethic. An essay by William J. Burling from 2005 explores the more "radical politics" of the political work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* alongside Robinson's *Blue Mars*. Another essay by William J. White (2007) takes a structuralist approach to the characters in *Red Mars*. In one of the most recent articles from 2010, K. Daniel Cho writes about the role of recurring revolution in the *Mars* trilogy. This critical review should hopefully have outlined the field of major research up until the present day. While some authors discuss eco-politics, Mars's historical grounding, and egalitarian social norms, none undertake the more encompassing discussion of the Earth/Mars collective progression from capitalistic to socialistic norms this chapter seeks to cover. This thesis seeks to address this critical lack.

Before delving into my analysis, I would like to take a few moments to situate the reader in the basic plot of these three novels. While they are three separate books, they really form one large meta-text and almost need to be considered as a unified whole. *Red Mars* initially details the scientific voyage of the "First Hundred" to Mars. However, the goal of this trip eventually becomes the terraformation of Mars into a habitable planet for human beings. While the planet slowly undergoes its climactic changes, the overpopulation on Earth leads to a global war back home, killing hundreds of millions of mainly poor individuals. This leads to the assumption of power by wealthy nations, with large corporations slowly consolidating into massive organizations called metanats. The novel climaxes with the building and consequent felling of the space elevator on Mars in a (failed) revolution against Earth's capitalist domination and forced colonization.

Green Mars takes its name from the continued terraformation of the planet, now driven primarily by corporate efforts. The novel emphasizes further consolidated control by metanats (now merging into even larger corporations called transnats), however also introduces Praxis, a new type of democratic corporation that actively supports the original colonists (and resistance movements) on Mars. While the societies of both worlds drift towards tighter capitalist control, Praxis represents a utopic counterpoint in the Earth-Mars binary. This novel sees the Martian colonists begin banding together, culminating in the Dorsa Brevia agreement that sets a basic template for all human rights on Mars. The novel ends with a catastrophic sea level rise on Earth, which sparks a second revolution on Mars as colonists seek to capitalize on Earth's problems to seize independence.

Blue Mars closes the trilogy on a distinctly hopeful turn for the future of society between both worlds. The now independent Mars has melted much of its frozen water and has large oceans across its surface. It is habitable and people can breathe almost freely outside. Mars finally establishes its first real constitution, involving not only its own citizens, but also accepting input from individuals on Earth. Society on Mars has become socialistic, yet also become incredibly diverse. This novel uses much of its focus exploring the more imaginative possibilities of the egalitarian system on Mars (gliding, sailing, researching, farming, etc.), yet also explores the newer cultural conflicts arising from Earth-based immigration (in the form of the "MarsFirst" political party). There is a new wave of colonization called "accelerando" in which humans spread through the solar system colonizing various moons and planets such as Venus. On Earth, transnat control has essentially collapsed with the sea-level rise and society has slowly become more democratic in the ensuing crisis.

1.1 Cornucopia of Difference

The novels are, of course, far more complex than the outline above details. This section will explore how this complexity helps combat prevailing capitalist ideology. In doing so, I will be discussing Ernst Bloch's conception of dialectics. His dialectical process involves a critical relationship between the normal reality of day-to-day existence and the sudden shocks of difference that interrupt this reality. Bloch calls these sudden events *spuren.* This section looks at how the multitudes of differences, or *spuren*, in the *Mars* trilogy can ultimately come together in a form of synthetic utopic unity.

While the *Mars* trilogy is a story about societal conflict and the gradual development of new socio-political systems, there are also a multitude of characters, landscapes, and relationships worth exploring. In discussing these individual elements, I will relying on Jameson's reading of Bloch contained in his book *Marxism and Form* (1971). Bloch's approach to utopia can be considered wishful or hopeful. In Jameson's reading of Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1954-59) utopia is best characterized as a hope in the future. This hope can be recognized in objects as diverse as "political science, both of a conventional type, in the studies of the various theories of state and of social organization, and of a Marxist character, in the analysis of revolutionary strategy; the social planning inherent in the conception of Utopias of all kinds; *Technik*, not only in the sense of the scientific achievements of the world of the future, but also in terms of the way in which it alters our relationship to the objects around us;" and among other divers objects such as logic, literary criticism, and ethics (*Marxism* 121). These hopes usually reflect a subjective yearning for something better and are generally unconscious.

This future-oriented hope can be considered one half of Bloch's dialectical theory. Bloch's conception of dialectics consists of an intense relationship between the present and the future. The present represents temporal darkness, a hollowness, and in my interpretation, the mundaneness of everyday existence (*Marxism* 135-136). Its opposite consists of anything that abruptly disturbs or interrupts the present; Bloch calls these events *spuren*. *Spuren* are the smallest traces or spoors of utopic possibility. For Bloch these *spuren* "are both an external object and an immediate experience," authenticated by a subjective astonishment (*Marxism* 122). In the *Mars* trilogy *spuren* are revealed in characters like Nirgal and Jackie who represent the future denizens of Mars, in the revolutionary felling of the space elevator representing a freer Mars, in the various work and leisure possibilities allowed through eco-economics, in the diversity of the political parties and resistance movements on Mars (each with their own agenda),[4] in the unpredictable and uncontrollable vastness of the Martian topography, and even in the abundance of flora that eventually peeks out in all its multi-colored glory.

These events, objects, or people need not necessarily be inherently *good*, they simply need to express a sudden difference from the reader's normalcy. If we consider today's global dominance of capitalistic ideology, then these textual sparks of difference upset its unchallenged linearity. This difference can probably be characterized best by the Red and

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[4] A comprehensive list of these parties can be found in *Blue Mars* on pages 187-188.

Green political parties in *Red Mars*; in their dichotic existence each represents a polar extreme of difference, one for terraforming and one for Martian preservation. Ultimately, they cannot both achieve their maximum aims as these aims are inherently contradictory, but their existence still provides points of strong difference in the period of textual time they do exist. As Otto states, "Robinson's multi-positional narrative approach attests to his desire to move closer to utopia by encouraging readers to synthesize continually a complex array of political positions" (132). While Otto specifically looks at the "economic, philosophical, scientific, and historical perceptions of the land" (132), I am more concerned with how these different perceptions or sparks of difference resist the encompassing wholeness of capitalism.

I would like to emphasize that the present or temporal darkness I discussed above is, in this case, the reader's own. These *spuren* are inherently an ideological tool and can be used to inject a sharp aspect of foreignness into the text, not unlike cognitive estrangement. The point of difference then is that cognitive estrangement is a dynamic transformation, whereas *spuren* are simply sparks of difference that hint at the future by interrupting the present. Thus when Frank asks Hiroko to bet a sum of money, the reader receives a small shock when she replies, "Do you really think money matters anymore?" (*R* 92).[5] Of course, this comment is referencing the lack of money in More's original Utopia and forces the reader, momentarily, into a different socio-economic way of thinking alternative to capitalism. This little spark opens up a world without currency. Much as Franko discusses in her essay from 1997 then, there is an intertextual historicity being opened up in the various dialogues of these characters. While this comment, by itself, can hardly be considered a dynamic transformation (it is, after all, just a snippet of dialogue), within the structure of the narrative the comment evokes a small spark of difference. However, these small sparks of difference add up and build on each other. If Jameson is correct in his assertion that the universality of capitalism in today's society is nearly invincible, then the fact that these three novels are an encounter with *many* such differences helps undermine the dominant linearity or singularity of capitalist ideology (*Archaeologies* xii). Each one of these encounters with difference, each *spuren* is a Blochian spark of astonishment for the reader to experience and reflect on.

There is a multiplicity at work in the Mars trilogy, one that resists any simple linear solution to social problems. Robinson, through the course of these novels, produces multitudes of *spuren* that interrupt the status quo of capitalism. Yet, as mentioned above,

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[5] Mimicking Jameson's system in his *Archaeologies*, quotations to the individual books in the *Mars* trilogy will be coded as *R* for *Red Mars*, *G* for *Green Mars*, and *B* for *Blue Mars*.

there is a subjective element to this dialectic: namely astonishment. Astonishment is an emotion that intrudes upon everyday existence, an existence characterized by darkness, an inverse *carpe diem* as it is more the day which suddenly seizes you. As Jameson states, "Astonishment is therefore to Bloch… one of the most concrete possible modes of our being-in-the-world, the correlative, on the subjective side, of an objective disposition" (*Marxism* 122). Hence, in the darkness of monotony and routine, a constant ignorance of the now, there intrudes *spuren* which capture your attention. For example, when Maya is told, "that Hiroko had plans to fertilize several of her own ova with sperm from all the men on the *Ares*, and store them cryonically for later growth on Mars," her sole response is to think that "they were becoming strange" (*R* 101). It is in these brief unusual narrative moments that you, as a reader, are alive.

However, as I see it, there is also an inherent contradiction to this dialectic. In the instance of astonishment, the *Spuren* then becomes familiarly integrated into the present and then consequently fades into history. In this sense, Hiroko's actions above become far more mundane when she develops into the far more radical mother queen of the Areophany. Thus living in the now, or in the case of SF, keeping the reader consistently astonished by the truly estranged, keeping her reflecting on the darkness of her own current existence, is an enormously difficult process. Robinson's variability, his sheer range of *Spuren*, constantly bombards the reader, keeping her aware of her existence in society and simultaneously slowly altering her perceptions of surrounding ideological norms.

If we consider the trilogy as a whole, then this multiplicity of *spuren* function as variables in Robinson's broader narrative. They are parts of a complex Martian experiment, one not relegated to the merely "scientific." As Jameson states:

> if all of Mars is one gigantic laboratory[…], then it is a unique laboratory in which the variables can never be isolated in the ordinary ways, but always exist in a multiplicity which can scarcely be mastered by equations let alone by the computer itself. (*Archaeologies* 395).

If we focus simply on the characters for a moment, each character contains an almost polarizing uniqueness, to the point of being categorical. As Jameson notes,

> Multicultural liberals (like John Boone) are opposed to Machiavellian operators (like Frank Chalmers, for whom politics 'was all damage control' [*G* 442]), themselves both opposed to professional mediators (like Art Randolf, responsible for the original Dorsa Brevia declaration and then the first constitution itself), all of their forces and positions then recirculated through the woman characters, Mars' first president and first engineer. (citation, brackets, and parenthesis in original, *Archaeologies* 404).

These personal relationships are absolutely reflected in the multitude of various micro-utopias, which are just as varied and conflicting; we see this in Hiroko's Dorsa Brevia matriarchy, the Bogdanivist haven Vishniac (which views the revolutionary Arkady as their utopic hero), or the student society of Sabishii (Nirgal's utopic home at one point). Even Sax has his own utopia: "For Sax, a scientific conference was utopia" (*G* 296).

However, despite all these points of difference, they find common ground in working to form a better world together. As Jameson states, "it is clear that tension between the characters is a precondition for such moments of collective euphoria" (Archaeologies 404). But I feel that Jameson drifts too quickly over a certain point here. It is the *precisely* because of the ability of such differing individuals and groups (such differing variables) to come together to create a document such as the Dorsa Brevia accord or the later constitution in *Blue Mars* that we must celebrate their "collective euphoria." They move from difference to collective, they recognize the value of heterogeneity, but also the value of establishing a firm egalitarian framework for society, one in which a regulated framework prevents exploitation. Jameson, I feel, becomes a bit too lost in the terraforming science rhetoric, whereas I am emphasizing more the collective nature of establishing an egalitarian socio-political framework.

In this sense, many of the main characters can be said to unify behind the theme of utopic (or socialistic) egalitarianism. This development ultimately moves us away from the more individual nature of *spuren* and into the more collective nature of utopia. This leads us into a discussion of Suvin's more societal aspect of utopia as discussed in the introduction; however, one more imbued with a wealth of shifting differences. As John emphasizes in a flash of insight, Mars is, "like a great orange cell, or embryo, or egg. Chromosomes whipping about under a mottled orange shell. A new creature waiting to be born, genetically engineered for sure; and they were the engineers, still working on what kind of creature it would be" (*R* 465). Mars is then a collective utopia formed of many individuals with different interests, but one that holds at its core the collective rights of everybody.

1.2 Utopian and Dystopian Synthesis

In this section, I will show how Earth and Mars work in binary opposition with each other. I discuss how Mars is generally emphasized as the "utopic" planet, while Earth is generally portrayed as more "dystopic." I look at how this binary helps accentuate certain norms of society and helps problematize the role of ideology in reinforcing those norms. I also consider

the negative aspects of finance capital in regards to capitalist ideology. Finally, I explore how Robinson's trilogy can be read as a Marxian dialectic depicting society's movement from capitalistic to more socialistic norms.

While my first section discussed the collective differences of Mars, I believe that Earth's role in this trilogy is to ground the reader in the familiar. In this sense, Earth represents the status quo of today's society: capitalism. *Red Mars* works very hard to achieve this end and, in its depiction of the *Ares*, grounds the reader in societal norms very similar to our own. In addition, there is a comforting familiarity in the generic quality of this voyage. Robinson lures the reader in with what may appear as just another SF text about a voyage to Mars. Even the predominantly Russian and American crew is a direct extrapolation from today's space-faring monopolies. The sheer familiarity of a "space voyage" lulls the reader into familiar tropes of galactic space opera, little different than "Pulp" traditions from the 1930s. Even the conception of government-sponsored exploration is familiar on a historical level; a story as old as western civilization itself, a latent manifest destiny. In many ways then, Robinson wants to ground the reader in a norm so as to later break with that norm. Hence, much of the framework for identifying with some of the common elements of capitalism is initiated in the first novel of the trilogy. In this sense, the later depiction of Mars becomes ever so much more different only because initial voyage from Earth is so familiar.

This stated, many of the reflections on capitalism in the narrative make it clear that capitalism is tied with unfair exploitation and manipulation. This characterizes Earth as a form of dystopia. I am not the only one who sees Earth in this fashion. Leane, in her paper from 2002, also makes a good point in regards to the binary between Earth and Mars. As she states:

> The whole trilogy can, from one perspective, be seen as an attempt to theorize, or, more accurately, to narrativize, a postcolonial dystopia on Earth, and a postcolonial utopia on Mars; its central problematic is whether the two can exist simultaneously and interdependently. (87)

I agree with this statement. However, since her paper focuses mainly on the character of Sax Russell, I wish to instead build upon the broader socio-political implications of Earth's relationship with Mars and what this relationship ultimately means in regards to economic disparity.

Perhaps most importantly we should note that the reader is explicitly made aware of Earth's capitalistic system dominating this socio-political relationship. As Frank exclaims:

> Some people were used to being treated like ball bearings. A lot of people, in fact. But on Mars it was supposed to be different! [...] A million people and no law, no law but corporate law.

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The bottom line. Minimize expenses, maximize profits. Run smoothly on ball bearings" (*R* 593).

Yet, despite this cynicism, the narrative in many ways begins with our protagonists being those very same ball bearings. In this sense, when it was just the First Hundred on the *Ares*, they were all relatively unaware of their ideological position in society. In an Althusserian sense, they were unaware of their statuses as subjects of capitalism, the dominant ideology of both the narrative world and our current world.

The narrative seeks to slowly initiate the reader into the more problematic aspects of capitalist paradigms by depicting the characters of the First Hundred becoming aware of their ideological place in society. Thus, there is the consistent buildup of *spuren* that slowly nudge the hundred from this familiar capitalist paradigm and causes them to change their original flight plans. One such *spuren* occurs when Arkady exclaims, "I don't think we should pay any attention to plans made for us back on Earth!" (*R* 81). Arkady is attempting to, again in an Althusserian fashion, free his companions (ideological subjects) from the control of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) back on Earth. By making them aware of their subordinate relationship to Earth, he calls into question the actual strength of that relationship. This is consistent trend throughout the novel. However, like Fiske, I feel that the term "ISA" is too cumbersome for our current society, especially since so much ideology is pervasive and invisible.[6] It is less top-down and more lateral, we internalize ideology and then inflict it on others around us.

Our ability to laterally reinforce ideological systems among ourselves is reflected in how the First Hundred respond to Arkady's statement above. His statement is initially greeted with silence, and then, eventually, subdued attention. Arkady here speaks of altering the architecture of the settlement they plan to build; he emphasizes how the original plans represent "American business thinking" (*R* 83). Some, like John, are curious about this statement; others, like the Christian capitalist Phyllis, are resistant. Yet this dialogue draws attention to how people function within a system where it is normal to follow certain "obvious"

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[6] Fiske and Althusser provide some strong Marxist guidelines to analyzing culture. Fiske sees culture not as Pierre Bourdieu did, as an aesthetic appreciation of high art formed by class position, instead Fiske sees culture as the "generation and circulation of meanings" in the social experience of living in industrial societies (Parker 233, Fiske 305). To him, culture is about how the exploitation of one class by another is "naturalized" by ideology, in that the people who are dominated are generally unaware of it (Fiske 306). He states that it is possible for people to resist this struggle and that this resistance is often conscious. Fiske builds on research by Althusser who notes that subjects are always already subjects, in that they are part of an ideologized culture even before birth; in order to break with ideology one has to first acknowledge that they are a part of ideology (Althusser 299-300).

systems. In this sense, even if one "avoids" politics like Mary Dunkel, one is still propagating the ideological system by refusing to discuss that system, hence why the Russians cry out, "That itself is a political position!" when she states just that (*R* 83).

The point I am stressing here is that there is a constant tidal motion in the dialogue that carries through all three novels, a sort of Platonic rhetorical dialectic pushing back and forth between characters that cracks open the normativity of their ideological place or roles in society and creates spaces of resistance to the universality of capitalism. These spaces then lead to a searching for alterity on Mars, or as Jameson explores, utopic possibilities. Perhaps no section of the novel characterizes this best than Frank's brief discussion on ideology:

> **Frank:** How can people act against their own obvious material interests? […] It's crazy! Marxists were materialists, how did they explain it?
> **Slusinski:** Ideology, sir.
> **Frank:** But if the material world and our method of manipulating it determine everything else, how can ideology happen? Where did they say it comes from?
> **Slusinski:** Some of them defined ideology as an imaginary relationship to a real situation. They acknowledged that imagination was a powerful force in human life. (*R* 693).

In this example, we see both a reference *to* Althusser's conception of ideology, and the lateral movements of ideas *within* ideology. Frank's discussion is symbolic here as the act of discussing ideology helps reveal the subversive nature of ideological control. If we consider the SF text as a work *of* ideology (for the reader to consume), then there are three levels of ideology being explored here. In this sense, I believe that the *Mars* trilogy is critically self-aware of how ideology can both be identified and resisted in society.

While many of these *spuren* may interrupt the reader's ideological norms, many of them cannot be considered true cognitive estrangements. I think Jameson raises a good point when he looks at the more aesthetic aspects of Robinson's SF realism:

> Leaving aside a few wonderful Stapledonian excesses (the terraforming of Venus and the train-city Terminator on Mercury in the last volume), what look like science-fictional elements here are mostly temporal inversions, parts of early Mars looking old and museum-like, the great metropolis of Burroughs drowned under water in the last volume, inverted allusions to Terran ancient history – in particular to Crete - as those rise back up in Mars like a "return of the repressed". Is this then to say that the Mars trilogy is a more realistic kind of Science Fiction than what we ordinarily associate with space travel and emigration? (*Archaeologies* 394-95).

In one sense, Jameson is right, the estrangements, while cognitive, are hardly fantastic. They are, in many ways, simply inversions of the familiar reality of history. Much of what happens on Mars can happen on Earth after all, just minus the helmets. These are more *spuren* than truly "transformed" cognitive estrangements.

However, Jameson seems to temporarily forget here the largest cognitive estrangement of all, that of Mars itself. In this sense, Jameson's neglect shows just how normal Mars becomes for the reader as the passage of narrative time unfolds. Mars is an enormous aesthetic reflection on emerging society. Ann, even in her more angry moments of despair in *Green Mars*, cannot help but look upon the changes of Mars in a melancholy haze.

> The ice was pure, clean—translucent purple under the sunset sky—clearer than any ice she had ever seen on the Martian surface, and smooth, not broken like all the glaciers. It was steaming faintly, the frost steam whipping east on the wind. And out on it, looking like ants, people in walkers and helmets were ice-skating. (*G* 173)

Here, just a moment ago, Ann was looking at the large mining equipment meant to ruin/terraform her planet; and yet a second later the ice/mankind is still so hauntingly beautiful. In one sense then, these contradictory images function as a collective cognitive estrangement because they represent the transformation of Mars. Many events that can be considered *spuren* in isolation are actually part of a larger cognitive estrangement, one that makes us critically aware of the socio-historical condition they derive from. It is, after all, production machinery, deep industrial pits (moholes), and windmills that drive environmental, and consequently social, change on Mars. Viewed in conjunction with human beings, culture, and nature, the effect becomes a dynamic and confrontational progression through time.

Thus, I think that time is a key consideration when discussing SF as social commentary. Even the reading length is part of this estrangement. As Jameson notes, "Sheer length, sheer reading time, is crucial here in order to develop an *analogon* of historical time itself" (italics in original, *Archaeologies* 396). Similarly, time is a key element for Bloch, as his theory of dialectics is forward looking, anticipatory, and within time. Robinson's work is a case of the extrapolative taken to its utmost extreme, one that characterizes each change in excruciating detail, almost as if in defiance of analogical cognitive estrangement, a form perhaps more akin to a pre-Marxist idealism. Time is a key element for Robinson as his work is so firmly rooted in the theoretical and scientific possibilities of today that it becomes a recognizably dialectical synthesis of the familiarity of today and the uncertainties (and differences) of tomorrow. In a formal sense, the slow progression of narrative time itself helps validate the cognitive extrapolations being presented, one cognitively charged *Spuren* at a time.

However, I feel this alignment raises a troubling question. Does the alignment with traditional extrapolative SF (like space opera) then naturally align Robinson's work with the rhetoric of science? Robinson's usage of hard science details in his work is undeniable and

ubiquitous. However, Robinson also has a tendency to undercut his very "hard" SF approach at times. For example, at the beginning of this chapter I noted that Sax's personal utopia was a "scientific conference." This was very much the case before his eventual change. As Leane notes, "Sax's pre-conversion conception of the scientific conference as utopia is destroyed when he recognizes the ubiquity of political motives and perspectives" (99). In this sense, Robinson undermines the very "scientific" aspect of science by converting its key practitioner to something more humane than the average "scientist."

One can then still approach the world rationally without subjecting "objects" to a specific mechanical gaze. As Leane states:

> Science, then, is an integral component of Robinson's utopian vision in the Mars trilogy, but not science as traditionally conceived and practiced. Robinson's utopian science requires the openness to the "other" advocated by Michel, and the political self-awareness eventually realized by Sax. (99)

As noted earlier, Leane here is contributing to Jameson's discussion of "hard" SF in Robinson's work, and I completely agree with her perspective. In fact, this political self-awareness and embrace of the "other" are key parts of any socio-political reading attempting to reclaim any economically marginalized group. In this sense, this new form of SF writing can also be said to usurp the traditional "hard" SF rhetoric of many space operas which can be highly masculine, individual, and Darwinist in nature. Thus, this usage, but consequent undercutting, of the "hard" SF in Robinson's work actually strengthens the more collective approach to egalitarian socio-economic development, or indeed, the movement towards a more socialistic society.

However, this re-definition of the "hard" SF rhetoric, one more inclusive of the "other," is still highly cognitive. In fact, we could even say that the cognitive nature of these texts are strengthened by the more inclusive usage as exemplified by Robinson's trilogy. As Jameson states (drawing himself on Suvin):

> The reassertion of the cognitive means, as we said at the outset, a refusal to allow the (obvious) aesthetic and artistic status of the SF or utopian work to neutralize its realistic and referential implications: so we do want to think about "real" science when we read these pages (and not only about the "mimesis" of science in the bad dismissive sense Plato gave that term), and by the same token we want to be able to think about "real" politics here and not merely about its convincing or unconvincing "representation" in these episodes, which dramatize our ideological objections and resistances to Utopia fully as much as they satisfy our impulses toward it. (*Archaeologies* 410)

I believe that the modified hard SF rhetoric in Robinson's novels helps serve as an extrapolative bridge between the current socio-economic conditions and the more utopic and egalitarian future. This bridge is strewn with *Spuren* serving as a breadcrumb path for readers to aesthetically and cognitively understand the dynamic possibilities of a socialistic utopia, and also, in the case of Earth, the contrasting dystopic consequences of unregulated capitalism (with all its consequent economic disparity).

Yet why do I focus so much on time? As the emphasis on the future is such a specific trope of SF (particularly in forward looking SFs like the *Mars* trilogy), I wish to specifically investigate how the passage of narrative time helps undermine capitalistic ideology and draw attention to economic disparity. If we return once more to *Red Mars*, we see that Robinson specifically grounds the early Martian utopia in history. As Arkady states in a conversation with John, "[T]he people who pay for the scientist islands will eventually want a return on their investment" (*R* 461). This *spuren* represents the first cognitively charged breadcrumb in a larger cognitive estrangement relating to finance capital.

This economic form of history is represented by the formula of M-C-M, where money is converted into capital that is then invested to generate additional money (Jameson, "Finance" 250). As Arkady hints at above, prior Earth-based investments have generated money or profit on Earth, which have then been converted into capital on Mars (physical production assets). This physical capital is represented by specific cognitive estrangements, such as the *Ares* (used to get to Mars), the self-replicating and self-controlling machinery, the massive drilling machines, and the agricultural technology among other things. These are things that take time and people to produce; they are investments which have already been made and whose construction is not shown in the novel. Hence, when Arkady says above that the transnats and governments now wish to see the next logical step in the formula (a return), he is both implying the production which came before the voyage, and the financial profit which is expected after the initial voyage; that which the reader more tangibly encounters in the following book, *Green Mars*. This places the novel's depiction of capitalism both firmly within Jameson's conception of "an expanding dialectic of accumulation" and within Marx's dialectical thinking, tracing the means of production through history and location ("Finance" 250). I will elaborate on Marx's conception of dialectics further down.

If we consider just the dialectic of accumulation for a moment, we see that it is a function of ideology. It is only one way of how relationships can be arbitrarily organized. This stated, we begin to see how this formula can be disrupted by, for example, the first and

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second Martian revolutions. They literally seize (or attempt to) all the machinery and assets, regardless of where they originated from or who paid for them. Thus by allocating narrative time to the discussion of capital accumulation and drawing attention to a system that reflects so cognitively on our own, Robinson is taking the key first step towards disrupting the universality of this dialectic of accumulation.

Again, the first step to disrupting the dominant hegemony is making people aware of it. As Suvin emphasizes, any literature which does *not* make people aware of productive forces in society functions more as an "occulting ideology" (*Positions* 55). Robinson's work does the inverse, he works actively to spread awareness of our position within ideology. John and Arkady's conversation then, among many others, are minor *Spuren* in the Blochian sense of instant astonishment, and function as part of a broader cognitive estrangement that helps destabilize capitalism's norms and also support more foreign and estranged extrapolations of society in *Green* and *Blue Mars*. This conversation extends Franko's original idea of intertextual dialogization into a whole new realm of high finance and Marxist associations ("Density"). Hence, readers can move with the plot forward in narrative time and rationally understand the development in how Martians approach and understand capitalism.

As more capital is put to work in *Green Mars*, we see the equality shared by the initial First Hundred not being extended to workers being brought in by capitalistic enterprises. These are the first wave of immigrants to land on Mars. In a conversation between Sax and Desmond discussing the metanat Subarashii's immigrant employees, Desmond reveals that they are using the longevity treatments to incentivize workers to take deadly amounts of radiation (*G* 318-319). The reason for this corporate policy comes back to formula above; the investment of money into capital must then generate additional money. If longevity treatments are effectively the symbol of American healthcare, a hotly contested facet of American existence these days, and they are then being withheld to encourage worker cooperation; the reader becomes witness to some very constructive forms of cognitive estrangement that emphasize how workers are turned into fungible commodities. Likewise, the toxic radiation is similarly symbolic of exploitative working conditions, particularly a de-regulated environment that cares little for the worker rights, but one that sacrifices them to the God of profit generation.

In this conversation then, the worker is revealed as a commodity only necessary to generate profits, becoming more expendable than machines. If we follow this logic of profit generation to its conclusion, then capitalism becomes perfectly *rational*. Machines are after

all valuable assets, they are conversions of money into capital. These workers do not even have "human capital," as within the work span of three years they are so irradiated as to be useless. Their health costs make them better off as "dead" assets. Perhaps with the investment taken in shipping them to Mars there might have been some tangible capital value associated with human life, however with the advent of the infamous space elevator, this cost has also become negligible. With a surplus of cheap human labor, and no government regulation of basic human rights, the narrative emphasizes the natural nature of big business to exploit cheap and fungible labor.

Again, we must consider here economic disparity as a function of history; the immigrants that come after the First Hundred are part of a group who suffer from pre-existing economic disparity and are now being exploited for their lack of economic power. This is a group that has lost its collective bargaining rights and do not have access to the universals of longevity treatments (again, longevity treatments as reified healthcare). With the inclusion of people into this discussion, I would like to take a moment to explain the Marxist conception of dialectics. Marx drew his conception from Hegel. As Hegel states, historical change is "an advance to something better, more perfect" (qtd. in Marcuse 238). In this sense, as Herbert Marcuse explains, historical change is therefore a development in society (238). In many ways, this development is future-oriented, similar to Bloch's[7]. The dialectic of *development* is then really based on negations of the *present* (Marcuse 282).

In this sense, our current socio-political situation is the present (wage labor, restricted access to healthcare, costly private universities, etc), and its negation is that which does not yet exist (dealienation, universal healthcare and education, etc.). While my examples may be playing with Marx's original ideas a bit, I feel they emphasize important contemporary points of the dialectic. As Marcuse explains, "In the social world, this negativity carried forward the contradictions of class society and thus remained the motor of social process" (312). In this sense, the *Mars* trilogy is giving the reader a privileged glimpse into the negations of *capitalism* by portraying a very *socialized* societal development. We see the negations as they unfold in *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars* with the dealienation of labor, and the advent of greater freedoms and distributed rights. Hierarchy is (generally) removed, land (generally) made communal, and assets are fairly distributed. Robinson's novels are then wrestling with images of economic exploitation in consideration of history and production. The extended cognitive

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[7] Bloch, coming later, obviously draws from the Marxist dialectical tradition.

estrangements these conversations and images weave together help bring critical attention to these relationships that fundamentally define economic disparity.

      The larger reason Mars appears utopic then is because Earth, which represents the negative aspects of capitalism, is portrayed as a dystopia.[8] In this sense, the room for negation is large at the start of *Red Mars*. However, as Jameson briefly discusses, the narrative does not directly describe conditions on Earth; instead we learn of the deteriorating conditions on Earth through a Martian focalization, creating a "novel disposition of the utopian and the dystopian" (*Archaeologies* 413). However, this juxtaposition of Earth and Mars is more complex than that; I believe that Robinson's representation of Earth serves a much larger role in the narrative framework than Jameson (or Leane) allows; indeed I feel that Earth functions as the dominant half of an emerging dialectical relationship with Mars.

      While Jameson acknowledges socio-political developments of Mars and Earth separately, I feel he neglects how Earth and Mars function together as part of a single socio-political system that is gradually moving towards change. This is evident in the progression of socio-political events experienced by both planets. Let us consider the socio-economic situation a moment. Metanats are slowly consolidating political control and the planet is overpopulated; there is extreme economic disparity because worker bargaining rights are essentially non-existent, labor is cheap, and profits are high. These factors then trickle onto Mars through increasing metantional control and immigration. Hence, there is initially a one-sided relationship between the dominance of Earth's capitalism (one very similar to and

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[8] This is a classic good/bad binary that is part of a utopic tradition going back to Thomas More. As Suvin discusses in Metamorphosis, there is typically a voyage or journey that displaces the reader to a different (utopic) island. This island generally has socio-economic conditions improving upon the author's own, creating a striking contrast that forces the reader to consider the portrayed pros and cons of both societies. The narrative reliance on a "journey" transitions into a more temporal displacement as the genre matured, as in Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890). Despite the narrative shift from space to time, the good society/bad society binary remains intact. However, by exploring narrative time as a literary method to visualize how societies potentially change, we begin situating utopic narrative settings in material history, establishing a tentative causality between human actions and future society. It is not necessarily the actions themselves that matter, it is more so the implied message being conveyed to the reader: socio-political change is possible; furthermore, change is the result of human intervention. For example, Suvin points toward the Marxist dialectical development from one socio-economic form of society to another in Morris's *News From Nowhere*. He states that, "Human history is seen as a dialectical development from tribal communism, or from Morris's beloved Middle Ages, through capitalism to classless society, "from the older imperfect communal period, through the time of the confused struggle and tyranny of the rights of property, into the present rest and happiness of complete Communism" (*Metamorphosis* 187). However, Morris utilizes the narrative framework whereby the protagonist "falls asleep" to time travel from his time frame to another, thus aligning it more closely to Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" than it does Robinson's more modern narrative framework of extrapolative speculation. Also, Robinson upsets a secondary trope of utopia by eliminating the typical "utopic guide" and instead makes the narrators both guides to and characters of a society they build themselves, thus further reinforcing the causality between human actions today and socio-economic consequences tomorrow. Robinson, then, is both updating and building on many of older SF utopic traditions.

directly extrapolated from our own current socio-economic conditions) and the smaller utopia that is forming on Mars. This stated, Mars creates (and continues to create) smaller counter-points of difference to this larger capitalist normality, some of which initially fail (violent revolution) and others which succeed (co-operatives, gift economies, less-violent revolution). If we consider Earth as part of a dialectical relationship with Mars, then Mars's actions are the negations of Earth's capitalistic norms.

However, the beauty of Robinson's narrative is that he shows this relationship going both ways. Not only does Mars negate Earth, but Earth also begins to negate its own capitalistic tendencies by learning from Mars. As Fort (the corporate leader of Praxis on Earth) states, "we've identified an emerging coalition of progressive elements from Earth, the biggest of which are China, Praxis, and Switzerland" (*G* 603). Thus Mars eventually begins to influence Earth's own socio-political situation. This impact is either indirect, such as the inspiration that Nirgal gives Earth simply by existing, or direct in the form of aid after Earth's continental shelf melts.

Through the trilogy's narrative progression then there evolves a dialectical synthesis, a gradual movement from one stage of society to the next. The dominant political society is always being impacted and pulled ahead by newer ideas that negate existing capitalistic tendencies. As readers, we see the development occur; so much as capitalism still carries with it hints of feudalism, then (in the context of Robinson's novels) Martian socialism still carries with it hints of Earth's capitalism in the form of eco-economics and the idealized corporation Praxis. As Jameson notes, there is little lack of leftist ideas in Robinson's work:

> Yet there is no lack, in the Mars trilogy, of socialist and cooperativist alternatives and ideologies, among which anarchism and Bogdanovism hold the pride of place, but also the Mondragon cooperatives in Spain. New economic systems are pioneered, the so-called "eco-economics", an elaborate calculation of value in terms of calories (R 268-270, G 316-317, B 117-118, B 240); or more rudimentary gift or barter economies ('it's a sort of two-track thing, where they can still give all they want, but the necessities are given values and distributed properly" [G 34]). (brackets and parenthesis in original, *Archaeologies* 415)

In many ways, these leftist movements and ideas represent both the synthesis of events in the novels, but also the synthesis of real world leftist ideas. The result of synthesis is always something different to both elements that created it and is never static. Even after Mars essentially universalizes equality (both economic and non), there erupts new political parties and new debates over immigration policy, hence utopia is never actually reached and is instead continuously reached for.

Yet these changes are not without a price, the utopic Mars continuously seeks to extricate itself from the exploitative control of Earth. As Mars is the weaker subject of capitalism, then, as K. Daniel Cho argues, revolution is a necessary ingredient in disrupting the capitalist mode of production and working towards utopia (78). While I agree that Mars must eventually wrestle with its origins, I, unlike Cho, believe that one should not consider these planetary economic systems separately as there is a dialectical influence that is being exerted between them. As Jameson reminds us, the Mars trilogy condemns violent revolution, because this political action is outmoded and inspires only military retaliation (*Archaeologies* 415). Thus, while I acknowledge Cho's point that the first revolution is simply a learning attempt along the path to further (less violent) revolutions, I view revolutions in the Mars trilogy from a broader perspective in that they function as a utopic sparks in the new economic synthesis emerging between Earth and Mars. They are a facet of Mars learning to deal more rationally with the society that originally labored to produce it.

I prefer to think of these planets as part of the same economic system because Robinson himself grounds the narrative in this connection. Robinson's narrative portrays a system in the process of dialectical synthesis, with each dialectical half drawing inspiration from, yet resisting the norms of the other. Earth may represent the larger dominance of capitalism that Mars rebels against, but reciprocally Earth becomes slowly impacted by Mars's socio-economic practices, especially after the Antarctic ice cap melts and the meta-nationals are forced to convert into simulacrums of Praxis. Hence, when Cho isolates revolution as a facet of Martian development, he neglects the broader progress of the socio-economic system shared by both planets.

Yet in a work as vast as Robinson's, it becomes easy to lose oneself in any one specific theme or trend. It becomes an easy task to play "spot the poor person" in a socio-political work spanning some two thousand pages (the later Martian colonists become an easy target). In this sense, it becomes less important to isolate individual activist examples of economic disparity and more important to address how such a large work weaves broader trends and images together. As Jameson suggests, utopias are an expression of an author's social tinkering; it is he who manipulates the norms and weaves the narratives plot-lines together. While it may be the characters that experience these utopic possibilities; it is then the reader who is carried along their focalizations of the fictionalized world. This then becomes a didactic process where the reader intuitively follows the thought processes and

actions of the characters in question leading to new, utopically-charged individuals, characters themselves in the broader meta-text of reality.

1.3 Undermining Privilege

The mention of character focalization above raises some problematic aspects that I wish to address in this last section. The first hundred are not your average workers; indeed, as we will see, they are symbols of privilege. I consider this conception of privilege from the perspective of economic research from Piketty and Oxfam. I ultimately argue that the privilege of education shared by major characters helps define them as strong narrators able to reveal and discuss the utopic changes in the world around them. As they are themselves part of that world and laboring in that world, I argue that the more debilitating problems of privilege are negated by their more positive reinforcements of economic equality.

Simply put, privilege is a problematic aspect of any literature that portrays socio-economic issues as it can lead to very one-sided and misleading representations of economic issues. In having almost all of his characters be educated and powerful figures, the reader is potentially alienated from the more mundane labor occurring in society. This normalization of privilege is reflected in Bloch's interpretation of Proust:

> For it is precisely the leisure of this class, given over completely to interpersonal relationships, to conversation, art, and social planning (if one may so characterize the energy that goes into the building of a salon), fashion, love, which reflects in the most distorted way the possibilities of a world in which alienated labor will have ceased to exist, in which man's struggle with the external world and with his own mystified and external pictures of society will have given way to man's confrontation with himself. (*Marxism* 153-154)

As Jameson continues, "the Proustian leisure class is a caricature of a class society" and serves as a skewed concrete image of what such a utopia might be like (154). In some ways, I feel Robinson does much the same.

While no specific commentary on the Mars trilogy has been made on privilege, I am not alone in pointing this distinction out in regards to Robinson's broader work; in an early essay from 1994 Carol Franko briefly states that Robinson has a tendency to make his characters privileged and place them "in societies characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty" ("working" 192). In discussing Robinson's short fiction that is similar to, but pre-dates, the *Mars Trilogy*, Franko looks at intersubjectivity and how Robinson works towards

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utopia by giving his characters "a desire for and a respect of otherness" ("Working" 191). Her essay raises the question of whether fairly acknowledging "otherness" compensates for normalizing privilege. She argues that it does because Robinson normalizes feminist values ("Working" 193). This same question applies to the study of economic disparity; in response, we could say that Robinson attempts to normalize egalitarianism in his fiction while calling into the question the more abusive practices of capitalism.

But what exactly is privilege? As Maya narrates, the First Hundred are smart, healthy and supremely well-educated (*R* 45). We can consider these traits as reflective of certain rights. "Intelligence" (and education level) can be considered a result of a high quality educational system and "good health" a consequence of good health care. These same qualities are strongly reflected in contemporary economic research on disparity and are generally attributed to the economically powerful. For example, the Oxfam report from January 2014, written by Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva and Nick Galasso, speaks of economic disparity leading an "opportunity capture" where the best educations and health care services are reserved for those who can pay for them, essentially the richest families. As Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso state, "Oxfam is concerned that, left unchecked, the effects [of economic disparity] are potentially immutable, and will lead to 'opportunity capture' – in which the lowest tax rates, the best education, and the best healthcare are claimed by the children of the rich" (2). This implies a forward-looking statement where the current disparity contributes to disparity in the future, hence reinforcing the theory that we are sliding towards an oligarchical society.

In this sense, we are looking at a society that is inherently unfair. As John states, "In games there are rules, but in life the rules keep changing. You could put your bishop out there to mate the other guy's king, and he could lean down and whisper in your bishop's ear, and suddenly it's playing for him, and moving like a rook. And you're fucked" (*R* 579). The wealthiest demographic have the ears of US politicians. Social programs like education and health are manipulated in favor of other facets, like lower taxes. As Piketty shows, education costs in the US have risen, whereas wage levels have stagnated, making a good education a valuable resource that leads to a better job, which then allows parents to send their children to expensive schools, thereby propagating cycles of wealth from generation to generation. As Piketty states, "In all countries, on all continents, one of the main objective of public spending for education is to promote social mobility" (518). Without this guarantee, as Piketty notes of the American education system, a "parent's income has become an almost perfect predictor of

university access" (519). Given the overpopulation problems of Earth in Robinson's novels, this economic extrapolation carries over well. Simply put, the first hundred are an economically privileged group.

Since roughly half of the team is American, there is strong relevance between what these economic texts on disparity discuss and the corresponding representations of the first hundred in the *Mars* trilogy. Let us isolate the character trait of "education" for a moment. Since an elite education is probably one of the most defining features of privilege, its ubiquity and normalcy can then be seen as reinforcing economic norms. Yet, in another sense, this education also makes them strong and believable narrators and, since they all have that education, it functions as an equalizing force. Robinson has inverted the disparity of education as privilege by making it a common strength or equalizer of *Red Mars* society, one that can even help overcome such differences as nationality, race, and gender. This emphasizes educational equality. Simply put, privilege of education means little if everyone has it.

More importantly, their degree of institutional learning also allows for a focalization that is generally critical, cultured, and highly knowledgeable in one or more various fields of study. There is a plausibility to their focalized narrative commentary and dialogue because they are scientists who are trying to understand the Martian changes systematically and scientifically; however as the novels progress, this same systematized thought process becomes applied to analyzing all facets of Martian and Earth developments, including economic disparity. Hence, because of the way these scientists are crafted as characters (as educated and, towards the end, culturally sensitive scientists) and because of the way they view the world (generally critically and systematically), they are well-designed narrators who can most easily identify and resist ideology as they are the demographic most likely to be aware of ideology.

This established, the First Hundred all have access to the good medical treatment, everyone works, and money has no relevance among the initial settlers in *Red Mars*, hence there is no economic disparity in the initial colony. The text's setting then takes educated, but equal, protagonists and sets them in stark isolation from the dominant ideologies of Earth in one of the earliest tropes of utopia: physical isolation. Without the direct influence of top-down ideology from ISAs, with individual wealth essentially meaningless, and because of their strong "educations," we as readers have an easier time suspending our disbelief when they start discussing politics, economics, religion, or even directly referencing utopia;

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complex topics whose eloquent discussion would be difficult to rationally extend to other demographics in similar situations, such as a group of sailors (or children) stranded on an island. This rationalized focalization is what creates the foundation for the entire trilogy as the latter two novels are cognitively extrapolated developments from the first; reinforcing the theme of gradual progression from capitalism to socialism.

This rational extrapolation of educated elites in the isolation of space then, despite reinforcing some problematic norms of privilege, works very effectively at undermining prevailing ideology by smoothing out differences between the initial settlers and allowing them to act as the perfect seeds of a new society, one founded on equality. In addition, they are able to critically discuss the gradual changes in their society, providing strong focalizers for the reader to learn from. This is a plot that, as Suvin states, "educates the reader into acceptance of the strange locus and its values by following the puzzled education of a representative protagonist" (*Metamorphosis* 177). However, instead of having a singular protagonist that explicates the utopian world as in More's *Utopia* or Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, we have a series of critical (and different!) didactic protagonists to learn from.

Yet why does this distinction of a privilege matter? This thesis is not trying to argue against capitalism as a whole, but specifically how current day unregulated capitalism is propagating a system of increasing economic disparity. Hence, this thesis is looking at the circulation of ideas surrounding economic disparity within the context of capitalism as the dominant ideology. To step back from SF for a moment, many people are distinctly unaware of the severity of the current economic situation regarding income and wealth disparity; indeed, there is a common ideological conception among post-industrialized nations that they are classless, or, in the sense of America, everyone is "middle class." I think that this is a paradigm shift that Robinson's narrative is trying to address. While he initially makes most of his protagonists emblematic of privilege, he then systematically deconstructs that privilege.

Robinson establishes and then undermines the privilege of his protagonists by having them progress from the semblance of elite scientists to something more akin to diversified individuals, working on the fundamental production of resources in society in addition to their respective specialties. For example, these scientists, who initially represent a pinnacle in the capitalistic division of labor, all partake in producing food for the common good of everyone; they work the agricultural fields of the ship and on the Martian surface. This theme runs all the way through *Blue Mars*, where a collective of scientists working to solve the problem of memory loss take breaks from researching "to help with the farm" (*B* 873). This labor is

normalized and only referenced in passing; it becomes a given of Robinson's society. This emphasis on common labor outside one's economic "specialty" helps ground the narrative in production in the sense that it bridges the fundamental gap of the archetypical desk-job and agricultural labor. In addition, after the second revolution, most collectives are self-owned. Our protagonists have essentially become workers, members of the bourgeoisie, and owners simultaneously; people are finally able to enjoy the fruits of their own labor.

Each character provides a strong individualized focalization that merges labor with society. Nadia's focalization emphasizes manual labor in her wrestling with machines and housing. Hiroko, tied to farming and the later Areophany, is another prime example of the mixture of labor and spirituality. Nirgal develops from an enormously successful political figure to farming the fields of Mars. Even the cynical and acidic Frank, when pushed to his emotional and mental brink, spends time with the Sufis, mining minerals on a small scale. In this way, Robinson uses his characters to counteract one of the most serious problems of SF as a genre, namely the inherent privilege of its individualistic protagonists. As Suvin states:

> If anybody ever works at anything among the significant characters in SF except at war, crime, and adventures, it is at travelling, cerebrating or at saving the galaxy [...] One never has any inkling who builds all those spaceships, who feeds and clothes our hero and heroine. (*Positions* 55).

There is thus a communality at work in the *Mars* trilogy; an intermingling and sharing of basic workloads and responsibility that together helps undermine the conventional hierarchal sense of wage labor; there is, in others words, a tacit condemnation of stark specialization and the division of labor so ubiquitous to capitalism.

Yet Robinson takes his society one step further towards the utopic by specifically giving workers a core framework of inalienable rights and tight socio-political regulation. This allows them to control their own means of production as opposed the consolidation of ownership and the patrimonial wealth transfer we see emerging in our own society. Technology then has allowed for more time, for dual occupations, for personal explorations, and general communality. These texts help question the commodification of labor and the connection between labor and productivity; Robinson's trilogy is pointing toward a socio-economic alternative that pivots around production, while still advocating a social liberalism (much like the Nordic model, to pull out a real world example). Whether these postulated alternatives are actually feasible in our society is not the point; what matters is that these cognitive extrapolations help destabilize the limiting conception that capitalism is the only choice of socio-economic structure.

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There is then a running bias in the trilogy towards certain core inalienable rights that are currently in such hot debate in socio-economic literature today, the rights to fair employment, to healthcare, to education, to leisure; all at risk in a system which squeezes all those without money, a class quickly growing due to increasing economic disparity. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Blue Mars* when Vlad attacks the problematic view of capitalistic hegemony. Vlad, a heretofore relatively unmentioned character, slowly hefts himself to his feet and literally lambasts the Martian youths for attempting to repeat the folly of hierarchal capitalism (*B* 195-200). Whether authorial intrusion or *deux ex machima*, Vlad's monologue is placed here to remind the reader that this a utopia based on and influence by history; indeed Vlad is the personification, the culmination of history himself, a history built on and between two dialectically linked worlds:

> The system is based on models from Terran history, and its various parts have all been tested on both worlds, and have succeeded very well. You don't know about this partly because you're ignorant, and partly because metanationalism itself steadfastly ignored and denied all alternatives to it. (*B* 196)

There is a challenge contained within this passage, a challenge lurking in the assertion of ignorance, an assertion hardly leveled at the non-character Anter; I feel the accusation of ignorance is leveled at the reader, an inverse didacticism maneuvering readers into asserting change and to discuss economic alternatives.

It is symbolic that in taking us so far, by building upon one consistent and rational *spuren* upon another, upon one cognitively estranged extrapolation after another, Robinson, in *Blue Mars* finally returns us to Earth. As Nirgal states, "We can most help the home planet by serving as a way for you to see yourselves. As a way to map out an unimaginable immensity" (*B* 141). This, again, is directed at the reader. The mutual development of both Earth and Mars points towards a more utopic unity at the end, one not resolved, but at least pointing in the right egalitarian direction.

2 The Player of Games

Empires are synonymous with centralized – if occasionally schismatised – hierarchal power structures in which influence is restricted to an economically privileged class retaining its advantages through – usually – a judicious use of oppression and skilled manipulation of both the society's information dissemination systems and its lesser – as a rule nominally independent – power systems. In short, it's all about dominance.

-The Contact drone Worthil explaining the Azad Empire to Gurgeh

This chapter will discuss economic disparity as portrayed in Iain M. Banks's Culture civilization, paying specific attention to his second SF novel, *The Player of Games* (1988). Banks, like Robinson, wrestles with socialistic ideals in his fiction. While Robinson represents one of the strongest examples of utopic writing to emerge from the United States in the 1990s, Banks is the strongest utopic writer to come from the UK, a period generally known as the "British Boom" (Booker and Thomas 82). His vision of utopia is achieved through cognitively estranged representations of advanced technology merged with egalitarian social norms.

In the first section of this chapter I discuss the Culture-wide novum of post-scarcity as a cognitively estranged representation of the social state. I then trace the cognitive, cultural, and socio-political associations of post-scarcity to show how this estrangement extends and pushes the boundaries of economic rights. In my second section I discuss how the more egalitarian Culture is then used to contrast the more dystopic aspects of the Azad Empire in order to undermine ideological norms of economic exploitation. I use the third and final section to comment specifically on Gurgeh, the protagonist in the story and a Culture citizen. I explore how his development through the novel represents a progression from capitalistic to socialistic thinking. Hence this chapter will argue that Banks's novel *The Player of Games* challenges the assumptions of conventional economic disparity through the Culture's analogical representation as a social state and the socialization of the protagonist Gurgeh.

As this essay deals with the circulation of ideas within society, it is important to first situate Banks in his socio-political climate. If Robinson is known for bringing utopia back to American SF in the 1990s, then Banks's use of utopian themes in the Culture novels makes him the clear equivalent across the pond (Booker and Thomas 82). Banks was part of a movement known as the British Boom that emerged in the UK in the mid-1990s, a movement that was "often highly literary and fiercely political" (Booker and Thomas 11). This movement drew inspiration from disparate genres such as fantasy and horror, in addition to SF subgenres like space opera and cyberpunk. As briefly noted in chapter one, western

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utopian SF bloomed in the political hole left by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, allowing for the free exploration of socialistic possibilities. However, as O'Connell notes, drawing himself on a study by Csicsery-Ronay, British Boom SF came into popularity due to a host of additional reasons, including a general decline in American SF and as a resistance to Thatcherism (O'Connell 2). It is perhaps the latter concern which is the most relevant to this study.

In many ways Banks's Culture series is a reaction to the conservatism that prevailed in the UK from 1979 to the 1990s. This was a period marked by income tax cuts, union dismemberment, privatization of state assets, a deregulation of financial markets, and reduced social spending in key areas such as education and housing. Many of these same policies are embodied in the dystopic and capitalistic Azad Empire, which portrays a society wracked by massive economic inequalities and exploitation. Contrarily, as the ultimate form of social state, the Culture is crafted as a revision of many of these same policy decisions, one that regulates and fosters egalitarianism in all its myriad forms, including economic equality. As Booker and Thomas state, the Culture is a utopic society run by sophisticated, self-aware machines, where many heterogeneous races live medically-extended lives "devoted to leisure, recreation, culture, education, and exploration of their individual potentials," informed by "socialist and anarchist principles" (82-83). In this way the Culture is cast as an anti-capitalist utopia with enlightened egalitarian leaders.

While Banks's work undeniably carries utopic themes in it, Ronnie Lippens notes that Banks never intended to construct a full-fledged utopia (135). This is, in my opinion, partly due to the interest Banks has in exploring the interactions of the Culture with other societies; in this way Banks is able to wrestle with themes such as otherness and globalization rather than simply expounding on the Culture itself with a typical utopic guide as done with More's Hythlodaeus or Swift's Gulliver. Thus Banks tends to set his novels on the periphery of the Culture, where "other" civilizations are generally at a less-advanced state both technologically and socially. This interaction sets off an interesting contrast between the more socialistic norms of the Culture and the more capitalistic, authoritarian, or religious norms of other civilizations. This is not necessarily meant to demonize these latter categories outright, but more to weigh the various socio-political forms against each other. To say that Banks's Culture civilization is an end-of-history example would be a mistake, his narratives constantly interrogate their own socio-political suppositions and, as we will see below, are mindful of the manipulative aspects of the Culture's generally machine controlled (socialized) government.

While much of the action takes place outside the Culture's borders, at no point are we ever completely unaware of the Culture lurking in the background as a benevolent (if meddling) influence. Much of the socio-political commentary is then achieved through the striking interactions and contrasts of these "dystopic" civilizations with the "utopic" Culture.

The Player of Games is no different. While ultimately narrated by Mawhrin-Skel, a Special Circumstances drone we encounter early on in the story, we are only revealed this fact at the end of the novel. This stated, the narrative is generally focalized through the protagonist Gurgeh, a Culture citizen. While work as we know it does not exist in this society, Gurgeh is known as a professional "game player" in that he is able to play many games at a very high level of skill. While initially set in the Culture, he is manipulated into cheating by the Culture and blackmailed into a voyage to the Azad Empire to play a game also known as Azad. That the empire bears the same name as the game is no coincidence.

Azad is an enormously complex game that is based on Azad's capitalistic society. In addition, all of society in Azad is based on how well one does in the game, making it inherently hierarchal. Gurgeh does well in the games, internalizing both the brutal aspects of the game and society in the process. However, to defeat the most difficult opponent, Azad's leader, he must return to his roots in the Culture. In this sense, his experiences with the ruthlessness and unfairness of capitalism in Azad lead him to understand how much better the egalitarian norms of the Culture are for society. In the last bout his playstyle shifts from "Azadian" to instead reflect the Culture. The final game represents a clash of societies and, using the socio-political style of the Culture as a guide, Gurgeh wins the game. This victory is correlated with the dissolving of the Azad Empire; the implication being that a socialistic society ultimately outlives a capitalistic one. Gurgeh becomes, in effect, *socialized* through this process and returns to the Culture a better and more empathic person.

The Culture in the above reading is being posited as a utopia. Yet we must not forget that utopias, even partial ones like the Culture, are subjective interpretations of how society *should* be. They are meant to highlight the possible improvements upon socio-political conditions. In this sense, when asked by the news network CNN if he himself would live in the Culture, Banks gave a resounding "yes" as it was *his* version of an ideal society:

> Good grief yes, heck, yeah, oh it's my secular heaven....Yes, I would, absolutely. Again it comes down to wish fulfillment. I haven't done a study and taken lots of replies across a cross-section of humanity to find out what would be their personal utopia. It's mine, I thought of it, and I'm going home with it—absolutely, it's great. ("Author")

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This response complies well with Suvin's definition of utopia as cited in the introduction. Suvin believes that utopia is a fictional construction based on the author's personal motivation to more perfectly structure the existing world. However, while adequate, I feel Suvin's definition does not quite capture the hope implicit in Banks's "fantastic" aesthetic utopia.

To fully understand Banks's work I feel we must turn to Jameson's more modern reading of utopia in his *Archaeologies* (2005).[9] As Jameson states, the Utopian Imagination, "attempt[s] to imagine a daily life utterly different from this one, without competition or Care, without alienated labor or the envy and jealousy of others and their privileges" (56). Banks's work is a clear example of the Utopian Imagination; he depicts a world where, "people walked or danced or sat eating or just gazing out, watching the fuss of airborne activity, or played sports and games" (*Player* 117). The Culture is a society of complete leisure compared to our own. His work often drifts into the fanciful, exploring the boundaries of egalitarian norms by filling his books with sentient robots and ships that love bird watching and collecting snowflakes.

Banks's novels are delightfully creative and, contrary to Robinson then, rely mostly on analogic estrangement (a form of cognitive symbolism) to create his strong cognitive estrangements of contemporary society. If we consider Suvin's definition of utopia now, Banks improves the "socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships" of the Culture through a very specific cognitive estrangement, that of "post-scarcity" (emphasis removed, *Positions* 35). Post-scarcity is an advanced technological state that generally indicates a form of materialistic society where everyone has access to everything they could ever need. This technological state represents one of the ultimate forms of the Utopian Imagination as discussed above, eliminating alienated labor and privilege. As John Clute states, "Banks, and those he has inspired, make the iconoclastic suggestion that, somewhere, somewhen, energy will be sufficient to needs, and scarcity will not exist" (75). In a society where food production, manufacturing, and all other forms of menial and repetitive labor are performed by mindless (non-sentient) machines, people are freed up to perform other, more creative, social, recreational, or spiritual tasks.

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[9] Jameson's *Archaeologies* takes as its premise Suvin's conception of utopia as the "*sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*" (italics in original, *Metamorphosis* 61). Jameson echoes this point several times (*Archaeologies* xiv, 57, 410). In Jameson's case, the "sociopolitical" aspect of SF is the utopian longing towards something very akin to socialism. In many ways socialism was a form of Utopian Imagination. However, as Jameson explains, the political legitimation of socialism has moved it from that of "Utopian fantasy to that of practical politics" (*Archaeologies* 55). Since socialism is no longer considered part of the Utopian Imagination, the Utopian impulse has waned and the Utopian Imagination has been forced to find other (conceptual) spaces to occupy, like SF.

2.1 Post-Scarcity

Now that we have established that Banks's novel is a form of Utopian Imagination, I will use this section to explore the concept of post-scarcity. I do this by first by situating Banks's work within the analogic form of cognitive estrangement. This emphasizes the critical nature of his creative style and establishes its cognitive relationship with contemporary socio-political conditions. I then explore the concept of post-scarcity through two well-known economists, Keynes and Piketty. This shows how post-scarcity discusses the more central problems of basic human rights. I conclude by exploring the cultural associations of three cognitive estrangements Banks uses in his fiction, namely travel, housing, and culture. These estrangements help demystify the economically marginalized "other," in addition to spurring some broader questions on egalitarian "rights" in society.

One of the most dynamic aspects of Banks's work is his post-scarcity society. The emphasis on material comfort is ubiquitous within the Culture. Thus, I propose that, if I may once more lean on Suvin, who himself originally draws from Bloch, the primary *novum* of the entire series of Culture novels is their technological level of post-scarcity. As Suvin defines it, a fictional novum is a novelty or innovation that is validated by cognitive logic which creates a "feedback oscillation" between two realities (*Positions* 37). These two realities are of course the author's work of fiction and the reader's physical reality; hence the novum, in this case post-scarcity, is meant to reflect on the reader's state of scarcity. Yet what form of cognitive reaction is the state of "scarcity" supposed to be evoking in the reader?

To answer this question we need to know what post-scarcity represents and how it is represented in Banks's SF. In the Culture it is an improvement of material society. But, as of this current time, it is a technologically unattainable one. Thus, in a Blochian sense, it more represents the *hope* of improving society by removing the scarcity of certain goods and services. In this way, Banks's work, in contrast to Robinson's Mars trilogy, seeks no extrapolative grounding for these scientific technologies; the "hope" is very symbolic. In fact, his fiction has been interpreted as almost entirely analogical. As defined in my introduction, analogical SF is more a symbolic form of cognitive estrangement that is less concerned with "scientific" accuracy than it is in aesthetic effect. Echoing Arthur C. Clarke's famous dictum, the hard SF author Ken MacLeod has stated that the science of Banks's Culture civilization is

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"indistinguishable from magic." Yet Banks is very aware of this fact and plays with how the "science" is presented:

> The *Limiting Factor* was tearing through something it called ultraspace with increasing acceleration; the craft's velocity was hurtling towards its maximum with a rapidity which, when displayed in numbers on the wall-screen, numbed Gurgeh's brain. He didn't even know what ultraspace was. Was it the same as hyperspace? At least he had heard of that, even if he didn't know much about it... whatever; for all its apparent speed, the ship was almost perfectly silent, and he experienced an enervating, eerie feeling, as though the ancient warship, mothballed all those centuries, had somehow not yet fully woken up, and events within its sleek hull still moved to another, slower tempo, made half of dreams. (*Player* 104)

In this section we can see that the "science" is not about conveying any form of theory or expressing any form of futurism. Instead, the science helps convey Gurgeh's doubt and his anxiety about going to Azad. It reflects on difficult questions like age and time, and even the unfamiliarity of the universe. In many ways then, Banks plays with and undermines the "hard" science of conventional SF in much the same way Robinson does. They both use science rhetoric, but they both undermine the authority of that language. Ultimately, however, Banks's science is still far more playful than Robinson's.

This type of scientific detachment then frees the Culture novels from any *historical* connection to our own society and Banks can then freely imagine the world however ideal he wishes, without having to worry about accurately extrapolating the hypothetical machinery, theories, or technologies necessary to make such a society possible. Narrative time then plays less of a role in Banks's work as he can simply bypass millennia to provide the requisite events, social constructions, and/or technologies to match the socio-political point he is trying to make. He can then later fill in the backstory if necessary. Yet this does not mean that societal states like "post-scarcity" lose their cognitive connection to the reader's world.

Indeed, despite the large technological differences, Banks goes to great lengths to situate his books within the same "space" as us. For example, in his novella *The State of the Art* (1991) Banks even arranges a covert surveillance of Earth by the Culture. As a mild snub to our collective human morals (economic exploitation included), we were found unworthy of contact. Even if most of the SF content is foreign, SF readers are still expecting references to space to be about not just any space, but *our* space. Likewise, any references to time are about *our* time, our pre-historic origins, or our nuclear post-apocalypse; these stories are cognitively connected to our universe. Thus a *cognition effect* is achieved by the narrative. In building on Suvin's definition of cognitive estrangement, Carl Freedman states that the lack of direct extrapolation does not preclude any *cognitive effect* as analogical SF is still connected to and

based on (either temporally, spatially, or even dimensionally in the case of alternate histories) the author's world (17-18). Thus, even in its more "magical" forms, analogic SF still maintains a strong cognitive connection to the reader's world.

As Freedman further emphasizes, fantasy is disconnected from the mundane world by a "noncognitive disjunction," in that it is removed from the actual world of the author. One could add here that fantasy is not just disconnected from the world of the author, but also the basic physical laws of existence. In this sense, Tolkien never lived in Middle Earth, heaven does not exist in space, and fireballs cannot be conjured up from emotional energy, whereas Luke Skywalker still maintains a tenuous cognitive possibility of having existed in the distant past. Thus in the Culture novels, because of this cognition effect, the reader makes the connection that the state of "post-scarcity" in the text is cognitively estranging his state of "scarcity" outside the text; this is because both associations are ultimately referencing the same universe with the same material and physical laws that must be navigated by the narrative.

It is through this cognition effect then that Banks's representation of post-scarcity has no less of an ideological impact than the near-post-scarcity achieved via extrapolation by Robinson in *Blue Mars*. These two authors simply go about their socio-political commentary in different ways. Again, to situate this chapter in the broader argument of this project, I am looking at how SF functions in the debate of economic disparity, with the overarching thesis being that truly cognitive SF (whether extrapolative or analogical) draws attention to and undermines normalizing conceptions of gross economic disparities. In this sense, when the conception of post-scarcity is introduced by an author, I argue that it is meant as commentary on the capitalist world from which the author derives and, contrary to futurist positions, should be read as a cognitive vehicle to undermine current repressive ideologies rather than satisfy hypothetical "what-if" explorations. While not futurist, my focus on the "ideal" form of egalitarian society can ultimately be seen as closed and reductive; it sets me at odds with critics such as Dalene Labuschagne (2011) who views utopias with a fixation on the ideal as "redundant or unproductive" (59). While I will address some points of her argument in detail further down, it should here be stated that SF is well-suited to wrestling with real-world societal and technological change and is thus one of the best genres to explore the exploitation that results from such change.

In analyzing this change, we must look back at history before we look ahead to the future; this is because SF is both a product of history and a reflection of that history. This

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stated, we can trace the history of "post-scarcity" as a theoretical set of rights and egalitarian norms which helps show that truly cognitive SF is based on egalitarian hopes or ideals that have evolved through time. Let us first de-mystify post-scarcity in the more concrete context of economics by briefly looking at John Maynard Keynes, arguably the most influential economist of the last century and a founder of modern macroeconomics. As Robert Chernomas argues, Keynes's himself actually believed in the "economic and human possibilities" of post-scarcity society. While Keynes, an outspoken critic of Marxism, was discussing the cost of production more so than the magic of materializing steak on a plate, the underlying utopic dream is the same. He envisioned a society where everyone had access to the same material essentials of life. As Keynes said in a 1934 BBC radio address:

> The right course is to get rid of the scarcity of capital goods-which will rid us at the same time of most of the evils of capitalism-whilst also moving in the direction of increasing the share of income falling to those whose economic welfare will gain most by their having the chance to consume more. None of this, however, will happen by itself or of its own accord. The system is not self-adjusting, and, without purposive direction, it is incapable of translating our actual poverty into our potential plenty. (qtd. in Chernomas) [10]

By bringing the costs of production down (through quantities of scale, technologies, and machinery), everyone then gains access to same consumer goods. Thus post-scarcity is rooted in universal rights, specifically a right to certain core facets of existence like a stove, heater, or washing machine.

While Keynes's quote above initially lends itself toward private production, what Keynes actually was advocating was strong state intervention in the economy. As he states in the last section of the paragraph above, the system of unequal wealth distribution is *not* self-adjusting, meaning that state intervention is necessary to enforce a minimum level of egalitarianism. He wanted to both increase consumption among the wealthy (where wealth tends to stagnate once it consolidates there) and increase government investment in an attempt to reduce unemployment (as capitalism thrives on cheap labor), ultimately resulting in a "planned economy" (1015-6). He believed that much of this policy should be funded by direct income taxes (something Piketty now downplays in favor of capital taxes). In this way, Keynes advocated an active form of social redistribution that helped ameliorate economic inequalities: "Since the end of the nineteenth century significant progress towards the removal of very great disparities of wealth and income has been achieved through the instrument of direct taxation" (qtd. in Chernomas).

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[10] "Capital goods" are those machines generally used to produce consumer goods or services.

While taxation and production may initially seem to have little to do with *The Player of Games*, we must consider more the idea behind these policy recommendations. By increasing taxes on the wealthy and making goods cheaper, Keynes was hoping to both spur the economy and reduce inequalities. In this sense, the aesthetic effect of the Culture's endlessly and magically created "stuff" is really more about the elimination of hierarchy and the cheap (and fair) distribution of goods. Let us consider an example of how this works. One alcoholic drink ordered in the novel is a "double standard measure of *staol* and chilled Shungusteriaung warp-wing liver wine bottoming a mouth of white Eflyre-Spin cruchen-spirit in a slush of medium cascalo, topped with roasted weirdberries and served in a number three strength Tipprawlic osmosis-bowl" (*Player* 190). Despite its complexity, it has little meaning as an object if it simply pops out of the machine with no labor involved. Instead, his drink becomes more a symbolic reflection of drinkable creativity (or from Gurgeh's perspective, simply alcoholism). This negates and even criticizes the hierarchy or status implied in ordering such an "expensive" seeming drink in most any other genre. In this way, because the Culture seeks to fairly distribute this productive power to every single Culture citizen, I see the novum of post-scarcity in the Culture as a cognitive estrangement of the social state, a body seeking to actively negate large economic disparities and lift the quality of life for everyone.

Similar to Piketty then, Keynes's focus was on the deleterious effect of wealth consolidation at the top decile, with the added initiative of eliminating material scarcity for more marginalized groups. Also similar to Piketty, Keynes believed that the effect of wealth consolidation had to be enforced or regulated, as economic inequality would not correct on its own. There is then a tangible history of ideas that Piketty ties into his work *Capital*, a history that Banks himself plays with. In this sense, post-scarcity is not really about magical technologies or wish fulfillment, regardless of what Banks himself might say, but instead more about the effective confrontation of social problems that exist in a world with consistent mechanic, physical, and economic laws that is cognitively connected to our own. This is what makes his work a form of Utopian Imagination rather than a simple "pulp" novel from the 1930s. Banks's novel is then *really* about distributing the fruits of production more equitably so that everyone has access to same basic necessities of life.

This stated, I would like to briefly mention that Keynes did not believe in complete economic equality. As Chernomas emphasizes, "Keynes was not an advocate of economic equality but felt there was not sufficient justification for the degree of inequality under

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capitalism" (1012). Likewise, the aim of my thesis is also pragmatic. Like Keynes, I am revisionist and I do not endorse revolution. As shown by Robinson's Mars trilogy, this violent path is ultimately a path towards failure. But if we can take a revisionist approach and moderate gross inequalities through concrete policies such as effective taxation like Keynes and Piketty suggest, then we are on the path towards more humane egalitarian norms in regards to economic equality.

In many ways we, as a globalized society, have currently achieved much of the advanced production Keynes was discussing in the 1930s. Basic food production, for example, has become a marginal cost in most nations through the use of fertilizers, genetically modified crops, and advanced machinery, which is why Piketty and his contemporaries spend more time analyzing unequal access to healthcare or education, which as he states, "probably account for the most tangible and impressive improvements in standards of living over the past two centuries" (105). As Piketty states:

> An average worker could afford slightly less than ten kilos of carrots per day at the turn of the twentieth century, while he could afford nearly sixty kilos per day at the turn of the twenty-first century. For other foodstuffs, however, such as milk, butter, eggs, and dairy products in general, major technological advances in processing, manufacturing, conservation, and so on led to relative price decreases and thus to increases in purchasing power greater than sixfold. (102).

Karl Marx foresaw this mutual development of production and society that Piketty discusses here; indeed, Marx postulated that the progression towards socialism was highly dependent upon the technologies developed under capitalism. As Freedman says, quoting Marx, "As a result of any serious attempt to establish socialism on a low productive and technological basis, 'only want will be generalized […] and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and all the old crap must revive'" (122). In this sense, the Culture uses post-scarcity as a novum to call into question scarcity as known by the reader *today*; thus drawing attention to the fact that we live in a society with a production-capabilities well capable of supporting more socialistic norms of distribution. While surplus food may no longer be an effective cognitive estrangement in that food is no longer a "scarce" resource for many wealthy countries, other rights, such as higher education, are still quite "scarce" for many (particularly American readers in this case, but obviously including many non-"wealthy" nations).

Many such rights in the novel are cognitively familiar to us, such as how Culture citizens have medically extended lives and boosted immune systems (coding for universal healthcare), enormous personal freedoms (coding for pensions, social welfare, government

jobs, and perhaps social spending on culture), and education (coding for the same). These social elements are, as Piketty discusses in *Capital*, a function of the social state and are generally paid out from state revenues (taxes). This type of government spending increased drastically in wealthy countries (even in the US, if comparatively smaller) post-WWII and exists to provide a measure of equality. As Piketty states, "Modern redistribution, as exemplified by the social states constructed by the wealthy countries in the twentieth century, is based on a set of fundamental social rights: to education, health and retirement" (514). All of which are directly and equally provided for by the Culture (in their corresponding futuristic forms).

However, and here is where we will gently transition back into the science fictional and away from the economical, Piketty also hints at more exotic economic and social rights in *Capital* when he raises the question of universal "rights to culture, housing, and travel" (513). His question is both philosophical and economical in scope. While the US and French revolutions theoretically affirmed the equality of rights, Piketty emphasizes that they have, in practice, been primarily concerned with property rights. He points towards the budgetary constraints of governments, democratic deliberation, and political will as key elements of advancing social justice. Yet, in an odd form of aesthetic justice, the same rights Piketty can only approach from the most speculative position are the very same rights which are perhaps those most strikingly reflected in the Culture, particularly within the *The Player of Games.* Through the narrative, the novum of post-scarcity is used to cognitively estrange "scarce" rights as we know them by normalizing them as "universal." I would like to use the next few paragraphs to explore some of the more exotic socio-economic estrangements aesthetically explored within the framework of post-scarcity, namely those of travel, housing, and culture.

Firstly, travel. Most forms of travel in the Culture are either of a purely aesthetic or utilitarian focus. For example, each plate's collective transportation is focused around utility. As with the New York City subway, they exist for a singular purpose. In addition we also have the more cultural and scenic trains, like the one Gurgeh rides to get to Tronze. A balance exists between then the aesthetic and the practical, yet the final concern always remains the common good of society as a whole. Perhaps the best example of this are the massive GSVs that traverse the galaxy. These are utilitarian ships, meant for either living in and/or for mass (leisurely) exploration, but as they are essentially floating cities surrounded by force fields, they are also sources of aesthetic wonder in themselves. Ultimately, despite this being a vastly superior "post-scarcity" society, these cognitive estrangements are all relatively

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straightforward with a pretty socialistic logic: utility, equality, and/or cultural/aesthetic significance.

However Banks's work extends far beyond the activist socialist logic evident in this estrangement. Banks plays with the idea of travel and the individual nature of travel by making all the spaceships in the Culture self-aware individuals in their own right. As Gurgeh says, "All our ships are sentient. You could certainly *try* telling a ship what to do... but I don't think you'd get very far" (*Player* 233). In this sense, the collective nature of intergalactic travel has a form of moral personality. While one could convince a ship to take you to foreign systems, this culminates in a form of relationship. Maybe the ship takes you there, maybe not. These are of course the same ships that can "circumnavigate the galaxy in a few years, and count every cell in your body from light-years off" (*Player* 70). Thus the novel both emphasizes an implicit logic of collective transportation, but then subverts that same logic by making us reconsider the very nature of freedom and travel in society. The novel then turns travel into an exploration of the "other" by giving a voice to the very ship one "uses" to get anywhere. One need think no further than the taxi or bus driver who takes you to work or the assembly-line man in Japan who built your new car. This is a reimagined and focused exploration of the economic labor that drives movement.

The second cognitively estranged element of post-scarcity that I will be exploring is housing. Unlike ships, houses can be owned. Yet the drawback to ownership in the Culture is that that objects, in themselves, have little value because anyone has equal right to produce them. Thus, as Gurgeh says of his own house, "If somebody wanted a house like this they'd already have one built; if they wanted anything in the house… they'd have ordered it; they'd have it." (*Player* 24). In the Culture then, housing is utilitarian. However "utilitarian" in contemporary society also implies a level of reproducibility, of keeping costs low. Gurgeh here complains about the universal nature of housing, how it destroys some of the intrinsic value of the house itself because it can be perfectly reproduced by anybody else.

However, and here is where the cognitive estrangement evokes an aesthetic nature, while housing may be universally accessible in the Culture, there are unfathomable ways of making housing personal. For example, the wood Gurgeh burns in his fireplace is *bonise* and "was developed millennia ago by the old Waverian civilization specifically for its fragrance when ignited" (*Player* 20). Thus, as Gurgeh loses sight of, individuality is expressed through the endless *combinations* of cultural artifacts, emotions, experiences, traditions, and ideas, not in the universality of access to housing (or anything) in general. As Mawhrin-Skel

emphasizes, even with the removal of scarcity, "there's still luck and heartache and joy, there's still chance and advantage and disadvantage" (*Player* 56). Thus the novel normalizes elements of socialized housing while downplaying ideological fears that this removes "value" and individuality from each house (this idea of course toying a bit with the idea of a homogenized "socialized" people as well).

In terms of our last exotic theme, that the Culture is interested in "culture" is irrefutable; Gurgeh is, after all, a professional game-player, an occupation based around playable cultural artifacts, competitions, and traditions. He is well versed in games such as Deploy, Stricken, and ultimately the game of Azad. Gaming, which is a major theme throughout the novel, is a powerful cognitive estrangement of games and sports (and the role of either) in our own society. Most everyone alive has played in at least one soccer match or tried a game of bridge, chess, scrabble, or the latest edition of Call of Duty; there is a history behind these games, a cultural inheritance and identity. They also carry influence, much as the Olympic Games stopped wars in the olden days, so do football games interrupt work and chess matches study (particularly on the eighth floor of the Humanities department at the University of Oslo). They are a waste of time and a distraction, yet also, as shown by rising popularity of Magnus Carlson and the corresponding surge in chess activities in Norway, are something very much alive in culture. They hone our minds and bodies; they keep us social and entertained.

Thus post-scarcity is then a symbolic platform from which to explore the legitimacy of occupations not tied to farming or manufacturing today (as opposed to Keynes's 1930s). It advances the conception of post-scarcity beyond material necessity into more metaphysical rights of existence. In this sense, the right to culture is also a passive right to freedom to do and think as one wishes. Given further advances in automation, our society will absolutely have room for more freedom, and consequently more room for "gamers." Yet this type of thinking is perhaps a bit too easy, it directs too much emphasis on the theoretical future. Perhaps a better point can be made, one that revolves around social justice. If we were to more fairly redistribute wealth and income *right now*, how many more such "cultural" occupations would we be able to fund? How much "richer" would our society be? While these are, of course, rhetorical questions, it is important to note that the novel provokes them.

With these explorations above, we should be able to see the difference between the fictional and economic representation of rights between Piketty and Banks. One attempts to stay within the boundaries of the plausible and the other, through cognitively estranged

representations of post-scarcity society, breaches boundaries of the possible (given more equal redistribution of society today). In this way the firmly plausible rights offered by a social state (education, health, and retirement) are cognitively broadened to encapsulate the more hopeful ideals (the rights to culture, housing, and travel) of the Utopian Imagination; perhaps best marking the exact boundary where the study of SF becomes most relevant from the perspective of economic egalitarianism. Thus Banks's SF allows for a conceptual thought experiment in which to play out various forms of contemporary socio-economic possibilities that are perhaps *too* exotic to be seriously explored by economists like Piketty in our capitalistic world today. In essence then, SF goes conceptually where Piketty (bound by the conventions of data and simple academic respectability) cannot; by that I mean it explores more exotic conceptualizations of thinking about the *present*, not the future.

2.2 Dystopian Destabilization

Now that we have established the utopic aspects of post-scarcity from the context of "basic" human rights I would like to use the next section of this chapter to specifically discuss the conflict between civilizations in Banks's work. *The Player of Games* juxtaposes two societies: the utopic Culture with the dystopic Azad Empire, a conflict the narrative casts as an inverse "alien invasion" narrative. In one way, this binary becomes a contrast between capitalistic and socialistic norms, helping define the debate between the "freedoms" offered by a capitalistic society and the "egalitarianism" offered by a socialistic one. I emphasize that this conflict highlights the necessity of state intervention in the economy to prevent the exploitation of individuals, thus providing an egalitarian platform for society.

In Banks's novel we encounter the egalitarian Culture up against the capitalistic Azad in an extreme clash of societies. In an article from 2011 Dalene Labushagne states that, "The text deliberately installs this binary to foster the ideal of absolute freedom" (62). I disagree with Labushagne's assertion that "freedom" is the utopic ideal being emphasized in this binary for one main reason: the Azad Empire does not represent freedom for everyone. The empire is, in fact, hierarchal and represents freedom mainly for those sitting at the top of this hierarchy. As the drone Flere-Imsaho explains:

> It is especially important to remember that the ownership of humans is possible too; not in terms of actual slavery, which they are proud to have abolished, but in the sense that, according

> to which sex and class one belongs to, one may be partially owned by another or others by
> having to sell one's labor or talents to somebody with the means to buy them. (*Player* 119).

Flere-Imsaho's perspective is truly summing up capitalistic norms of wage labor today and shows how the juxtaposition of two disparate civilizations can create a strong cognitive estrangement of capitalistic norms. Thus, as the Azad Empire pivots around a capitalistic form of exploitation, I feel that the contrast being emphasized in this binary is "egalitarianism" more so than freedom. As Banks himself states, "Briefly, nothing and nobody in the Culture is exploited. It is essentially an automated civilization in its manufacturing processes, with human labor restricted to something indistinguishable from play, or a hobby" ("Few Notes"). Indeed, in this sense and more broadly, I feel that the novel emphasizes freedom more as a consequence of economic egalitarianism.

My focus is different from Labushagne's; she emphasizes the Culture's manipulation and arguably "exploitation" of Gurgeh. In her reading, Gurgeh has lost his "freedom" because the Culture has been secretly conditioning him to play games for many years, games that would make him an ideal opponent for the Azad Empire. In this sense, she argues instead that the utopian aspects of freedom in the Culture are ultimately an "illusion" (69):

> The Culture is shown to be devious and manipulative in ways that consistently transgress the
> laws of this utopia it purports to have set up for itself, so that the idea (and the ideal) of the
> subject's freedom is compromised; insofar as freedom is an integral part, even the object, of
> the utopian dream, this in turn casts doubt on the feasibility of this, or any utopia. (62)

In this sense, she sees the Culture's meddling as a form of control restricting individual freedom. In contrast, I see this very same control as a tool of regulating egalitarianism in the galaxy. Gurgeh plays games; it is what he loves to do. The Culture has encouraged his interests and arranged for him to play the ultimate game. In this sense, his voyage is not a devious manipulation of "freedom;" it is a part of a broader goal to enforce egalitarian norms through the galaxy. Thus, I see the Culture's "manipulation" as a form of societal regulation on a galactic scale, akin to Piketty's or Keynes's focus on government taxation, spending, and redistribution, a focus that ultimately restricts exploitation. In this sense, the Culture exists as an egalitarian platform (the social state) for the entire galaxy. The Azad were a rampaging civilization that was suppressing economically marginalized individuals everywhere. Thus they needed to be stopped and Gurgeh, a part of the Culture, was dispatched to do so. His victories helped topple the Azad Empire.

However, to be fair, when Labushagne is attempting to paint the Culture as repressive, she is more so trying to address a broader academic focus on the form of utopia. Labushagne

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states that utopian forms, including SF, are perceived as having a "structural closure" which locks them into a fixation with the ideal (in her case, freedom). They consequently become "redundant or unproductive" (59). Thus by reading the Culture as "manipulative" and the Azad Empire as "utopic" (at least for Gurgeh), the novel achieves a form of irony that frees the subject from a fixation on any one ideal. Her argument is thus mapping a broader argument on Utopia. This is an argument with which I fundamentally do not agree. Contrary to Labushagne, I feel that the novel *can* have a singular ideal, as long as that ideal actively dealienates people from their social position and helps make them more aware of the ideological systems of control that surround them.

In this sense, working collectively towards a more egalitarian goal (as Gurgeh implicitly does within the Culture) should be considered fundamentally different than the labor that is exploited for the simple benefit of the few (the top 10% of society for example). Labushagne's reading does not emphasize this dynamic; instead it emphasizes a circular logic between utopia and dystopia that ultimately does not see the novel take a stance on contemporary society:

> The Culture, in its will to dominate and control, and its ruthless exploitation and of the individual, is exposed as a system that is in its own way no less tyranical than the Azadian system, so that the idea of choosing between utopia and dystopia becomes 'something dictated finally by the game itself'. (72)

In this way I feel her reading is unconstructive because it draws attention away from the more cultural role of *The Player of Games* in undermining repressive ideologies today.

This stated, I do agree with Labushagne's assumption that the Culture is an imperfect society (70). Perhaps the largest of these flaws is the imperialistic nature of the Culture towards other less "advanced" civilizations. The Culture seeks to spread their egalitarian, post-scarcity society through expansion, both through direct and indirect influence. Problematically, they are also the largest, most powerful, and technologically advanced civilization in the galaxy. Thus their attempts to "improve" other less-developed and less "moral" nations tends to reek of totalitarian expansion, globalization, and ideological control, with perhaps a bad historical aftertaste of religious forced conversions. The novel is very aware of this connection and takes its time working through the complex cognitive estrangement. As the drone Worthil states:

> We might be forced into a high-profile intervention against the empire; it would hardly be war as such because we're way ahead of them technologically, but we'd have to become an occupying force to control them, and that would mean a huge drain on our resources as well as morale; in the end such an adventure would almost certainly be seen as a mistake, no matter the

> popular enthusiasm for it at the time. The people of the empire would lose by uniting against us instead of the corrupt regime which controls them, so putting the clock back a century or two, and the Culture would lose by emulating those we despise; invaders, occupiers, hegemonists.
> (*Player* 84)

In this example, the novel is critical to American globalization and military practices, and is particularly harsh of the aggressive "spread" of Western democracy by force. Yet, this stated, in many ways the broader theme of the novel still holds up the moral ideal of the *necessity* of ending economic exploitation and abuse found in ruthless socio-political systems. This is emphasized in the egalitarian distribution of the rights of housing, travel, and culture discussed in the previous section.

However, Banks is the not the first author to present utopia in this problematic fashion; one need look no further than More's *Utopia*. Peter Y. Paik points to Voegelin's critique of More when he states that "anyone who is on the opposing side of the Utopians' just wars is automatically unjust, since the 'carrier of the ideal can only just act morally', having appointed himself as the 'party, judge, and executor' of his necessarily immoral enemies (Paik 5). As Paik (on Voegelin) emphasizes, the Utopians commit war only in self-defense or to liberate oppressed people, which is actually just a recoding of modern totalitarianism and condones violence. This reading strongly applies to Banks's work as the Culture is obviously being painted as the "ideal" civilization when held up against the Azad.

However, I believe that because of social state's focus on the egalitarian distribution of rights we *can* at least draw a vague "line in the sand" in terms of moral ideals. As Booker and Thomas note, while their "intervention" is problematic, the Culture still "attempts to steer less-advanced civilizations in more positive and humane directions" (83). There is thus ultimately an egalitarian moral element to the expansionism of the Culture, one that cognitively inverts the rising economic disparity evident in society today. I might add here that the culture works towards lifting the quality of life for the broader collective population of the galaxy, including marginalized groups in the Azad Empire.

This core morality is also emphasized in the sentient machines and devices throughout the Culture social strata. By breathing life into simple devices (like cars or houses) based on "objects" in our contemporary society, it gives them a voice that cognitively extends to the economically marginalized groups represented by those objects. These are those groups with generally little voice or power, and which are often left behind in political debates. The point I am emphasizing here echoes my previous point in discussing Piketty and Keynes earlier; the state must intervene to control and regulate gross economic inequalities. This means the

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Culture represents a social state working to limit the economic exploitation of all marginalized groups.

In this sense, the contrast between the Azad and the Culture shows how we must limit the "freedom" of exploitation in order to limit the consequences of economic disparity. Thus a certain amount of "control" or "regulation" by the state will always ideally exist in democratic society to prevent the exploitation of those most vulnerable in that society. This is perhaps the strongest symbolism inherent in the Culture's imperialism; it represents the regulated nature of society that constantly seeks to play catch-up with capitalism. Regulations exist and are created in response to abuses in society. We can see literature emphasizing these deregulated environments throughout history, yet perhaps characterized best in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906).

This is not to say that social regulations do not become bureaucratic at times, or expensive for capitalist systems to manage, but their overall purpose is ideal and (in my opinion) can even be considered inspired by the Utopian Imagination. As new forms of production are created, there will always be need for an adaptive system of regulatory bodies to oversee that people (or animals, or environments) are not exploited in those systems. In this way this book ideologically combats a form of laissez-faire "freedom" which is really coding for "exploitation." Thus when the Culture seeks to curtail the overwhelming economic and political power of the few; it is really seeking to comment on Piketty's top decile, the few that (directly or indirectly) abuse that power of economic might. Thus, in contrast to Labushagne, I argue that the novel should be hailed for its cognitive fixation with egalitarian ideals as represented by the novum of post-scarcity. In this way the novel should, and must, be interpreted from a Marxist-cultural perspective *because* of its fixation with an egalitarian ideal that actually helps question ideological norms relating to economic disparity.

What can then be superficially read as imperial conquest is really more about breaking ideological control and making people aware that they live in an oppressive society; the Culture works to reveal the exploitation of one group by another. Labushagne tends to gloss over this facet when discussing the Azad Empire. In trying to reinforce the "ironic" nature of *The Player of Games* she repeatedly asserts that the Culture has "destroyed" the Azadian system (69, 71, 72). This is simply not true; it must be emphasized that it is only the ideological system of hierarchal exploitation that is being dissolved. This is more a liberation from oppression, both for the people in the Azad Empire and those outlying civilizations the empire conquers. Nobody will die or be conquered should the Culture establish control; the

Culture does not even believe in execution. Instead, the opposite will occur, smaller periphery civilizations to the Azad will finally be protected from exploitation. The Azad and their conquered peoples, including their own disenfranchised citizens (slaves), will finally become integrated into a society which values equality above all else. Thus, in an odd way, I feel Labushagne's essay functions more as a form of ideological reinforcement that affirms the patrimonial and oligarchical rule of the Azad empire, and consequently our own society's rising disparity.

Instead of generically reproducing the same tired trope of invasion common to many popular SF novels, Banks's work undermines the whole conception of intergalactic war. The battle he depicts here is one based on ideas; this battle is ideological. Gurgeh does not command fleets of battleships, but his skills and his background represent a cultural shock of difference for the Azadians. The Culture represents socialistic beliefs. In this sense, their expansion is not military, but social; their existence is communal. The Culture diffuses hierarchy and emphasizes egalitarian norms into very pores of their society. Thus, when the Culture is invaded, it is the invaders themselves who are taken over by the people they conquer. This is reflected in Gurgeh's thoughts during last battle with the emperor Nicosar:

> The barbarians invade, and are taken over […] The architecture of the system channels them, beguiles them, seduces them and transforms them, demanding from them what they could not before have given but slowly grow to offer. The empire survives, the barbarians survive, but the empire is no more and the barbarians are nowhere to be found" (*Player* 276).

The barbarians are, in this sense, socialized by the very people they sought to conquer. Coming back to Marxism then, in this quote we see the dialectic of two societies merging and forming something new, a more egalitarian synthesis. The Culture values all "culture," it just does not tolerate exploitation. The Culture then provides the root or core of an ideal, namely egalitarianism.

While I understand that the Culture's expansionistic tendencies aligns them frighteningly close with totalitarianism or even modern-day capitalistic globalization, the alternative of passive complacency in the face of inequality is not an option. The reality is that economic exploitation is occurring under capitalism right now. Change occurs through the circulation of ideas and the consideration of new forms of socio-economic developments. Utopia is part of that change. In the Culture novels, we are not considering any one person's benefit in reducing economic disparity, but the betterment of broader society and future generations. It is this distinction which separates truly cognitive SF from non-cognitive "wish fulfillment" or escapism. As Freedman states of Bloch, "it is only the dimension of

collectivity that guarantees the future-orientedness of utopia; the merely self-interested wish always amounts to a desire that the status quo of the present should remain essentially unaltered while one's own personal lot within it is improved" (64). At the end of the novel Gurgeh has nothing but ash in his pocket; it is all that remains from Azad's hierarchal system of control.

2.3 Gurgeh's Socialization

I would like to use this last section to comment specifically on the main character Gurgeh. Banks's depiction of Gurgeh is important because his portrayal represents some of the more problematic aspects of conservative and capitalistic thinking. One of the clearest of these paradigms would be Social Darwinism, a form of "dog-eat-dog" character trait that is emphasized in laissez-faire capitalism. This is also an element of earlier "pulp" traditions as well (Suvin, *Metamorphosis* 82). The novel helps call into question Gurgeh's character traits by showing his progression from a more domineering mindset to one more open to socialistic and empathic thinking at the end. The Culture has, in effect, socialized Gurgeh by sending him to Azad. By gradually revealing (and then modifying) these aspects through Gurgeh's focalization, the novel cognitively estranges the capitalist frame of thinking, making it look unnatural. In this sense, the character development reflects and draws attention to problematic thinking in our own society.

Firstly, it should be stated that Gurgeh, while a citizen of the Culture, is not your average Culture citizen. While born and raised in the Culture, the novel sets him apart. In a society built around egalitarianism, Gurgeh, as a gamer, does not want to be equal to people, instead, he wants to be *better*. As Gurgeh himself states, "I… *exult* when I win. It's better than love, it's better than sex or any glanding; it's the only instant when I feel […] real" (*Player* 24-25). Correspondingly, he worries about losing and frets about the younger generation taking his victories away from him (*Player* 24). These are not typical Culture character traits, instead, as Chamlis tells him, he is "a throwback" (*Player* 24). The narrative is then distinctly condemning his hyper-competitive thinking and marking him as regressive. This regressive thinking is emphasized even in Gurgeh's masculinity. Gurgeh echoes traditional heterosexual norms with the women of the Culture. As Yay asks him, "You've never changed sex, have you? [...] Or slept with a man?" (*Player* 28). These hetero-normative behaviors are unusual in the Culture. As Yay states, "You're strange, Gurgeh" (*Player* 28).

In addition, Gurgeh is also a bit sociopathic, even cruel. This is perhaps best depicted when he watches his friend, Ren, having a nightmare. Instead of waking her, he watches her "for some minutes, with an odd expression on his face, somewhere between a sneer and a sad smile, wondering […] what sort of the nightmares the young woman must be having, to make her quiver and pant and whimper so" (*Player* 31). There is then, in Gurgeh, a subtle need for power over others. We see again this when he dominates a younger man in a conversation; Gurgeh emphasizes that the conversation "had become a game," something to be won (*Player* 45). He is prideful, boasting, and flamboyant; when he defeats people, he does so with a cocky flourish. Most of these character traits can be tied back into his urge for superiority. In many ways then, our protagonist from utopia is dystopic, flawed, an anti-hero, and, perhaps most importantly, *human*. Yet it should here be pointed out that these are very much the same character traits shared by the archetypical masculine, self-centered hero from the earlier space opera and pulp traditions of SF. As readers of SF, we identify with these traits and are either carried along with the narrative in the fashion of popular escapist fiction and/or silently condemn his regressive mindset and hope for his humbling downfall. Conscious readers are rewarded by the latter.

In many ways, Gurgeh's personality is meant to echo Mawrhin-Skel's. Gurgeh, like Mawrhin-Skel, was "born" with character traits that make him particularly suited for a certain environment, particularly one with hierarchy and competition at its core. As Mawrhin-Skel puts it, "They call it compassion to draw my talons and remove my eyes and cast me adrift in a paradise made for others; I call it torture. It's obscene, Gurgeh, it's barbaric, *diabolic*; recognize that old word? I see you do." (*Player* 65) Gurgeh then is highly intelligent, mildly sociopathic, and domineering, all of which are excellent traits for competitive (capitalistic) environments. Thus, Gurgeh, because he cannot fully exercise these traits in the Culture, admits an affinity for Mawrhin-Skel because he also feels as if he has a "birthright taken away" (*Player* 25).

In this sense, Labushagne is absolutely right when she states that the Empire "takes on the feel of some utopia for Gurgeh" (68). His mindset, warped and regressive as it is, explains why Gurgeh is so attracted to this "pathologically violent and lugubriously sentimental, startlingly barbaric and surprisingly sophisticated, fabulously rich and grindingly poor" society of Azad (*Player* 109). In many ways, Gurgeh is actually a placeholder for us, the reader. He is crafted as a flawed creature of capitalism because that is ultimately what the

reader is most familiar with. Between the utopia of the Culture and the dystopia of Azad, he is an ideological bridging point because he belongs to both worlds.

The novel is focalized through Gurgeh and this helps us follow along with his perceptions of different forms of disparity. For example, let us consider his encounter with the women of Azad. In Azad, women are considered "simply possessions" (*Player* 211). Most are portrayed as prostitutes or dancing girls. One of sole Azad women that converses with Gurgeh on equal terms is Trinev, who he meets early on in his stay in the Empire. From her he learns that Azad is "free" for anyone to play. As Trinev states, "Nobody is forbidden to play. That is embodied in the constitution" (*Player* 143). However, he also learns that education in Azad discriminates against women as "all the great colleges must take only apex scholars […] to prevent the distraction of those [males] who study" (*Player* 143). Since women are not allowed to attend colleges, they cannot learn the best Azad gaming techniques. As the game of Azad determines all facets of life in the empire of Azad, this discrimination against women acts as a form of economic "glass ceiling." We later learn in the novel that "no women had made it to the second round" (*Player* 236). To clarify, this means that no women had advanced beyond a certain economic level in the entirety of Azad civilization.

Gurgeh, through his experiences, is learning the real message of capitalism's hierarchy. Not that it allows risks, such as losing one's house or fortune in an economic bet, but that it conveys an unfair advantage among those at the top, an advantage that is then enforced by that same group. This is the notorious patrimonial society Piketty warns against, a society that reproduces material and social inequalities. As Piketty states, "In the United States, France, and most other countries, talk about the virtues of the national meritocratic model is seldom based on close examination of the facts. Often the purpose is to justify existing inequalities while ignoring the sometimes patent failures of the current system" (521). These forms of privileges then transfer from one generation from the next. Similarly, in Azad, those with access to the best educations have the best chance to succeed at the game and thus succeed at life. In this sense, Piketty's emphasis on the core elements of the social state becomes absolutely clear in this novel; egalitarian access to health care, education, and pensions are necessary for providing everyone a fair chance in society.

After discussing with Trinev the injustices women suffer in Azad, Gurgeh feels "a strange tingling feeling at the back of his neck" (*Player* 144). He is agitated. Yet the novel makes no direct mention of how Gurgeh feels. We, as readers, must work to read Gurgeh's thoughts. In this case, the agitation he shows makes us, as readers, aware that Gurgeh is

becoming conscious of the plight of other people. This is a process that slowly undermines his earlier, more domineering, traits; he is becoming more empathic. For him, it is the game that matters. Cheating is frowned upon in the Culture, and capitalism is, in many ways, a system defined by cheating. Everyone competes, and everyone looks to cut costs and generate profits. Cheating becomes almost encouraged in this sense (cheating on taxes, avoiding government regulation, etc.). Much of this "cheating" becomes enacted in the form of exploitation.

This is why markets need to be regulated, as without regulation, exploitation occurs. This novel is emphasizing how governments need to be *active* in preventing this exploitation. As Flere-Imsaho states: "it all boils down to ownership, possession; about taking and *having*." (italics in original, *Player* 218). Just as Chinese companies have fortified milk with toxic chemicals, just as animals are born and slaughtered in America never having seen the light of day, just as people are exploited every day for their labor all around the globe simply because they are marginalized and have no political voice, so does the social state attempt to correct these same traits. The social state then attempts to control for that human nature which causes enormous suffering around the world; namely the greed that comes hand-in-hand with profits and competition.

The primitive emotions that Gurgeh experiences and wrestles with early in the Culture and later in Azad center on possession. This is not possession in the traditional sense, but a possession for the "victory." Even towards the end he struggles with his urge to win. As Gurgeh himself narrates, "He had lost control of his own drug-glands; the mix of chemicals in his bloodstream had taken over, and his brain felt saturated with the one encompassing idea, like a fever; win, dominate, control: a set of angles defining one desire, the single absolute determination" (*Player* 280). As Jameson states of Bloch, emotions such as greed, envy, and adoration ask for an inauthentic future as they are filled emotions which "ask for fulfillment in a world at all points identical to that of the present, save for the possession of the particular object desired and presently lacking" (*Marxism* 126). In Gurgeh's case, this greed for victory and power was filled with emotions that were "primitive or infantile to the degree that they amount to magical incantations, a conjuring up of the object in question just exactly as we long for it" (*Marxism* 126). In this sense, Gurgeh's greed revolves around the individual. From the very beginning he played for one person: himself. This is the anti-thesis of the Culture mentality; as discussed above, the culture is based on a mentality based around the social state, which essentially means the egalitarian distribution of goods and services to those

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who need them. Victory is singular, unless it means a perpetuation of further egalitarian norms for the entire community.

Thus we see towards the end of the novel that this individual mentality begins to shift. It is because of his stay in Azad that he begins to understand the Culture. He needs to learn all about the communality of Culture to defeat to destructiveness of Azad. As we see in his last battle with Emperor Nicosar, "The Emperor sent pieces to their destruction with a sort of joyous callousness where Gurgeh would have hung back, attempting to prepare and build up. Where Gurgeh would have accepted surrender and conversion, Nicosar laid waste" (*Player* 278). In this sense, Gurgeh needed to see Azad to understand the individual nature of the culture. His experiences in the cruelties of the game (and, by proxy, reality) become the psychological stepping stone to empathy and a more communal focus. He becomes the Culture in Azad. As Gurgeh states, "He'd habitually set up something like the society itself [the Culture] when he constructed his positions and deployed his pieces; a net, a grid of forces and relationships, without any obvious hierarchy or entrenched leadership, and initially quite profoundly peaceful" (*Player* 277). The final battle emerges as a "battle" between the Culture and the Azad, one of them hierarchal and the other communal. This is ultimately a battle of ideologies and socio-political systems. It was, to echo Flere-Imsaho at the start, a game that was not a game (*Player* 6). As Gurgeh states, "The board became both Culture and Empire again […] carved from Nicosar's beliefs and his together" (*Player* 283).

In the end Nicosar would rather destroy his court than surrender the power of his empire. In this sense, echoing the "cheating" Gurgeh does at the start of the novel, Nicosar uses outside advantage to offset the natural skill required for the final game. He is, in effect, utilizing his privilege to win. This action echoes how the competitiveness of capitalism goes far beyond any games, and (as Nicosar would say) makes "the game real" (*Player* 298). Thus, the intermingling of power and money which collects at the top of hierarchal societies is the ultimate game, and not really a game at all, but reality. This is, as shown by Keynes, one of the ultimate and most absurd obsessions.

> The love of money as a possession-as distinguished from the love of money as a means to the enjoyments and realities of life-will be recognized for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease. (qtd. in Chernomas)

In the end it becomes a battle which Gurgeh, despite his primitive capitalistic emotions, does not understand. He is privileged member of a post-scarcity society and cannot comprehend the actions of Nicosar. He does not have the fetishism of objects that the empire has. We see a

foreshadowing of this earlier. When asked by Hamin if he could own a planet in the Culture, Gurgeh simply responds, "How can you own a planet?" (*Player* 233). Gurgeh still sees the game as a game, not a socio-economic struggle. If Nicosar wins, he maintains his right to exploit an empire. If Gurgeh wins, he already has everything he could ever need in the communal Culture, thus the empire falls apart.

In this sense, I feel Labushagne is ultimately wrong in her circular reading of *The Player of Games*. While Gurgeh may have, at one point, realized Azad as utopia, at the end he knows that it is not that. Gurgeh becomes one with the Culture in a way he never was before. By playing as the Culture, particularly against the Empire, he was able to finally understand the indirect socio-political differences in both civilizations. Combined with the outside aspects such as cheating (or exploitation in the case of Trinev), we can see that he finally realizes the benefits of living in the Culture. He is, for all intents and purposes, socialized. In using the term "socialization," I am borrowing a bit from social theory, but I feel it is a particularly apt description. As Alexander Wendt defines it, "Socialization is in part a process of learning to conform one's behavior to societal expectations" (170). Thus, by recognizing the strengths and advantages of the Culture's norms in playing Azad, Gurgeh finally begins to accept the Culture's expectations as well.

This stated, I wish to clarify that socialization does not preclude the right to individual freedoms (what wood to burn, where to live, who to be friends with, what games to play, what to study, etc.). Instead what I am emphasizing here is that Gurgeh's socialization represents more how one learns to understand socialistic norms from the perspective of regulation and policy. In this sense, it actively prevents the exploitation of one group or person by another and negates the pathological emphasis on possession so inherent in capitalistic society. As Wendt explains, "socialization is also a process of identity- and interest-formation" (170). Gurgeh's singular focus on victory is not much different than any singular focus on money or power in capitalism. It is an inherently hierarchal focus; someone must come out on top, and someone must lose. This type of thinking, when it drifts into the obsessive, is not conducive to society as a whole.

Thus, in many ways, Gurgeh's urge for victory, and the hierarchy and domination that go with it, is resolved in the end. Banks makes this change implicit in how the other characters acknowledge his changed state. This is one of the reasons why Yay finally sleeps with him. As narrated in the text, "Yay put her head on Gurgeh's shoulder and said she'd missed him a lot, and five years was long time, and he looked a lot more cuddleable than

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when he'd gone away, and…if he wanted…if he wasn't too tired... (ellipses in original, *Player* 315). The ending is thus meant to reflect on Gurgeh's approved acceptance back into Culture society.

This is a significant development for our protagonist. At the beginning of the novel Yay admits to feeling that Gurgeh wants to "take her," to "possess" her, and mentions that the feeling is "primitive" (*Player* 28). Gurgeh has changed in the end. He had never slept with men, and yet in the end, with Yay half transformed into a man, he still sleeps with her/him. While at the beginning of the novel he treated people in a domineering fashion, at the end he is more gentle. With Yay he "pull[s] the covers gently over her exposed back and shoulder, and move[s] his hand very gently through her curls" (*Player* 316). Labushagne misses this fundamental point of character development in her reading; Gurgeh does change, he is a better person in the end, and he is a better person because of the Culture and its egalitarian (if regulated and manipulative) system.

In Gurgeh's transformation the novel is not condemning gaming or competition, but the excessive negative aspects that go with it, such as pride, cruelty, and the urge to dominate at all costs. In many ways, it is condemning the same facets which ultimately make laissez-faire capitalism a failure for society as whole and explains why government regulation and the social state are such a necessity. The social state provides a platform to actualize possibilities, not limit them. In this sense, *The Player of Games* explores the need for fair distribution of society's production and the helps emphasize the rights of those so intricately involved in that production.

This is not a novel about materialistic wish-fulfillment. This is an exploration of utopia, where fairer distribution and stronger worker regulations may just result in unexpected freedoms, even the freedom to experience culture. Since the text is cognitively estranging the current-day, socio-economic problems of society, we can concretely say that the novum of post-scarcity actively works to reveal and ultimately upset our ideological position in capitalism. As Suvin states: "In brief, a novum is fake unless it in some way participates in and partakes of what Bloch called the 'front-line of historical process'–which for him (and for me) as a Marxist means a process intimately concerned with strivings for a dealienation of men and their social life" (parenthesis in original, *Metamorphosis* 81-82). Post-scarcity is a truly cognitive novum because it never completely lost its connection to its Marxist roots in focusing on the dialectical progression of society.

Utopia as a genre may have its origins in closed systems (such as More's *Utopia* which is an end-of-history example), but specifically SF utopias are cognitively connected to our world, which makes them a part of history (either directly through extrapolation or indirectly through analogism). As I have shown in Robinsons *Mars* trilogy, there is an element of dialectical progression in SF that accentuates how society is continually evolving based on utopic or "idealic" influencing pressures that negate the current existence of capitalism. The *Mars* trilogy is part of a socio-economic process which does not stop at either *Blue Mars* or in Robinson's following work, *2312* (2012). There is no end-of-history moment in truly cognitive SF as they are societies that will forever be a work-in-progress. They constantly reach towards difference and the negation of the ails of the present. In this sense, the Culture's largest negation of capitalism is its society-wide egalitarianism. However, like the *Mars* trilogy, it is not perfect. Gurgeh does suffer a loss of some individual freedoms in living in a regulated society (the freedom to domineer others) and he ultimately must contribute in some way (defeat the empire). The tradeoff between freedoms and egalitarian norms is a constructive ambiguity to the text.

In this sense, I agree with Labushagne that *The Player of Games* evades any final structural closure (75). Yet, I would like to emphasize that it is the egalitarian ideal (and not the reinforcement of its opposite, exploitation) which provides the energy to shift society forwards. Human lives are temporary, with new ideas and technologies emerging constantly, thus there will always be new pressures on how society and relationships are organized. In this sense, good utopic SF, with a strong cognitive novum as its heart, will constructively seek to dealienate us from our socio-economic conditions by making us aware of our own ideological situation in society. This is what makes SF part of the Utopian Imagination. Broad ideals here, like economic egalitarianism, are important; but they do not have to be perfect. Thus, even analogical narrative constructions like the Culture, which are only peripherally related to Earth, contain elements of the extrapolative in that they could be our hypothetical future. Though they are not *finished* utopias, they still present egalitarian ideals that are comparatively *more* finished than those in our current society. By focusing on SF's depiction of tomorrow, we are actually considering what society lacks today.

3   Live Free or Die

"Liberals," Gorku said, rippling his fur. "What can I say?"

<div align="right">-Gorku, speaking to Tyler Vernon about politics</div>

This chapter will focus on the popular SF author John Ringo and his novel *Live Free or Die* (2010), the first part of his *Troy Rising* (2010-11) trilogy. The novel depicts the rise of entrepreneur and capitalist, Tyler Vernon, as he conquers the consumer markets of space, defeats the invading hordes of Horvath aliens, and builds a military empire out of America. The novel depicts the larger interactions of galactic civilizations and is rooted in the rhetoric of science, politics, and economics. However, it also problematically encourages an ideology that increases economic disparity. Ringo's political convictions lean distinctly to the right and he produces perishable texts in rapid quantity. This chapter then is a cautionary reading of contemporary SF and will attempt to show how genre can directly reinforce capitalistic norms. While this chapter functions as an individual reading, it also works as a synthesis of some of the major ideas and themes from my previous two chapters.

As Ringo's work follows in the tradition of space opera, particularly in regards to alien invasion, my first section will be discussing its generic ties to SF history. This will allow me to explore how the novel falls victim to the older generic "pulp" tendencies of demonizing the "other," in this case, the most vulnerable, unseen, and marginalized economic demographics in society. In my second section, I argue that this novel develops America into a form of conservative utopia. The utopia this text posits is a subjective longing for individual and societal improvement, however one that actually winds up benefiting only a select group of wealthy individuals to the detriment of the broader whole. I argue that this American utopia models itself on the "regalian" state, a form of feudal system with low taxes and high property protection. In my final section, I briefly visit two financial reports that warn against the problems of severe economic disparity. They help highlight and call into question the more ideological aspects of the novel's socio-political system. Thus, this chapter will seek to prove that *Live Free or Die* conforms to the more culturally regressive heritage of SF in that it reaches towards a regalian utopia that ideologically reinforces existing norms of severe economic disparity.

Known as a military SF writer, Ringo has over two million novels in print and has been translated into seven languages ("John Ringo"). As stated on his website, "he also has

done stints as an op-ed writer for the New York Post and a guest commentator for Fox News, thus ensuring the loss of what little soul was left" ("About John"). His work has appeared several times on the New York Times best-sellers list and is enjoyed internationally. From the perspective of ideology, it is perhaps this reach and popularity which make the genre of SF so important to analyze, especially from the context of ideological conceptions relating to economic disparity.

Of his work, Ringo's *Troy Rising* series follows his predilection for military themes. Inspired by the webcomic Schlock Mercenary, this trilogy's primary novum is the "gate" which arrives in our solar system in the near future. The gate allows for instantaneous travel between Earth and a network of other civilizations; this sets the narrative up for a direct confrontation between humans and any amount of myriad "others." These gates function as a convenient highway system between different parts of the galaxy normally too distant to reach each other. With advent of the gate's establishment, in a prototypical Wellsian fashion, it does not take long for an enemy "communist" civilization, the Horvath, to invade and begin plundering Earth of its valuable resources, in this case: metals.

The novel's protagonist, Tyler Vernon, uses the gate as an opportunity to seize a new market. His smooth investment in maple syrup (a near-addictive alcoholic substance among "alien" species) and his calculated exploitation of the Glatun consumer market allows him to amass a huge fortune. The Glatun represent the largest and most powerful civilization in the novel and become a strong trade partner for Earth. Tyler uses this trade relationship to both protect Earth and fund an arms race, swiftly catching up to Horvath in terms of technology. In this sense, while there is the requisite military research and development as done in many other space operas (Robert Heinlein and Peter F. Hamilton come first to mind), it is the novel's unabashed endorsement of laissez-faire capitalism that leads to Tyler's saving of humanity from the Horvath.

The novel depicts a scary future for Earth then, one full of aggressive alien species and uncertainty, involving the mass production of Death Star-ish battle stations, fleets of warships, and massive fuel (H3) and commodities distribution networks. That the "liberal" cities of New York, San Francisco, Paris, and London (among plenty others) are all annihilated is only a narrative bonus. This destruction helps ease government regulation and boost public support for increased military spending. Toss in some eugenics (an alien virus causes blonde women to go into monthly "heat" cycles) and we have a thematic mess that not

only resembles the masculine pulp tradition from which it stems, but reinforces many of the same problematic gender and societal norms common to early "pulp" SF from the 1930s.

3.1 Space Opera and Space Invaders

Up until now this thesis has focused on specific methods in which contemporary SF uses cognitive estrangement to help undermine ideological conventions relating to economic disparity. This has been important in discussing the important role SF can have in contemporary culture today, especially in advancing more progressive ideas regarding economic equality. Since this chapter instead looks at how SF can propagate certain ideological norms, there will almost necessarily be more focus on the genre's history. I explore here how the generic history of space opera contains within it certain norms intimately tied with conservative values, especially in relation to the role of the "other."

This section will involve a look at the "space opera" subgenre, in addition to the trope of "alien invasion," both of which helped define the "pulpy" outgrowth of SF in the 1930s; one that was replete with themes of racial discrimination, national aggrandization, and masculinization, among others. The "other" in the case of this chapter is the marginalized subgroup of any population most susceptible to economic disparity; in other words, those with the least socio-economic power. Yet the goal of this section is twofold. In addressing the conservative roots of space opera, we must necessarily acknowledge that Banks and Robinson also perpetuate certain forms of this tradition. However, as I will show below, they are both able to use and yet still set themselves apart from that historical tradition by constructing truly cognitive nova within that generic framework. In this case, I lean heavily on Suvin's conception of the novum as a core estrangement which is radically different and ultimately socially progressive (*Metamorphosis* 64, 81-82). Ringo's work is less successful; by adhering more strictly to generic origins, he winds up also perpetuating its conservative heritage and thus only creates a false novum, or a novum that simply drowns in such familiar economic exploitation that it only reinforces certain alienating norms of society. In this way, this chapter will address the historical deficit of my broader thesis and also help elevate certain progressive generic estrangements of prior authors discussed herein.

Since SF is a form of writing that wrestles with technological and social change, it is perhaps then not so ironic to write about a sub-genre that has itself undergone such remarkable change in the past century. Space opera, originally rooted in pulp fiction of the 1930s, is a term that Booker and Thomas classify as "originally derogatory, suggesting

second-rate, formulaic stories written by untalented hacks" (40). Suvin, writing *Metamorphosis* in the 1970s, takes, if possible, an even more acerbic view; he states that "All space operas can be translated back into the Social Darwinism of the Westerns and similar adventure-tales by substituting colts for ray-guns and Indians for the slimy monster of Betelgeuse" (*Metamorphosis* 82). If we consider the first two chapters of this thesis for a moment, then there is certainly an underlying element of the "Wild West" in both Robinson's early Mars colony and in Banks's Azad Empire. Despite the Azad's tendencies towards totalitarian military control, both societies represented a veritable Wild West of individual possibility. However, Banks and Robinson develop their respective narratives beyond this simplistic backdrop to explore the more collective question of egalitarian issues relating to economic disparity and exploitation. In this sense, we can consider space opera today more as a form of socio-political SF that deals with societal changes on a broad scale, particularly in regards to cultures and ideas that conflict with each another.

Despite the subgenre's constrictive Darwinist and masculine roots then, some authors are still effectively able to pursue strong cognitive and critical perspectives into, among other areas, heightening economic disparity. As a result, we can see that this is an area of SF which has experienced significant improvement since its early pulp days; this development also helps explain why Booker and Thomas include Robinson and Banks in their brief historical survey of the SF sub-genre of "space opera," despite these SF authors championing far more egalitarian and socialistic ideals than some of their earlier precursors (46, 48-49). In this sense, the sub-genre that originally emerged from E E 'Doc' Smith's "muscular" and "colorful imaginative fictionalization" (Roberts 71-72), which was based on simplistic binaries of Good and Evil, eventually evolved into what Booker and Thomas call a "renaissance" of thought-provoking novels that only self-consciously and nostalgically look back on the "swashbuckling action and larger-than-life heroes of the early space opera" (40). However, just because some texts have revitalized and transcended the genre's origins does not mean that all SF texts have.

Our case in point will be Ringo's novel *Live Free or Die*, which mobilizes the SF trope of "alien invasion." While initially brutal, this invasion only serves as a catalyst for a very dystopic American dominance of the known galaxy. In a nod toward globalization, the Americans eventually achieve militaristic and economic dominance of most other alien civilizations. As I will show, deploying the trope of alien invasion in SF can act as a form of ideological screen to not only hide and suppress domestic social issues, but also function as

the catalyst for the spread of a conservative political agenda. It can therefore serve as a cognitive suppression of more progressive themes, such as healthcare and education. However, in order to understand the current socio-political commentary Ringo enforces, we must first understand the generic history of the "invasion" trope.

Critics generally agree that the theme of alien invasion serves as social and political commentary (Booker and Thomas 28, Roberts 63-65). In this sense, the proliferation of alien invasion narratives around the late 1800s and the 1950s correspond respectively to English colonialism and American globalization of the Cold War years. While invasion narratives were particularly popular in Great Britain during the height of colonialism, it was H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1897) which "established many of the conventions of the alien invasion subgenre and set a standard against which subsequent alien invasion narratives have tended to be compared" (Booker and Thomas 28). In this sense, it is only natural that we use *The War of the Worlds* as a historical contrast to Ringo's novel *Live Free or Die*.

There is a critical consensus that Wells's text reflected a form of cultural anxiety towards British empire-building (Booker and Thomas 28, Freedman 53, Roberts 63-4). The Martians are depicted as imperialists using superior technology to conquer England; this is meant to estrange England's use of advanced technology in conquering its colonial holdings. In this way, by putting the reader in the almost helpless position of the colonized, Wells asks her to consider the ramifications of a socio-political event she would otherwise not consider. As Booker and Thomas state, the novella functions as a, "powerful critique of British colonialism that works through the reversal of asking British readers to view colonialism from the point of view of the colonized, rather than their accustomed position as colonizer" (28). We can see a similar anxiety in Ringo's novel. Since it is the Horvath and later the Rangora which invade Earth purely for its material wealth, there is an implicit estrangement of US globalization practices abroad. The Horvath care little for either human culture or lives; instead they terrorize the Earth with superior technologies by bombing Earth's cities and forcing humans to work as slaves. In this way, Ringo's text can be read as a dystopic social commentary. Similar to Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, the novel seems to be asking readers to look at a brutal form of "globalization" through Tyler Vernon's encounter with economic and physical exploitation.

However, there is a problem with this interpretation. Firstly, readers see little of this destruction. The novel is focalized through Tyler, who spends much of his time acting the space capitalist; he is depicted as running from space mining, to space battling, to back-room

dealings. There is little actual estrangement of the planetary destruction the Horvath create. Therefore we have little consideration of the cognitive effects of this destruction; there are no drawn-out moments to appreciate the aesthetic effect of one culture's domination of another. If there were parallels between the Horvath and US globalization (or military) practices abroad, then the reader simply does not see them.

Secondly, Ringo draws strongly from the pulp fiction traditions of the 1930s and has his American protagonist not only rise up to defeat the Horvath, but eventually utterly dominate them both militarily and commercially via sheer productive might. Even in *The War of the Worlds* there is an ultimate irony in regards to human "power" whereby the Martians are killed by the smallest of bacteria instead of any concrete human intervention. Thus Ringo's narrative can be seen as overly blunt. These types of narratives are rooted in certain conservative ideologies. As Ringo himself states, he is an "American exceptionalist" and idolizes aspects of American culture which he believes are unique to the US socio-political system (PJ Media). This probably explains why it is aggressive American trade policies (monopolizing and controlling the maple syrup market for example) and the US military that initially drive off the Horvath.

While it is ironic that Wells's highly cognitive novel helped kick-off much of the pulp fiction that followed up through the 1930s, it is sad to see that so much of his initial social criticism was lost in this shift. As Adam Roberts notes, "One of the less-definable aspects of this [shift] was the repeated use of a Wellsian trope of alien invasion in order to celebrate the superiority of humankind over the unprovoked threat from an unspeakable alien menace" (69). This need to celebrate superiority is exactly the outdated facet of space opera that Ringo's narrative draws from, in the case of *Live Free or Die* it becomes a very nationalistic and capitalistic superiority.

In this way, Ringo's work portrays an uncritical reproduction of contemporary imperialism/globalization ongoing today. By having Earth respond in force and one-upmanship, Ringo legitimates the very same forceful tactics the Horvath used. This implies that all cultures and civilizations (including the real-world reflections of these "alien" societies in our own time, namely other countries) share the same socio-political tendencies. If we consider that the primary drive of this novel is the later economic conquest of the galaxy through American globalization (a combination of military and economic power), then Ringo is not asking his readers to take a second look at the actions of the US abroad, but instead reinforcing the norm of contemporary US imperialism.

This text is not self-reflexive or ironic, instead it immediately puts into practice the same forms of exploitation enforced against Earth, only in the more "humane" disguise of capitalistic norms. As stated by Tyler after purchasing the media company MGM, "I bought MGM as another experiment. And I *am* interested in changing cultures. Just not *ours*" (emphasis in original, Ringo 322). He intends to use the corporate giant to sell American media (and the culture behind it) to the rest of the galaxy. Thus, the opening of the gate has simply opened up new markets to exploit. Tyler even gets in on the cruise industry:

> With the decline in the cruise ship industry, Tyler had snapped up the company and gotten them to start thinking about spaceships. With most of the kinks worked out of gravity systems, he had his eyes on fleets of ships plying between worlds. (Ringo 413)

The novel glorifies this form of high finance and production, representing an uncritical view of globalization at work.

In contrast, part of the complexity of Wells's fiction lies in its coded and layered commentary. For example, in addition to offering a critique of imperialism, it also symbolically reflected the concerns of the society from which it was produced (Roberts 64-65). By portraying his "Martians" as distinctly "Eastern" with their ululating cries, he depicts a very specific national and cultural xenophobia. As Roberts states, "the deftness of Wells's conception is that he is able to simultaneously critique the European Imperial excesses, whilst also coding the 'Eastern' threat against which European Imperialism specifically justified itself" (Roberts 64). If we apply this reading to *Live Free or Die,* we see that, in contrast to Wells, Ringo not only unproblematically reinforces the "imperial excesses" of the American globalized empire as discussed above, but also specifically codes the threat as "communist."

That the Horvath are specifically described as communist is a clear throwback to the heightened fear in the communist-era of the 1950s and 1960s. As Tyler states:

> The Horvath are essentially a communist society. *True* communism. They do not even have an executive, just a distributed bureaucracy. Which also demonstrably doesn't work with humans. Just look at the EU. (Ringo 317)

Ignoring the emphasis on America's "exceptional" executive branch and the inherent anti-European bias in the stigmatized label, the most important aspect to consider here is that Ringo's Horvath (and the "communistic" EU for that matter) are given far less textual attention than Wells's Martians. The invading "Martians" of Ringo's novel are not only physically absent from much of the narrative, but when they *do* appear, it is generally only in very brief shots that depict them as very "human" in nature, or as villains bombarding society from space. This is emphasized in the Horvath's rather curt communications: "We will

eliminate all resistors" (Ringo 168). Instead of aesthetically exploring the Horvath, Ringo instead explicitly "tells" the reader that the Horvath are communist without devoting any narrative space to the exploration of communist norms or socio-political culture. This is a narrative evasion whereby the text implicitly refuses to constructively consider any other socio-political norms other than its own (capitalism).

The evasive nature of Ringo's narrative in discussing the socio-economic "other" stands in stark contrast to Banks's and Robinson's work. For example, in Banks's *The Player of Games*, Gurgeh feels an enormous empathy for the individuality, passion, and risk-seeking he encounters in Azad's brutally capitalistic system. Likewise, Robinson's Mars trilogy takes a very sincere look at the sheer diversity and beauty of Earth, despite it being wholeheartedly capitalistic, polluted, and overpopulated. In these contrasts, we see that Ringo's text creates a very one-sided picture that plays solely on the reader's anxieties and need for strength over those anxieties. The Horvath are simply a trigger for a broader tale of American exceptionalism. As Tyler's co-pilot Steve says on a mission, "I've even got a playlist. […] And now we can concentrate on killing Horvath" (Ringo 382). In contrast, in Banks's and Robinson's work there is a vacillation between the foreign and the familiar which helps cognitively estrange conventional aspects of our own capitalistic existence in society. While their novels do unabashedly endorse a socialistic mentality, there is still an exploration and even acknowledgement of the "capitalist" other, one that is made to contrast with their more "endorsed" socialistic norms, thus adding complexity which prevent these texts from being entirely polemic (or indeed political) treatises.

Thus in labeling the Horvath as communist without even bothering to explore the label or idea of communism, Ringo's work is simply miming earlier pulp traditions of outright discrimination. For some generic examples, Roberts lists a series of pulp fictions from the 1920s to 1930s which repeatedly show an anti-orientalist bias in their representation of the invading "other" (71-72). Of these, Roberts has one particularly biting reference to Heinlein:

> This coding of invasion paranoia was sometimes even more direct: Heinlein's 1941 novel *Sixth Column*, which first appeared in Astounding, is specifically about Asian invasion of the USA. In each of these cases, SF is being used to reinforce a particular, narrow ideological construction of 'American-ness' by demonizing some notional scapegoat. (70)

Ringo's Horvath are sadly little different. We receive a brief encyclopedic entry about them when Tyler gets his implants installed; that is about all the reader learns about this culture. As Tyler states, the "Horvath had two sexes, male/female, more or less corresponding to standard Terran form even if their physiology was completely different. They did look a bit like squids

though, though" (Ringo 201). The text continues this listing from a clinical perspective. This type of clinical analysis is the worst form of "science" rhetoric and turns the person or culture into an "object" of study, dehumanizing them. The Horvath become simply an empty entity that exists only to frame the awesomeness of American military and business ingenuity.

Yet simply because Ringo uncritically reproduces the trope of "alien invasion" does not mean that "alien invasion" has lost its function in contemporary discussions of class disparity. Let us consider how Ringo's depiction of "invasion" specifically differs from that of Banks and Robinson. In Robinson's *Mars* trilogy, the invaders are human. Perhaps their most alienating feature is their aggressive capitalistic socio-political system relative to that of Mars. Earth repeatedly attempts to dominate Mars, its utopic and smaller counter-point. There are no analogic aliens here; instead, as I argued in my first chapter, this development is normalized as a Marxist progression in society's movement from capitalistic to socialistic norms. This is not a linear process, the Martian colony suffers numerous setbacks, including fringe resistance groups, violent revolutions, and dystopic capitalistic manipulations and military force, but ultimately they resist and settle on a constitution that upholds some basic egalitarian rights that should be shared by all. These setbacks reveal how Robinson's novel is self-aware of the difficulties of settling on "egalitarian norms" in the context of spiritual and cultural differences.

Continuing on this trend of self-critical explorations, we saw in my second chapter how Banks's narrative reflected on the Culture's "universal" socialistic norms. The trope of alien invasion was inverted and the Culture was portrayed as the manipulative aggressors against the Azad Empire. There was a constant exploration of the boundary between individual freedoms and broader egalitarian rights. In trying to settle on "socialistic" norms, the novel first had to explore the dystopic freedoms of the Azad to then accept the far more universal (if slightly more limited) freedoms under regulated societies like the Culture. As this process is reflected in both the aesthetic depictions of the societies and in the protagonist Gurgeh, the discussion of the nature and range of "freedom" is then dynamically explored from multiple perspectives.

In both of these readings then, it can be argued that the "invasions" served as very strong cognitive estrangements in regards to economic disparity; they marked a progression towards egalitarian norms for broader populations, including disenfranchised and exploited groups, and thus expressed a socio-political novum that was *radically* different than the reader's own. They were both self-critical and yet still aware of their own utopic origins and

yearnings toward more egalitarian norms relative to our contemporary society. In this sense, despite featuring a classic SF trope, they can be said to have transcended their "pulp" origins and perhaps returned to the more "critical" socio-political roots of Wells's SF.

The problem with Ringo's novel is that the novum, or novelty, it seeks to create in the text, namely the emergence of the gate, is not actually "new." The gate is regressive and merely perpetuates past tragedies in human history; it is then, in effect, a false novum as it does not seek to dealienate men from their social life (*Metamorphosis* 82). The gate becomes a reading into rehashed forms of colonial invasion and consumer markets to exploit. It reinforces generic norms instead of upsetting or transforming them. Thus, Ringo's invasion represents neither social progression, nor an inverted exploration of egalitarianism; it follows instead firmly in pulp tradition that elevates "American" conservative socio-political culture to the detriment of all else.

3.2 The Conservative Utopia

Since the novel uses alien invasion to elevate a form of neo-liberal politics and denigrate its opposing socio-economic alternatives, I believe that the novel can be read as postulating a form of conservative utopia. This utopia is inherently regalian, a feudal system that stresses rigid property laws (and protection) and low taxes. This utopia is reinforced through Tyler's ultimate economic success and upward social mobility. This "utopia" also stands in stark contrast to the Glatun, which represent a failed social state in need of capitalistic assistance. The conservative utopia is then both implicitly and explicitly reinforced in the narrative through, respectively, Tyler's upward social mobility and the Glatun's portrayal as a socialist state.

In analyzing both Tyler's role in the novel and the juxtaposition of the Glatun civilization with Earth we can target two conservative ideological "ideals" being emphasized in this novel. One, that upward social mobility and economic well-being are universally accessible *if one works hard enough*. Two, that the universal freedom or right to upward social mobility must be "protected" and "encouraged" through certain conservative policies like lower taxes, reduced social spending, and a strong military. While these conservative ideals may initially appear utopic, I argue that they are actually non-cognitive utopic myths and function merely as an ideological screen that reinforces hierarchal inequality and

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increased alienation. In this way, while Ringo's text may initially read like a utopic text, it is in fact quite dystopic.

It should here be pointed out that Ringo's work is not meant to be read as a pure utopia. However, the framework of a utopic/dystopic binary coincides well with the trend we have encountered in the past two chapters. While it is the Horvath that Ringo overtly labels as communist and aggressive, they simply have too little narrative presence to exist as a valid socio-political contrast. The Glatun offer a far better "dystopic" civilization with which to contrast Earth. They are the one of the oldest and largest civilizations in the novel and have the most advanced technologies. However, as is so clinically researched by Tyler, they also have a very "socialist" socio-political system with 30% unemployment, high social spending, and high taxes (Ringo 203).

In other words, stripping away the stigmatic economic labels for a moment, this culture appreciates leisure time and leans towards policies that facilitate redistribution, but in many ways is not as "productive" as it could be. We can contrast this with the more "utopic" planet Earth which has a more business-friendly and laissez-faire socio-political system. While we addressed some of these issues in my previous chapters, it is worthwhile looking at how this SF novel establishes its socio-political mindset as it this mindset which gives us a glimpse into the underlying conservative ideological norms being reinforced. Since the novel is generally focalized through Tyler Vernon, our pre-eminent capitalist, we have an ideal focalizer to analyze. Yet his role in the novel extends beyond his narratological capacity. I believe that he also stands as a utopic symbol of upward social mobility in capitalist society.

If we return once more to Suvin's definition of utopia, we see that it is described as an author's personal motivation to more perfectly structure her existing world. As Suvin states, utopia is a "quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized on a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis" (emphasis removed, *Positions* 35). In Ringo's work, the "alternative historical hypothesis" is of course the arrival of the Gate that links Earth to the rest of the galaxy. I stated above that the gate was a false novum, however let us take the idea of a conservative utopia to its logical conclusion before returning to this (non)cognitive point. Tyler rises to economic promise by exploiting new economic trade markets opened up by this gateway. It is due to the combination of new markets and the protagonist's own hard work and ingenuity that lead to economic freedom and personal utopia. Yet, how can we designate a novel "utopic" if it only

affects one person? Tyler (and capitalism) gives us an answer: the universality of upward mobility.

Despite the novel depicting Tyler's own meteoric rise to wealth and power, there is an emphasis that anyone can achieve the same. The novel's treatment of Tyler portrays him as hardworking and creative; a well-structured manager who never stops reaching for the next goal. This creates a normalization of upward social mobility. Thus *everyone* has the "freedom" to make as much money as they want to and live exactly as they want to, as long as they work for it:

> I was the one who found the one thing that we could produce that the Glatun wanted. Anyone could have done what I did. And whereas I'm now the richest person in the world, when I met my first Glatun, the free trader Wathaet, I was cutting firewood for a living. That's the beauty of the free market, Lisa. Anyone with the right drive and determination, and just a touch of luck, can succeed. (Ringo 107)

This kind of utopia can be considered collective in that it is one which *potentially* anyone can achieve. In addition, if we step away from the individual a moment, Tyler's company is representative of a healthy outgrowth of capitalist development, which then hires (and invests in) new people and defends the galaxy from "evil" alien attacks through control of the massive solar laser SAPL. Thus, in a reading any political war-hawk would endorse, this novel is a mixture of personal utopic possibilities enforced and encouraged by collective entities like multi-national corporations and the US army. By the novel's own rationality then, society is already a relatively well-functioning utopia; it is the individual's responsibility to fulfill his own economic self-actualization if she so wants to.

Yet there are few obstacles to economic self-actualization, even in a capitalist utopia. Taxes become a serious point of contention for the narrative. The novel directly mentions the word "tax" in various negative ways a rather amazing *17 times*. The repetition alone serves as a negative reinforcement towards taxation. For a SF novel (or any novel really), this is a heavy emphasis on a very specific socio-political issue. Tyler, as a character, takes particularly strong offence to the US government's policies of taxation. Indeed, when the government looks to raise revenues by taxing maple syrup producers (of which he is the largest), he takes it personally. As Tyler states:

> they'll probably start trying to tax the crap out of me. While *I'm* trying to pour all my money into infrastructure that they're not working on and won't no matter how much money they get. There's a windfall profits bill in Congress aimed straight at me and the rest of the maple syrup holders. Tell your contacts that the minute it passes, I'm *out* of this project and I'll just buy my

> ships from the Glatun. And we humans will stay grounded until the government figures out to spend the money on stuff like this and not crap. Clear? (emphasis in original, Ringo 264)

If we were to consider this passage from the context of a Marxian dialectic for a moment, we could consider the absence or lowering of taxes as the negation of the present, thus leading to a more "utopic" world for "collective" society. In this sense, the negation of taxes raises a series of interesting problems in regards to ideological norms. Firstly, we encounter the philanthropist capitalist working towards the common good of mankind under alien duress. Tyler works hard and creates value for society. This normalizes broader instances whereby capitalism is inherently meant as a benefit for all society, not simply for those hired by any one specific company or the markets they satisfy. Thus, any taxes on said private enterprise can only be viewed as a hindrance of their benevolent actions. This is, for all intents and purposes, a wonderful illusion. As emphasized throughout this thesis, capitalism does not generally encourage philanthropy.

A second issue I would like to address about the above passage is that there is no mention of net profit. In this sense, the novel avoids labeling Tyler a "greedy" person. However, this depiction does not preclude the fact that he is making a profit. His wealth and power are so extreme that he even toys with the idea of building a yacht for his daughter as a wedding present, "I could probably still get a custom yacht built to any spec you'd want from Glalkod Yards. […] I'd give it to you as a wedding present, but I don't think you'd want it" (508). Towards the end of the novel Tyler actually does produce this ship, "He'd gone ahead and gotten the ship even if Steren didn't want to get married in it" (516). While similar to many Earth based shuttles it has "one wall replaced with optical sapphire" (516). Simply put, Tyler cruises around in his own private luxury space yacht, so we know that his businesses are profitable. Yet ironically, when Tyler discusses government taxation, no mention of this individualistic and enormous (read: greedy) wealth flow is made. As I see it, capitalist ideology owes much of its success to this omission. It emphasizes the incredibly problematic idea that actions (either corporate or individual) made essentially for personal gain are masked in the guise of working towards a better society, while actually seeking only to further alienate the broader population into positions of exploitation.

Again, I think part of the problem with this mythos is not that it reinforces hard work, but that it does not acknowledge the sheer difference in income. No amount of labor corresponds to the huge income disparities evident in this novel or, correspondingly, in the world today. Thus fiction like this, while potentially a true estrangement of actual norms, serves little cognitive function as it does not reflect on the larger dealienating function of

wealth derived from ownership and the exploitation of wage-labor in the first place. The concept that "hard work" correspondingly results in increased economic status merely encourages one to work harder for an employer, ignoring the fact that the product of one's labor in most typical wage jobs is owned by somebody else.

Owners (and managers) generally want your labor as cheap as possible, especially if the margin of profits on the produced good is marginal. Given that the process of maple syrup gathering can be compared with a job as difficult as, say, sewing a shirt-seam (a relatively complex, but poorly paid job in many countries), one can assume that this job will eventually become as fungible as any other. Thus when Tyler apparently grants a 20% bonus to his maple syrup pickers (from gross profits no less!) (Ringo 107), the action amounts to little more than capitalistic propaganda. As Eagleton states, there is little "ontological difference between working down a coal mine and working in a call center" (*Criticism* III). One could say the same of being a maple-syrup picker.

Yet in addition to the constant justification of wealth being a natural result of working hard, there is also the corresponding reinforcement that the state is a bumbling keeper. As Tyler notes, "If he had the choice of turning over his credit balance to Washington to do something or doing it himself… He'd take his chances" (Ringo 176). Here the state becomes more an annoying entity that should keep its hands off any "hard-earned" private money. This stands in stark contrast with *The Player of Games*, where the "social state" or Culture civilization represents the culmination of egalitarian norms. This also stands in contrast with Robinson's collective yearning for more democratic governance inherent in his Dorsa Brevia and constitution-writing scenes. In one sense then, Tyler's mentality marks him as inherently self-interested. Considering his humble roots and massive socio-economic elevation in the novel, one would think he would be ever so slightly concerned about those less fortunate or able than himself. This proves not to be the case.

As discussed in my second chapter, the social state serves an egalitarian role for society as a whole. In any democratic society, the state is meant to serve the people; in other words, it functions as a democratic and regulatory body to prevent exploitation and disperse societal resources. The healthcare, education, and social redistribution inherent in both Banks's and Robinson's texts are a reflection and outgrowth of the social state. The social state is not some new phenomenon that needs to be brutally combated with right wing ideology in SF texts (or Fox news); it is an entity that truly originated in the postwar period

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less than a century ago. If we consider Piketty for a moment, he creates an excellent breakdown of this social spending in terms of the percentage of national income:

> All told, if we add up state spending on health and education (10-15 percent of national income) and replacement and transfer payments (another 10-15 or perhaps as high as 20 percent of national income), we come up with total social spending (broadly speaking) of 25-35 percent of national income, which accounts for nearly all of the increase in government revenues in the wealthy countries in the twentieth century. In other words, the growth of the fiscal state over the last century basically reflects the constitution of a social state. (512)

By replacement and transfer payments, Piketty here means social welfare and pensions. As seen above then, the majority of state spending is being used on healthcare, education, and pensions. In this sense, those terrible taxes Ringo mentions are being recycled into socialist forms of redistribution (even in America, which stands at the low end of the scale mentioned above). This is not to say that this redistribution is perfect or that it cannot be *even more* effective, I am merely noting that it is already being put to good socio-economic use and is already correspondingly lower than its European counterparts.

Ringo's work lacks the true spark of Utopic Imagination precisely because universal upward social mobility does not exist without education (a social service funded by taxation). It is a myth. Universal education is a necessary element of any society to reduce poverty; this is a fact. The notion of "opportunity capture" I discussed in my first chapter is relevant in showing how Tyler's form of thinking simply reinforces the status quo of society. Opportunity capture is the trend whereby wealth transfers from generation to generation, gradually assuming all the best societal resources for itself. In this sense, while explicitly depicting upward social mobility via Tyler's rise to power, the novel is really implicitly calcifying socio-political trends of hierarchy. By emphasizing reduced taxes, and consequently reduced social spending, the novel works towards increased economic disparity. This novel reinforces a socio-political system that maintains the status quo of those already at the top of that existing hierarchy and actually works against upward social mobility. The very nature of exploitation means that those at the bottom of this hierarchy have little ability to be as socially mobile as Tyler.

Thus this ideological mentality that reinforces the universal nature of upward social mobility in conjunction with lower social spending is actually working against the interests of broader humanity and can never be considered truly utopian. As Freedman states, "Utopian hope or longing, in other words, possesses an inherently collective character and at bottom has nothing in common with individualist impulses like greed" (64). It is precisely because

Tyler's greed is never emphasized that perhaps we should be most wary; Ringo is good at presenting utopian impulses that appear to work in the favor of the masses, yet poor at describing the economic costs of such policy. We are being a sold a socio-economic product in this novel which we think works in our best interests, but indeed, as the first two chapters have emphasized, does not. As Bertell Ollman emphasizes:

> Capitalism, after all, has proven very effective in co-opting free-floating utopian impulses. Fashion, for example, is but one example of how our desires for happiness, beauty, and community are cynically manipulated and turned into a means for enriching the few. (1)

Ringo's text shows how the collective utopian urge to increase one's position in society is a co-option of a utopian impulse.

Thus when Ringo uncritically portrays the rapid social advancement of our protagonist, it reads more like early form of utopic learning, namely the peasant's dream of *Cockayne*. In many ways this form of upward social mobility is the capitalist version of the fantastic peasant's folktale. As Edward James states, "The medieval peasant's dream of Cockaigne where cooked birds fly into one's mouth and the streams flow with wine" is an early form of uncritical utopia (James 226-227). James is of course, referencing hierarchy of utopic forms Suvin discusses in his Metamorphosis (55-57). Ringo portrays a land where people simply tumble over new markets to conquer, handily seizing economic riches, if they simply *work hard enough* for them. While the *Cockayne* folktale creates an amusing contrast to the drudgery in the lives of feudal serfs, it is a fitting analogy considering Ringo's obsession with enforcing a society that seems to be trending towards increased economic disparity, rather than utopian collectivity.

In exemplifying the Cockaigne peasant's dream, I feel we can better see the fine line between constructive utopic thinking and wishful dreaming. This stated, social programs cost money. Thus I do understand the mentality of funding the social state. Ringo is not constructing a completely non-cognitive world when he discusses the cost of such socialistic perks. Without funding, social programs simply would not exist, especially in the system of capitalism in which we live. However, when Tyler mentions government spending as "crap" (Ringo 264), considering that most government spending is tied to social programs like pensions, health, or education, I feel it places a sad focus on how social programs must be viewed solely from the subjective perspective of personal burdens. For example, when Tyler states that, "Medicaid and Medicare and all the other creeping socialized medicine programs were absorbing more and more of our federal and state budgets" (Ringo 335), it places an undue negative emphasis on the underlying social core of why these programs exist.

If we consider Banks's and Robinson's work for a moment, they advocated the opposite side of this political spectrum. As emphasized in Robinson's longevity treatment for example, the universal distribution of medical life-extension treatments has one purpose, to represent a fair distribution of socialized healthcare. Similarly, Banks gives everyone in the Culture drug glands and the ability to regrow limbs; these are post-humanist utopic dreams pushing society further into the realm of universal healthcare. Tyler's statement can be seen as the opposite; he views social spending more as a depressing drag on society, rather than a beneficial aspect that helps reduce economic disparity.

Live Free or Die simply cannot seem to draw the connection between taxes and social programs that promote equality. Tyler, our cowboy protagonist, is represented as the novel's self-made capitalist, thus it is implied that he is able to fund his own healthcare out of hard work. Correspondingly, when he speaks of the US's federal budget as "our federal and state budgets" (Ringo 335) being wasted on apparently ineffectual social programs like pensions and healthcare, it is really a commentary on the social state and the "unfairness" of having to waste "his" taxes on other people. The war budget he wants is one that does not cater to marginalized (or in this case, broader) economic groups and does not promote equality. The truth is, with any society that is perpetually at war, as America seems to be, using this excuse will forever push back the necessity of looking at egalitarian norms *now*.

What Ringo then seems to advocate, opposite to Banks and Robinson, is a far more regressive state than the one we have now. If we turn to Piketty a moment, I believe that the state Tyler really dreams of in all his anti-tax commentary is the low-tax "regalian" state of the 1800s, one devoted mainly to police, courts, army, foreign affairs, and general administration (Piketty 509). This implies a state stripped of all the social benefits mentioned above, including healthcare, education, and social welfare, leaving only those entities that can enforce property rights. The largest textual support of this policy is, of course, the pervasive alien invasion itself; you need an army to fight "alien" invaders from taking your property (to the death apparently, given the title of the book). When aliens invade, you need to raise a military force to fight them. In any capitalist society, this is done through taxes.

Since Tyler is a military supplier, the government winds up paying him with tax money. Tyler is a veritable military mogul in the text; he mass produces "Death Stars" and has control over the largest military laser in the galaxy, the SAPL. This narrative interaction blurs the lines between private and government militarization. These are products the US military purchases and rents from him. These narrative details are all affirmations that Ringo

encourages military spending. Thus by explicitly condemning social taxes and implicitly affirming military taxes via all the government contracting Tyler does with them, the novel is ideologically reinforcing a return to the regalian state. This mentality makes sense for a novel with a capitalist protagonist with a huge amount of wealth and assets; regalian taxes, after all, protect property rights, or perhaps more specifically, property *owners*. The regalian system also broadly reduces taxes; this is a policy which generally benefits those who earn (or own) most in society. Contrarily, this policy reinforcement makes less sense for the vast majority of (non-wealthy) individuals who read this novel.

We should also be aware that the narrative organizes this same reinforcement from a different perspective as well. The "aliens" in the novel are either communist in the case of the Horvath or socialist in the case of the Glatun. The novel is clearly enforcing a good/bad or good/worse binary by having Earth defeat the Horvath and eventually save the faltering Glatun. While simple enough in itself, by setting up these binaries, the novel also robs itself of any last tenuous hold to self-critical irony or self-reflection on capitalistic norms. If we, as readers, were only to rely on Tyler's narration and dialogue for this narrative's ideological perspective, then we *might* be able to consider him, as a character, a conservative junkie; in this case, he would be one so extreme as to even add a degree of levity or humor to the text (much as Banks's snowflake-loving spaceships for example). Tyler is such an over-the-top capitalist that he can almost be considered as ironic counter-part to the actions taking place, an extreme estrangement that helps accentuate the horrors of capitalism in the first place. However, this is not the case. The novel reinforces capitalistic norms outside the characterization of Tyler by including the Glatun and the Horvath, both more "socialistic" entities cast in distinctly negative light. As we discussed the Horvath above in my first section, let us now consider the Glatun.

In many ways, especially since Earth appears as such a conservative utopia, Glatun represents a dystopic USA that has leaned a bit too far towards the left. As narrated in the text:

> At this point, the Glatun Federation sat as the nexus of trade between fourteen different races, some of them having, in turn, expanded widely. They were rich even by Galactic standards, and with riches came problems. They had a permanent unemployed underclass approaching thirty percent, their military was paltry for their size, absorbing less than point zero three percent of their GDP, and their trade imbalance was becoming astronomical. (Ringo 182).

The Glatun are then a highly advanced civilization that is both socio-economically and militarily powerful. However, they have one big weakness. They are inherently socialist and

spend far too much political energy catering to their social problems. As noted in the text, "The People's Council has firmly rejected further 'military boondoggles' and also have rejected every draft bill. So even if we build more ships we can't crew them. They also refuse to yield on reductions of basic social spending, and taxes are already killing us" (Ringo 487). Thus, the text reinforces that their very socialistic focus on social spending leads to their military vulnerability. However, interestingly enough, while the Glatun have all this social spending, it gets absolutely zero textual attention. The reader simply never sees the consequences of it. We have no exploration of the utopic society that could be fostered with such social redistribution. Instead, the reader is given a view of a Glatun slum, a bad neighborhood where Tyler first visits: "It was clearly a different passageway since the light was lower, mostly from blown light panels, and the pedestrians were. . .different. It was amazing how universal a 'bad part of town' could look. Graffitti, it turned out, was another universal" (Ringo 181). Even this "bad neighborhood" gets very little textual attention.

All the benefits (and indeed, even problematic aspects) of the social state are ignored. Clearly, within the framework of the narrative, the Glatun have advanced production capabilities far beyond Earth's. This is obvious since Earth has copied or attempted to copy all of these productive capabilities. Yet with all the emergent production, the novel still condemns unemployment. There is no exploration of "culture" or alternate forms of societal structure that mobilize labor in different ways. Work is defined in the binary of employed/unemployed. The novel even emphasizes their unemployment rate of 30% two times (Ringo 110, 182). The more ambiguous categories of work explored in the texts of Robinson or Banks are not even textually considered in Ringo's work. Either you work and achieve upward social mobility or you do not exist. Given the productive nature of the Glatun, their "technology" (coding again for redistribution or egalitarian norms) must be very similar to the Culture and thus there must correspondingly be more time for leisure. Yet not even the leisure elements are explored beyond the bars in the slum neighborhood or the one Glatun elite Tyler meets. Thus we encounter only the fallible markets Tyler exploits for profits, a hapless civilian population ripe for economic plundering.

This stated, why then do the Glatun ultimately fail as a state? There are multiple reasons, however I would like to emphasize their rather meagre military spending as mentioned in the larger quote above. In contrast with the idea of the Glatun as a socialist state, the regalian state exists mainly to enforce property rights; in other words, the military, police, and courts exist to protect property. As Piketty states, "With 7-8 percent of national income, it

is possible for a government to fulfill its central 'regalian' functions (police, courts, army, foreign affairs, general administration, etc.) but not much more" (512).These numbers matter because the Glatun only spend 0.03% of the their GDP on their military. The US, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, spends about 3.34% of its GDP on its military. By Piketty's numbers, we can see that Glatun's military usage is far less than the average 7-8% of GDP needed for regalian purposes and miniscule compared to the US's. Indeed, that the Glatun need so little government revenue for their military almost makes one assume that, perhaps, the rest of their regalian expenditure is equally low. If we consider this a moment, this means that they have little need for government entities that protect property rights (police, courts, etc.) implying a more socialistic, or even implicitly communistic, socio-political solution.

That a society that is so egalitarian, or at least implicitly so, is condemned to die by the narrative, only to be saved by the more barbaric Americans, is rather comical. This narrative element also raises the implication that socialist countries can only exist because someone takes care of their military protection. This estrangement seems to carry over weakly to the European state of France. As Tyler mutters, "You can afford to be the French if you've got a great big buddy to take care of you, but…" (182). Again, with these constant reinforcements of the regalian state, we should keep in mind that this was an enormously inegalitarian historical period. The state existed only to enforce property rights; in other words, the military, police, and courts existed to protect property. Social spending in the form of schools, education, and pensions generally did not exist as they do today. This is not a healthy ideology to reinforce in a SF text, much less any text.

If we consider how the text views certain elements like upward social mobility or lower taxes as utopic, we can say that the text is normalizing the socio-economic system of capitalism at the expense of defining any socialistic norms as socio-political "other". As Roberts states:

> One of the ways, then, in which an empire establishes itself, justifies itself and continues, is by putting out the cultural message that the dominant culture in that empire is the best, and that (therefore) other cultures should conform to it. It does that on the one hand by raising up the values of the dominant culture, and on the other by attacking those who are not part of that culture. In other words it is involved in praising the Same and demonizing the Other. That Other might be many things: history has given us the Other as Jew, as Black, as Arab, as East Asian ('the Yellow Peril'), and as Woman. On the other hand, history's version on the Same has been remarkably consistent: the Same has tended to be male, white, Western, and associated with military power and technology. (66)

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In many ways Tyler epitomizes (and flaunts) capitalism's norm, especially in regards to the "dominant culture." As Tyler says, "I'm what her culture, her tribe, has long seen as the bad guy. Wealthy, self-made, conservative. White. Male. I'm a more comprehensible evil–and it is viewed as *evil*–than the Horvath" (Ringo 288). The problem with any media form is that it can so easily fall into the familiar.

In this case, Tyler represents the familiarity of what already exists out in society. He represents the dominant discourse and the dominant ideology. Tyler represents the epitome of upward social mobility, he is the both the working class and capitalist simultaneously. Thus, when his actions are elevated above all else, then anything not represented in this capitalist ideology is automatically a marginalized "other." By this I mean he marginalizes the collective nature of society. Society built around upward social mobility is by its very nature hierarchal. This fact alone separates Ringo's novel from the Utopian Imagination and moves his work into the dystopian range of social criticism.

Again, one of the main points emphasized in my second chapter was that analogic SF representations are meant to discuss thematic issues relevant to society *today*. Thus, when Ringo uses "aliens" in his work, we must consider what their analogic representations are trying to tell us about ourselves or our society. As Suvin says, "The aliens–utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers–are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world" (Suvin 5). As I see it, many aspects of the aliens portrayed in Ringo's series are a reflection of the horrors of capitalism, western civilization, or colonization; in essence, they are dystopic reminders of humanity's flaws. The bombing of the liberal cities reflects the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The forced extraction of mineral wealth from Earth is directly (and, if comprehensible, less violently) correlative with colonial meddling in such nations as the Congo. The early mercantile treatment of humanity by aliens such as the Glatun is directly referencing how colonizers came to early indigenous populations with glass beads in trade for resources or land.

These are not uncritical representations; the novel is very aware of the history it is referencing. As Tyler says to his Glatun trading partner, "Look up Polynesian contact with the West […] You're trading iron nails for pearls" (43-44). These are in many ways explicitly dystopian socio-economic views of society. Citing work by Northrop Frye, Lalande, and others, Suvin states that "the explicit utopian construction is the logical obverse of any satire. Utopia explicates what satire implicates, and vice versa" (*Metamorphosis* 54). The horrors

Ringo implicates via his alien "others" are the horrors we have ourselves committed, it is more a fear of the familiar then the foreign which is represented in these texts.

Thus, it is ultimately Ringo's emphasis on the wholly familiar that makes me truly consider it a non-cognitive ideological reinforcement. While Ringo himself admits that the "other" is sadly lacking in this novel in his acknowledgements section, I feel this is little excuse for such a non-cognitive approach to socio-political SF (Ringo viii). Utopia confronts the differences worth striving for; in the case of the past two chapters, it was more egalitarian and socialistic differences. As emphasized in the litany above, dystopia is regressive and looks towards where things go *wrong* in society and is thus a reflection on history. Ringo's novel seems to read far more like a dystopia, than a utopia if approached from this perspective.

The largest dystopic element is of course Tyler himself, reinforcing capitalism in every upwardly mobile social step of his. His utopic construction, the regalian society, is inherently self-interested. The military buy his products and protect his assets. The novel's reinforcement of upward social mobility in conjunction with lowered social spending becomes non-cognitive in that it cannot apply to collective society, it is a utopia modeled upon a hierarchal and vastly inegalitarian system. Portraying this mobility as universally achievable with a little "hard work" is a akin to myths where "roasted fowls fly into your mouth, [and] rivers flow with cream or wine" (*Metamorphosis* 56). Suvin emphasizes the *Cockayne* folktale as an a-historical possibility. Likewise, Ringo's world is also not a historical possibility; it serves instead as an ideological reinforcement and illusion.

In contrast, the cognitive utopian texts discussed earlier in this thesis are forward looking; they fundamentally break apart past historical elements and then attempt to assemble a wholly different entity, a chimera of new utopic thought. In this sense, the reader is given an idea of how technology and sociology can, *within history*, lead to greater egalitarianism. Regressive fears projected onto aliens are merely that, not a conflict of difference in the narrative, but a recycling of a fear of oneself, a wrestling with guilt over what has done and then reciprocally expects to have done to oneself.

In this sense, while this novel may superficially portray a "utopic" Earth versus a more "dystopic" Glatun system, it is in fact the inverse. If we hark back to the prior two chapters a moment, we see far more parallels between the Glatun and Robinson's Mars colony or Banks's Culture than we ever do with Earth. With the Glatun's emphasis on social spending and redistribution is revealed a collective utopic yearning in a way maybe even Ringo did not

notice. As Freedman says, "These are longings that can never be satisfied by the fulfillment of any individual wish (say, for personal wealth) but that demand, rather, a revolutionary reconfiguration of the world as a totality" (64). In their societal longings for egalitarianism the Glatun have reached beyond Ringo's petty capitalistic Earth which simply wishes to dominate all others. While they may have been crushed by early battles with the Rangora, they at least *reached* for a collective social dream. Ringo's Earth, with its supreme elevation of economic hierarchy and social inegalitarianism, is more akin to the Azad empire or Robinson's Earth. While the novel is obviously not meant to be read like this, I feel that it indeed should be approached from the context of utopian studies as it absolutely portrays a society descending further into the socio-economic condition of alienation.

3.3 Fixing Ideology

Moving away from literature and into the broader circulation of ideas within contemporary economics, this last section will consider two recent economic reports from 2014 that discuss increasing economic disparity from the context of big business. I would like to use these reports to help deconstruct the ideological and socio-political notions surrounding Ringo's conservative regalian utopia. This section also helps exemplify how ideology can drift beyond its original purpose as a system of control. While ideology is ultimately meant as a top-down system of manipulation, in this section we will see that Ringo's text has begun to perpetuate ideological ideals that are actually harmful to the system of capitalism itself. Thus, I explore how ideological beliefs can be co-opted and laterally reinforced by individuals to the detriment of the entire socio-political system.

Considering that these economic reports are written by some of the largest financial institutions in the world, namely S&P, a credit ratings agency, and Morgan Stanley (MS), a financial services corporation, it is interesting to note that they stand in such stark contrast to much of Ringo's heretofore discussed capitalist ideological reinforcement. As they advocate *for* policies that decrease economic disparity, they help call into question (from a different perspective) some of the ideological underpinnings implicit in Ringo's estrangement. In this way, this section compliments the last two sections. It shows that much of Ringo's estrangement is of a non-cognitive sort, akin to fantasy or wish-fulfillment found in the *Cockayne* folktales. This reading also helps emphasize that the Gate itself is a false novum, as it only perpetuates existing socio-economic norms evident in society today. This analysis

carries a broader implication for contemporary SF and literature in general as it not only shows how regressive and non-cognitive SF propagates ideological measures of societal control, but also indicates how an ideology can drift far beyond its intended functions into a realm where it actually begins to work contrary to its intended purpose.

In many ways then, I have found it extremely worthwhile (and rather amusing) to contrast certain narrative reinforcements mentioned in the sections above with the research provided by these two large banks (the epitome of capitalism). They essentially state that economic disparity is *bad for economic growth*. They see economic disparity as a result of policy and recommend increased social spending to adjust the social trend. This places their views at complete odds with the utopic regalian state I discussed above in Ringo's novel. Let consider some of these details.

If we again consider the conception of Tyler's "upward social mobility," we see that the MS and S&P reports both have rather gloomy opinions of contemporary social mobility in America. The MS report by Ellen Zentner and Paula Campbell discusses upward social mobility as contingent on education. As they state, "Central to the American ethos is the notion of economic mobility where colleges and universities are major enablers… [A] college education can be both an equalizer and a driver of income equality" (7). Thus, their research coincides with my assumptions of the importance of the more egalitarian aspects of education in both the first and second chapters of this thesis.

In emphasizing a study by John Goldthorpe, Zentner and Campbell state that, "obtaining a college degree can go far in helping students propel themselves to higher levels of income compared with their parents" (9). Thus, while both reports acknowledge that education is highly linked to social mobility, including generational mobility in the case of MS (the economic advancement of one family generation over another), they also emphasize that the cost of obtaining a college education has increased significantly (handily outpacing inflation). This coincides with a corresponding increase in the student debt to the point where it is the "largest component of household debt outside of mortgages" (Zentner and Campbell 10). In many ways then, America's political focus of the past thirty years has weakened its ability to produce an educated and socially mobile population. In this way, when Ringo uses the Glatun as a dystopic binary opposite of Earth's more utopic capitalistic norms, he is essentially arguing *against* the very social mobility promoted by his book. If the Glatun are funneling a large section of their GDP to social programs like education (in excess of regalian norms considering the low level of military focus), then social mobility should arguably be

increasing. Their society should be doing well! The Glatun's economy should be booming with all this educated labor, not busting. It is an inherent contradiction set up in the text and functions only to reinforce a conservative ideology.

The S&P report by Joe Maguire takes this logic a step further. He specifically states that *more* social spending on education will reduce economic inequality and drive economic GDP growth (in addition to creating more taxable income). He emphasizes certain low-cost interventions "like simpler financial aid applications, more outreach about financial aid options that are available to students from low-income households, as well as offering college mentors to students, could help send more kids to school and encourage them to once they get there." While these are very concrete policy options, the collective idea behind them still reaffirms a stronger interest in increasing government funding for education. However, this is perhaps a minor comment compared to the much larger blanket statements made towards the end of their report. They state that "some degree of rebalancing--along with spending in the areas of education, health care, and infrastructure, for example-- could help bring under control an income gap that, at its current level, threatens the stability of an economy still struggling to recover" with "effective investments in health and education promot[ing] durable growth and equity, strengthening the labor force's capacity to cope with new technologies." This is an enormous confirmation of much of the utopic yearning inherent in Banks's and Robinson's narratives and, in many ways, a crippling attack on conservative politicking enforcing just the opposite.

As discussed above, the implausibility of the Cockaigne's peasant dream can, within reason, be extended to Ringo's world. The typical conservative argument states that a deregulated working environment and lower taxes allow businesses to both produce goods more cheaply, hire more people to meet this production, and consequently expand their businesses; this causes a repeating expansionary loop. While this may be true, I am not condemning the economics of capitalism in this thesis, I am more so condemning the socio-political factor of rising economic disparity that capitalism has created. In a way then, this cycle has become unbalanced and we can read Tyler's expansionary social mobility more as luck, or a dream, especially because of current socio-economic disparity. Thus, when a Morgan Stanley report carries with it a glaring warning against trickle-down economics, conservatives (especially those in the lower deciles) might do well to take heed, as Morgan Stanley's very existence is also very dependent upon broader economic expansion.

In reinforcing this point on trickle-down economics, Zentner and Campbell draw attention to how consumption is generally driven by the broader population, which means that more national wealth needs to be accessible by this population. The recent accumulation of financial wealth at the top decile has ultimately not "trickled down" in the form of spending. In fact, the largest segment which has seen an increase since the financial crash of 2007 was the sale in private planes, a branch largely irrelevant to the broader population. As they state:

> The bottom line is that the majority of US households are still recouping lost wealth from real estate holdings, while wealth from financial assets has reached new highs. Unfortunately, the marginal propensity to consume from financial wealth is lower compared with real estate wealth because it not only touches fewer households, but touches households that tend to carry a higher savings rate, Further, even the marginal propensity to consume from financial wealth appears to have been dampened in the wake of the financial crisis. (31).

This is very much in line with the more socialistic rationality explored by both Robinson and Banks. Large businesses thrive when broader society does well, thus there is an emphasis on more equitably distributing the productive and collective wealth of society to society. Again, these papers are *not* advocating socialism, but, like our first two authors, more egalitarian distribution of collective productive resources of society. In one sense, they advocate a mild dealienation of society while still holding themselves firmly within the range of meritocratic capitalistic values. In this moderation, they maintain the focus on "rights" to, for example, education, and yet still encourage the very consumption and upward social mobility they, as a capitalistic entity, need to survive.

In the introduction and first chapters of thesis, I discussed the concept of lateral ideology. If we consider the standpoint of these economic papers on economic growth above, we can make the assumption that Ringo's work actually functions as a form of lateral ideological reinforcement. The reinforcement of upward social mobility combined with the indirect emphasis of the regalian state, dispersed through the popular form of SF, feeds into a growing problem of economic disparity. Now this ideology, whose original purpose was akin to "soma" in that it kept individuals happy while the wealthiest members of society accrued ever larger percentages of the national income, has spread beyond its true purpose. As Maguire states, "A degree of inequality is to be expected in any market economy. It can keep the economy functioning effectively, incentivizing investment and expansion--but too much inequality can undermine growth."[11] Now that same ideology, which is being laterally reinforced by people in whose economic interests it actually works against, works against the

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[11] This report is web-based and has no page numbers.

interests of the wealthiest corporations and corporate owners and they publish research papers advocating against it. Instead of assisting the wealthy make money, economic disparity actually threatens global growth, threatening corporate profits. The ideology has become a political *belief* rather than an economic system of control, and has thus taken on an existence of its own beyond the businesses and wealthy people it originally benefited, reinforcing an imbalanced economic disparity which actually *impedes* growth and hurts large banking entities like MS and S&P, and more broadly, society in general.

I think the key aspect that needs to be stressed here is the difference between depicting the possibility of upward mobility versus the actuality of mobility for the broader masses. *The Player of Games*, which bases its novum of post-scarcity on the conception of the social state, embraces a collective government which moves society forwards. Ringo's work is a false novum based on a the conception ever-eternal new markets and rampant economic expansionism, things that the individual can exploit in her quest for upward social mobility. Things that, in many ways, do not exist. Thus *Live Free or Die* lacks the progressive utopian solidarity and the dealianation of a true cognitive novum. The ring that enters the system opens up new markets that are exactly like old markets, simply inverted. While the reader is basked in the possibility of achieving such bounty as Tyler has achieved, it is simply faulty logic to assume that every person on the planet could achieve what Tyler does. In this sense, the economic and political expansion that occurs in *Troy Rising* spreads an economic system of dealianation and collective disharmony, of false wishes and extreme inequalities. It is a universe where CEOs can afford space yachts while governments struggle to fund Social Security or healthcare, one frighteningly similar to our own society.

Thus, as Ollman states, "Each utopian thinker, after all, has drawn upon his hopes, wishes, and dreams […] Who should we believe, and why should we believe them, except in so far as our own hopes and wishes overlap with theirs?" (4). In this sense, Ringo's subjective wish or *Cockayne* folktale appeals to a very specific thinker, one that emphasizes individual at the expense of the collective. Thus, as Ollman states, "if utopian thinkers can give no good reason for believing that their personal vision represents something that would be good for all of us, the claim that their ideal is also possible is equally groundless" (4). This conception of utopia working for the betterment of all humanity is equally shared by Freedman. As Freedman states of Bloch, "it is only the dimension of collectivity that guarantees the future-orientedness of utopia; the merely self-interested wish always amounts to a desire that the status quo of the present should remain essentially unaltered while one's own personal lot

within it is improved" (Freedman 64). Utopia veers off into escapeism when it wish-fulfills a protagonist's dream of becoming powerful and wealthy by having him "hit" the economic lottery. This then turns into dystopia when the narrative then also endorses a return to a government that strips away the protective rights of everyone in society except those who benefit most from regalian government (those with property like Tyler). This is a frightfully dystopic picture of capitalistic society for everyone who is *not* Tyler Vernon.

Live Free or Die, because it loses its cognitive focus on the dealienation of man from his socio-economic position can be said to lose its status as that of truly cognitive SF. The novel may as well be an early Western, the generic imagery is simply a veneer for a non-cognitive adventure text. As Suvin states, "any such SF tale that can be translated into another literary genre simply by changing surface *realia* (for example, the ray guns and aliens into the Indians and six-shooters of the Western) [is] by that token a fake mimicry of SF" (emphasis in original, *Positions* 203). In many ways Suvin is correct, Ringo's novel can just as easily be set in the Wild West, with angry Indian tribes arriving on horseback into "settled" American lands. The SAPL is simply a more advanced machine gun, comparable to single shot rifles or bows and arrows. This reliance on the familiar aspects of adventure or history locks the narrative into conservative ideologies, especially in relation to the "other."

When a book typifies itself by utilizing elements of genre (in this case, space opera) or a trope like alien invasion, it can either adhere almost religiously to that tradition like Ringo does or it can attempt to surpass and play with that genre as the works of Robinson and Banks do. In this sense, genre becomes almost political. If we consider for a moment the very nature of conservative versus progressive politics, conservatives generally wish to maintain the status quo, progressives generally wish to enact change. There is a parallel here that should be emphasized from the context of exploitation. Conservative politics can easily be seen as wishing to maintain the status quo for those *who have it best* in society.

Alternatively, progressive politics, much like progressive SF, then seeks to lend voice and space to all sides of an argument, particularly that side which is most marginalized. This disperses power (both economic and political). Thus, it is always looking to move socio-political boundaries and rights forwards to where they benefit the majority of people. In this sense, as SF is a genre that wrestles with change, that change should then almost inherently be progressive in the sense that moves society forward. I use the word "progressive" here because capitalism exists in a state of democracy. Radical change would be a society coming to terms with that democracy and casting off such abysmal ideologies as the one just

discussed. The core message my thesis is trying to elucidate is that Robinson and Banks wrestle with economic disparity with an eye towards the present, not the future. In this, I mean that they work towards recognizing every facet of society, familiarizing the "other," and ultimately de-alienating people from their working environments. These are societal aspects that help us reimagine the *present*, not some distant illusory utopia.

In an odd way, while this chapter has generally been highly critical to Ringo's text from an ideological context, I cannot help but feel that Ringo himself would appreciate it. As a commentator for Fox news, Ringo himself would probably revel in the liberal attention I have lavished on him here. More power to him. However, this stated, that Ringo's work is generically regressive is undeniable. SF is a fun field to romp in, both as a thought-experiment and socio-political commentary at the same time. However, the conclusion of this thesis is that regressive narratives like this are simply ideological artifacts and socially obsolete.

In this novel Ringo has crafted his own form of conservative utopia. The liberals are all dead, taxes downplayed, the government militarized, and the aliens (that matter) are all as capitalistic as we are. Ringo's construction is in this way a form of utopia that is both wish-fulfillment in the sense of the *Cockayne* folktales, and escapism for the reader. It is, as Suvin might say, a form of opium for the masses:

> In the first case, estrangement is a creative approach, an organon (as Bloch said of utopia) for exploring the novum, but in the second case it is an opium for the people: if one should not forget that opiates may be necessary for momentary relief from great pain, one should not forget either the venerable adage curruptio optimi pessima. (*Metamorphosis* ix)

Ringo hides economic disparity under the guise of certain conservative tropes, and for those readers who wish to escape any cognitive confrontation of current social problems, including the growing issue of economic disparity, they can escape into a narrative world that perpetuates regressive and dominant societal norms instead. While Ringo's work is definitely a part of SF, it is not *cognitive* SF. The Big Point here then is that Ringo's familiar depiction of only one socio-economic system, his resistance to discussing change, and his anathema towards social progress, makes his work reductionist. It becomes, in many ways, comparable to a *The War of the Worlds* when stripped of its reflective scenes and reduced to bare action. With nothing but alien invaders, Wells's seminal novella becomes little more than a "terroristic suppression of cognition" (Suvin, *Positions* 56).

4 Conclusion

In wrapping up this thesis, I would like to say that SF's effect is ultimately aesthetic in nature. While political snippets of dialogue can spark many a curious thought in the night, it is ultimately the vision of the future that draws people to the genre. This is embodied in the majesty of Robinson's slowly greening Martian planet, the open city-ships that traverse the galaxy of Banks's Culture, and the massive space battles of Ringo's American empire. Scale and wonderment are, however, not the issue at stake. At stake are all the troubling associations these images evoke in the mind of the reader. To consider literature in a vacuum is ultimately a mistake; it is firmly ensconced in a world of cultural meanings.

This thesis's focus on economic disparity is a direct reflection of the current socio-economic situation and absolutely an activist attempt to draw attention to this problem. While this focus may, in the long run, date this essay or assign it to the archival dustbin of some forgotten server, I would consider this the "ideal" event. I happily relegate this work to history if we come to a point where studies like this no longer matter.

This thesis project set out to prove the argument that cognitive SF can utilize its popular generic trappings to both interrogate and reimagine real-world economic disparities. I feel, in many ways, it has accomplished this goal.

In Robinson's *Mars* trilogy we saw how multitudes of sharp differences can come together in a utopic whole; the Martian utopia helped negate the capitalistic tendencies of Earth, pulling both societies towards greater egalitarian norms. This embrasure of difference and otherness is key to Robinson's work and helps undermine any problematic aspects of narrator privilege, ultimately cognitively estranging contemporary society in such a way as to show how universal education and acceptance is a goal worth achieving today, while simultaneously affirming that capitalism is *not* the only option.

In Banks's novel *The Player of Games* we explored how a fantastic "post-scarcity" society can function as a symbol for the social state. The Culture is then an inherently a regulatory body, simultaneously curbing the exploitation of individuals while enforcing a common platform of egalitarianism. In this sense, everyone gets an equal part of the productive pie and everyone partakes in the work, like Gurgeh must when he is sent to the Azad Empire. The Culture forces readers not only to think about existing inequalities, but also helps test the boundaries of how we define "rights," like travel or culture, in society.

In Ringo's novel *Live Free or Die* we explored the regressive nature of more perishable texts in the SF genre. This reading is meant to show how generic SF can fall victim to publishing pressures and the ideology inherent in the capitalism behind that process. These types of narratives uphold the linearity of capitalism while advocating non-cognitive utopias based on regalian states of old. They represent ideologies that have become political to the point of being nonsensical, threatening even the system of capitalism itself. They hold to the individual, at the expense of the collective. They do not explore the "other" and they do not confront us with difference, they simply reinforce the trend of rising economic disparity.

I think the most important aspect I am trying to draw out from the juxtaposition of these three texts is that Robinson and Banks are able to transcend the generic trappings of SF to present truly cognitive studies of economic disparity. In addition, by conforming to a popular mode of writing, their disruptive-ideological reach increases significantly. In comparing them to Ringo, we can see that there is a fine balance between making the "generic" familiar enough to reach the largest SF audience, while still making the text cognitive and difficult enough to spur alternative socio-political thoughts.

This stated, it was interesting to uncover how a narrator's personal interests could be masked so effectively as collective interests in the text. For example, Robinson diffuses his narrators into a multiplicity. Gurgeh comes to represent a multiplicity. Yet Tyler creates the *illusion* of representing a multiplicity. His personal successes are represented as extending to broader society, but do not actually benefit broader society. This representation boils down to the nature of ideology as a means of controlling individuals. Economic disparity exists because individuals are alienated under capitalism.

Yet, despite this ideological facet, this juxtaposition still reveals one last aspect about SF worth considering. There lies a utopic hope behind this illusion. The illusion of collectivity in Ringo's novel is hope in itself, the hope of joining an upwardly social economic class, the hope of partaking in society in a meaningful way. This is why, I believe, his novels are so popular. Now the problem simply becomes moving this hope in a constructive direction, one towards exploring otherness, difference, and most of all, in a direction of collective dealienation, instead of ideological manipulation.

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