

## Elite Domination and Lower Class Resistance in Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011), a popular science fiction novel. The objective of this research is to find out how a massive company called IOI (Innovative Online Industries) runs its domination against people in the novel. Furthermore, this paper also studies how the people resist the company's domination. This study uses Marxist Theory since it investigates class, class conflict and struggle, domination, and resistance. The elements of the theory are identified in the novel and therefore analyzed to reach the objectives. The results of the analysis show that conflict is the reason of class grouping. In *Ready Player One*, the capitalist wants to expand its domination by winning the easter egg hunt while the proletariat resists it. It is concluded that class struggle and conflicts brings the proletariat to work together to resist the capitalist's domination.

**Keywords:** *dominance, class, class conflict and struggle, resistance, Marxist theory.*

### INTRODUCTION

*Ready Player One* is a 2011 popular literature, adventure, and science fiction novel by Ernest Cline. The book has been made into a movie in 2018 under the same title, directed by a well-known director Steven Spielberg. The premise of the story is the main selling-point of the work. It is about a dystopian society that prefers to live in the virtual world rather than in the real one. However, one day, when a competition to inherit the virtual world happens, a giant corporation is determined to win it and dominate the world. The power dynamics between the corporation and the people is something that is very interesting for to investigate.

Therefore, in this paper, we attempt to examine the power dynamics of the two opposing groups and how the corporation tries to dominate the majority of social groups and how the social group fights back.

Another reason why we were interested in this novel is because the Internet community is the biggest it has ever been since the Internet was created, and the novel talks exactly about it. As part of that community, we are interested in analyzing the sense of belonging that the users have and the power that the community holds.

*Ready Player One* is classified as popular literature or popular fiction because it fits the characteristics of it. According to Bloom (2008), popular fiction is expression of mass and industrial

society. The aim of this kind of work is always commercial-oriented and heavily relies on past success for potential future sales. This is visible in the publication of *Armada*, Cline's novel that follows the popularity of *Ready Player One*. Although the status of popular fiction in literature world is always debated, popular fiction has its cultural value in it. Cawelti (1976) stated that popular fiction has convention (representative of shared meanings and ideas that assert continual values) and invention (introduction of new perception) that serve different cultural functions. While convention maintains cultural stability, invention is the respond of an altering or changing situation about the world. Therefore, although *Ready Player One* is a popular fiction novel, we have pointed out that it has cultural value in it in a form of writing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been a number of studies related to the present research. The first is Farris (2017) in which he proposes that gaming literature, in this case, Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, is a productive medium to consider embodiment, identity, and acceptance as it occurs both in virtual worlds and in real life. This paper emphasizes the contrast of real and virtual world and the benefits of role-playing via avatars as mean of self-acceptance. The finding reveals that through avatars, the characters can explore unlimited physical construction, yet appear as authentic, raw personalities that conquer gender or racial limitations and bonds a more intimate mental connection between people as seen in Wade and Aech's relationship.

The second is Nordstrom (2016). This study examines the novel using Bernard Suits' philosophical approach that defines games and utopia that showcases how essential gaming is, especially in utopian literature. The study finds that games are equally necessary for a dystopian world as a mean of escape from the reality of futuristic decline.

The third study is Utami (2015). Though the object of the study is not *Ready Player One*, it

studies the portrayal of oppression and struggle of a man living in the time of industrial revolution.

The fourth study is Permatasari (2015) which focuses on the identification of inequality of economic situation and opportunity through the identification within each of the social classes in *The Hunger Games* novel.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research employs Marxist theory. As Tyson stated (2006), attaining and maintaining economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities including education, technology, media, art, religion and so on. He also mentions that Marxists believe that one day the group of lower class will develop class consciousness and rise up in violent revolution against the oppressors to create a classless society.

Marxist criticism is applied in this study because it is deemed to be the most suitable to answer the questions regarding this research. The elements of Marxist theory are as follows:

### 1) Class Division

To understand how a giant company dominates a group of people, first, we need to understand how the society itself is divided. Giddens (2001) explains that the root of Marx's idea of class is that humans never produce as individuals, but as part of a definite society. Therefore, classes are created based on the relationship of groupings of individuals to the ownership of private property in the means of production. All class societies are built around a primary line of division between two classes: one is dominant and the other subordinate. The two classes are the capitalist or also known as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In the novel, the proletariats are the protagonist of the story, the main characters, while the capitalists are the people of Innovative Online Industries (IOI).

### 2) The Role of Ideology

According to Tyson (2006), in Marxist criticism, repressive ideologies are what make people unaware of the fact that those ideologies made them subservient of the ruling system. Therefore, the ideologies that the people hold will

make them believe in what is called false consciousness. The ideologies that are identified in *Ready Player One* are rugged individualism (the idea that romanticizes individual success without any external help) and consumerism (the idea that encourage the purchase of goods and service in great amounts).

### 3) Class Conflict and Struggle

According to Marx's perspective, class conflict and struggle are inevitable in capitalist society because the interests of the two classes are at odds with each other. Ritzer (2010) explains that for Marx, a class truly exists only when people become aware of their conflicting relation to other classes. If the people haven't acquired this awareness, the class is called a class in itself, not a class for itself. In this case, the two conflicting classes are the capitalist and the proletariat.

These elements of Marxist theory are used in this research to reveal how a giant company dominates the world, and how the oppressed reacts and revolt against it.

## METHODS

The method used in this analysis is library research. The data were gathered from various sources that are relevant with the study. The primary source of data is Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One* while supplementary data sources included journals, essays, articles, and books which provide additional information and strengthen the arguments in this paper.

The primary data is taken from the novel *Ready Player One* itself, which contains the issues that are discussed in this paper. The data were obtained by close reading the literary work and taking down notes that are essential to the study. Therefore, the primary data included narration, description, dialogues, and all written materials in the novel that are direct and indirect that provides further insight of the issue.

The supplementary data were taken from journals, essays, article, books, and interview that provide additional information on the novel, theories and the scope of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of how a giant company called IOI (Innovative Online Industries) dominates the people of *Ready Player One* and consequently, how the latter resist it is divided into several sections.

The first one is identifying the classes that exist in the universe of the novel. This is done to understand how they are at odds with each other's and therefore, resulting in conflict and struggle. The Second one is finding how domination is run through consumerism and rugged individualism. In addition, this study examines how IOI restrict resources to themselves. After all of the elements of domination, there are class conflicts and struggles by the proletariat and how the people of the virtual world bonds better than those in real life. Lastly, the proletariat resists the domination of IOI.

### Class System in Ready Player One

Humans produce not as individuals, but as part of a definite society. Therefore, they form the so-called class. It is no different in the universe of *Ready Player One*. The grouping of the people in the novel is based on the ownership of property and means of production. The class is divided into two, the proletariat, which is the subordinate, and the bourgeoisie, which is the dominant, or also known as the capitalist.

### *The Proletariat*

The members of society who do not own the means of labor and earn wage to live are the proletariat. In *Ready Player One*, the proletarian is first mentioned by the protagonist, Wade or also known as Parzival in the virtual world. He mentions that his mother has two virtual jobs to support their life, one as telemarketer and the other as an escort in an online brothel (Cline, 2010, p.15). He also mentions that there are commuter buses that take day laborers to go to work in the giant factory farms that surround the city, implying that many people from where he lives work in factories.

Now, it is important to note that although the protagonists in this novel are not wage earners, they still belong in the proletariat. The reason is because none of them are of age yet. All of main characters

are still in school. However, it is known that Wade's mother works virtually. The same thing goes with the mother of Wade's best friend, Helen, or also known in her online identity as Aech, who also works in OASIS in the online data processing center (p. 320). The other main characters are Samantha aka Art3mis, Akihide aka Shoto, and Daito aka Toshiro. It is mentioned that Samantha is a college student, and although not specifically explained, Akihide is still in school (p. 329), while Toshiro is only known as 22 years old male in Japan who is committing *hikikomori*, an action where young people withdraw from society and choose to live in total isolation. (p. 243). It is safe to say that these characters belong to the group of proletariat because none of them own mean of production whatsoever.

Furthermore, because of its subordinate position in the society, the proletariat usually lives in poverty. Both Parzival and Aech are poor. The former lives in the stack, which is a kind of housing in the form of trailers that are stacked and rented out to the people who cannot afford a real housing because their wage is not enough to afford that.

Gunfire wasn't uncommon in the stacks, but it still shook me up... I was curled up in an old sleeping bag in the corner of the trailer's tiny laundry room, wedged into the gap between the wall and the dryer... the rest of the trailer reeked of cat piss and poverty. (p.13)

Although his situation is a little bit different from Parzival, Aech also has troubles with money. After he is kicked out by his mother for being gay, he lives in several shelters before he competes in OASIS arena league to buy an RV and lives nomadically (p. 320). Living in poverty just strengthens the argument that Aech and Parzival are a part of the proletariat, not to mention that they are the people that later will fight the giant corporation of IOI.

### ***The Capitalist***

This is the opposite group of the proletariat. While the proletariat does not own means of production, the capitalist owns them. Just like the name, the capitalist gains profit from capitals. Ritzer (2010) explains that capitals will not have significant increase without having to exploit those who do the work. In this novel, the capitalists are James

Halliday and Ogden Morrow, the founder of GSS (Gregarious Simulation System), and the giant company IOI.

These capitalists are divided into two groups, the good one and the bad one. The division is merely based on how the mass in the novel treats them. James Halliday and Ogden Morrow are the 'good capitalists'. The reason is because as far as it is seen, none of the main characters from the group of proletariat ever shows their disagreement to them. The primary reason is because Halliday and Morrow are the creators of the virtual world where the characters live in, which is the OASIS (Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation). They are hugely favorable by the people because although they own a company and employ people, they offer cheap service with the best quality of virtual immersion. (p. 59). Also, when Halliday dies, he creates a competition of easter egg hunt in the virtual world that holds the prize of all of his wealth, including the total control of OASIS. Ogden, Halliday's best friend, states that the intention behind this competition is because Halliday always wants everyone to share his obsessions. Therefore, this competition is his way of sharing. (p. 122). This competition takes the world by the storm, as winning the competition has become everyone's dream. The reward of this competition invites all of the inhabitants of OASIS to join the quest of major fortune and total control of OASIS, but this prospect attracts a company called IOI, which is the bad capitalist.

Innovative Online Industries or IOI is a global communication conglomerate. Their products vary from telecommunication companies, transportation services to banking services. This surely makes sense because according to Marx and Engels (1984), the need of constantly expanding market chases the capitalists everywhere, settle and establish connection everywhere.

A large portion of IOI's business centered around providing access to the OASIS and on selling goods and services inside it. For this reason, IOI had attempted several hostile takeovers of Gregarious Simulation Systems, all which had failed. Now they were trying to seize control of GSS by exploiting a loophole in Halliday's will. (p. 33)

Halliday's will contains the explanation of the easter egg hunt. By looking at the will with a group of experts to find a loophole, the capitalists have ruined the spirit of the competition. However, this is the job of the capitalists: to conquer new markets and thoroughly exploit the old ones. This is the primary reason why all of the proletariats despise the company. The competition that is meant for everyone to join becomes unfair when a giant company enters it with an army of employees to do their job for them, not to mention that IOI's intention for winning the competition is not the most noble:

IOI believed that Halliday never properly monetized his creation and they wanted to remedy that. They would start charging a monthly fee for access to the simulation... The moment IOI took it over...It would become a corporate-run dystopia, an overpriced theme park for wealthy elitists. (p. 33)

Therefore, based on those passages, the 'bad capitalists' of this novel is the corporation of IOI. The representative or the name that is used in this novel is Sorrento, the head of operations of IOI, the antagonist of the story.

### **Domination through Consumerism and Rugged Individualism**

Consumerism is a repressive ideology because it is the only way the proletariat feeds the capitalist by working for them, only to buy products from their very own wage-giver too. This is a belief that is very apparent in the real and online world of *Ready Player One*.

Consumerism is the belief that personal wellbeing and happiness depends to a very large extent on the level of personal consumption, particularly on the purchase of material goods. The idea is not simply that wellbeing depends upon a standard of living above some threshold, but that at the center of happiness is consumption and material possessions. (Wright & Rogers, 2010).

People embody this believe that they are going to be as good as the high-class (the capitalists) so long as they buy certain items with certain

amount of money. This ideology is repressive because in reality, those who follow this ideology do not own means of production despite how much money they spend. Instead, this idea feed the capitalists. Consumerism will make people pay more for items that the capitalists sell.

In *Ready Player One*, consumerism plays a major role in how the people are dominated by the corporation. In the last chapter, it is mentioned that IOI does corporation arrest when people fail to pay for their spending using IOI visa card.

People fail to pay for their spending using IOI visa card. The reason why people fail to pay their visa card is from overspending. Even Parzival purposefully spends outstanding amount of money to get arrested by the corporation officials. Not only that, if people refused to get arrested, the officials will forcefully take them out of their domicile by breaking the doors, which cost of repairmen will be added to the person's debt to the company. The company gains so much from people who are strong followers of consumerism. Parzival mentions that the company takes care of him because they do not want him to get sick since he is now a company property, a human resource. (p. 274). There are also so many people in the same position as Parzival.

I was led into a warm, brightly lit room filled with hundreds of other new indents. They were all shuffling through a maze of guide ropes, like weary overgrown children at some nightmarish amusement park. There seemed to be an equal number of men and women, but it was hard to tell because nearly everyone shared my pale complexion and total lack of body hair, and we all wore the same gray jumpsuits and gray plastic shoes. (p. 277).

This is only one day in the life of corporate arrest. If the company arrest hundreds people daily, there are also hundreds of people who overspend money they do not own daily. There are also hundreds of people less in the competition of the *easter egg* hunt.

One day, IOI even tries to use consumerism directly against Parzival, the protagonist. Sorrento proposes to recruit Parzival to be a part of IOI and offers him five million dollars for a walkthrough to

the First Gate. Parzival is almost swayed by the offer.

I admit it, I actually considered it for a second. Five million dollars would set me up for life. And even if I helped the *Sixers* clear the First Gate, there was no guarantee they'd be able to clear the other two. I still wasn't even sure I would be able to do that. (p. 141)

Seeing his previous spending, five million dollars will enable him to spend for a lot more. To rationalize the offer, he starts to underestimate *Sixers* and even himself. However, he snaps out of it when he thinks about the worst thing that can happen. If *Sixers* wins, he is the one responsible for that and he will not be able to live with it (p. 141). Therefore, he declines the offer. However, things might work differently if the offer is given to other people.

Aside from consumerism, there is also rugged individualism. Tyson (2006) explains that rugged individualism is an ideology that believes people can succeed alone without any external influence or help. This ideology romanticizes individuals who strike out alone in the pursuit of something that is high-risk and dangerous. This belief is the reason why the proletariat cannot win over the giant corporation of IOI. The High Five really glorifies the idea of winning the competition alone without any help. IOI sees this as a chance to keep them separated and gain information from them individually about the *easter egg*. At one point, Sorrento, the head of the egg hunt division in IOI, invites Parzival to arrange a deal with him regarding the competition. He sends Parzival a message regarding the details of the meeting.

Despite the message's reasonable tone, the threat behind it was crystal clear. The *Sixers* wanted to recruit me. Or they wanted to pay me to tell them how to find the Copper Key and clear the First Gate. And if I refused, they would go after Art3mis, then Aech, then Daito, Shoto, and every other gunter who managed to get their name up on the Scoreboard. (p. 132)

Here, Parzival predicts that Sorrento will reach out individually to the people who have cleared the first challenge of the hunt. Turns out, Parzival is right. Sorrento reaches out to all the

members of the High Five. Fortunately, no one agrees to work with IOI. However, it is very possible that someone will fall for IOI's offer of a high ranked position in IOI with equally high wage. IOI manages to give this offer because the egg hunters work separately.

Parzival, Aech, Art3mis, Shoto and Daito are all skilled egg-hunters. They are the original five people who manage to clear up the First Gate of the competition. However, they get stuck at finding the Second Gate, and all are too prideful to join forces and work together. In the meantime, IOI has been working nonstop with their team of experts to find the Second Gate. This attitude of not wanting to work together gives IOI a huge benefit because their competitors become weaker. Thus, they have the benefit of inching closer to win the *easter egg* and dominating the world.

### IOI Restricting Resources

According to Oxford's dictionary, restriction means the limitation or control of someone or something. In this study, the restriction is done by IOI to maintain their domination. In real life, they restrict the resources simply by being the capitalists.

Sorrento had PhD in Computer Science. Prior to becoming the head of operations at IOI, he'd been a high profile game designer, overseeing the creation of several third-party RPGs that ran inside OASIS. He'd been a decent coder, back before he sold his soul. (p. 133)

Due to his education and skills, Sorrento, along with the other people in the boards of IOI, is the decision maker who decides on how the laborers are recruited and how much money the workers will be paid. In the virtual world, however, IOI restrict the resources literally. In OASIS, the resource is the *easter egg*. The first thing IOI do when they find the First Gate of the hunt is to plant a field of power in the shape of a sphere so that no *gunters* other than *Sixers* can enter the gate. Not only that, they also have a team of experts to finish the challenge.

"Every Sixer has a support team made of Halliday's scholars, videogames experts, and cryptologists who are there to help them beat

every challenge and solve every puzzle they encounter.” (p. 156)

This is what the *Sixers* has been doing the whole competition. When they find the gates, they will barricade it with field of power that only allows them to come in and electrocute anyone who tries to get over it, not to mention that the company owns high-tech items to help them succeed. This is how they keep the resources to themselves and because no one works together to break the sphere, the *Sixers* manages to maintain its restriction.

### Class Conflict and Struggle at Full Force

Throughout the story, it is apparent that every single *Gunter* despises the idea of having to compete against a big corporation such as IOI. However, as Ritzer (2010) explains, Marx believes that a class never truly exists without conflict between the classes itself. Moreover, there has to be class consciousness. According to Parrillo (2008), class consciousness is the set of beliefs that a person holds regarding their economic rank in the society, the structure of their class, and their class interest. In Marxist theory, this is the formula for a proletariat revolution that will change them from the wage-earners to the ruling class. Crossman (2017) also mentions that the capitalists accumulate wealth by exploiting workers while workers maintain or advance their own well-being only by resisting the capitalists' exploitation. The results are conflicts and struggles such as unionizing efforts to strike and topple the ruler.

There are three triggers that eventually let out the conflict at full force and make everyone stand together to fight IOI. The first trigger that puts the idea of teaming up is when IOI bombs Parzival's trailer because he refuses to help them find the First Gate. After the incident, he invites everyone to gather. There, they talk about how Daito and Shoto actually get hints to the First Gate from Parzival and Aech, and how Aech himself gets help from Parzival. (p. 154). This is the moment that reveals that they have been helping each other indirectly and IOI is getting stronger. However, when Parzival suggests an alliance, everyone becomes defensive.

“Let's just talk this out. We shouldn't part as enemies. We're all on the same side here.” ...

“This is pointless,” he said. “Only one person can be the first to find the egg and win the prize.” he said. “And that person will be either me or my brother.” (p. 157)

Here, Daito insists to play solo even though Parzival already states the fact that they are out-powered and outnumbered. There are thousands of IOI employees working together to find the egg. (p. 156).

The second trigger is when IOI manages to find the third and last gate of the *easter egg* hunt after six months of complete silence from the High Five. During those six months, all of the members of the High Five have drifted apart, due to the argument in the previous meeting. During this time, reality hits Parzival hard.

The end of the contest was at hand. And it wasn't going to end like I'd always thought it would, with some noble, worthy *gunter* finding the egg and winning the prize. I'd been kidding myself for the past five and a half years. We all had. (p. 238)

At this point, Parzival realizes just how bad rugged individualism is, that winning the contest solo is nothing but an illusion. He has a breakdown after receiving this information. Parzival even goes as far as thinking about suicide if IOI ever win the competition. Unable to think of any other options, he goes undercover as IOI's prisoner, steals all of the company's data regarding the *easter egg* hunt and launches his plan to bring the people of OASIS together to fight IOI.

Parzival meets the High Five to discuss about their condition. Here, they have to work together to understand the clue to open the third and the final gates, the gates that are already found out by IOI, but yet to be opened. Understanding their position of being outnumbered by the *Sixers*, Parzival already discloses all of IOI's information about the *easter egg*, and about how the company tried to kill him and the rest of the High Five. He sends the data to all major newsfeeds that exist. (p. 303).

Then, they ponder upon the reason why IOI has not managed to solve the riddle to open the Third Gate. To find this out, without them noticing, they work together to solve the riddle. It turns out that to open the Third Gate, the hunters have to

insert three Crystal Keys. They assume that either Halliday wants people to work together, or he enjoys seeing a more dramatic competition. (p. 308). Here, they decide to work together. Knowing it will not be easy to fight IOI with only the High Five members, as the last strike to wake the proletariat with the fact that they have always been at the disadvantage, Parzival invites every OASIS user to fight against IOI, the capitalists.

*Fellow Gunters,*

It is a dark day. After years of deception, exploitation, and knavery, the Sixers have finally managed to buy and cheat their way to the entrance of the Third Gate... If Gunters around the world don't join forces to stop the Sixers, they will reach the egg and win the contest. And then the OASIS will fall under IOI's imperialist rule.

Our time is now. Our assault on the Sixer Army will begin tomorrow at noon, OST. Join us! (p. 310)

This is the last trigger for a battle that is about to happen between the capitalist and the proletariat. Parzival is so positive that his plan will work, that the people will realize how IOI will be the ruler of their lives if they win the competition. He believes that no one wants the Sixer to win the contest and see IOI take control of OASIS. (p. 310). Surprisingly, Ogden Morrow, Halliday's best friend, part of the capitalist, shows up and wants to help them. This is in accordance with what Marx and Engels (1984) wrote in the Manifesto of the Communist Party.

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the progress of dissolution going on within the ruling class. In fact, it happens within the whole range of the old society, assuming that such a violent, glaring character causes a small section of the ruling class to cut itself adrift and join the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands (Marx & Engels, 1948).

It is true that at this moment, the end is near. IOI's win is only obstructed by the Third Gate. It is true to Marx writing that a small portion of the ruling class, in this case, Ogden, is joining the revolutionary class. It is revealed that he has been monitoring the High Five's meeting this whole time. Apparently, a week before his death, Halliday

asks Ogden to monitor the contest for him, in case there are complications that might arise that will prevent the contest from proceedings. The complication that Halliday means is something like IOI. (p. 314). Ogden says that he has to intervene in order to maintain the integrity of his friend's legacy. Therefore, to help the High Five fight IOI, he flies them off to his house and provides them with the best gear to accommodate them during the war. Not only that, Ogden has previously shown his displeasure towards IOI.

He is well aware that what IOI does ruins the spirit of the competition and puts OASIS in a dangerous position. However, he is not in the position to do anything with the rule. He also helps to accommodate the High Five during the fight. He mentions that he does not know what is inside the Third Gate and he will not tell anyone even if he knows. He respects Halliday's will and the competition. Even during the fight, he just sits back and watches the most epic battle in videogame history. (p. 325)

Maas (2010) explains that the longer a struggle carries on, the more the need for unity to assert itself, and the more people will become participants of this solidarity. As explained in the previous chapter, people have a high sense of belonging in OASIS, the virtual world. The reason is because they grow up with the software. Parzival even explicitly mentions that for people like them (the proletariat), OASIS is the only reality that has any meaning. (p. 243). A similar feel of belonging is experienced by Ogden Morrow. Although he is from the capitalist, he helps the High Five to preserve OASIS, his best friend's legacy. To defend such a meaningful dwelling of the people is an honor. Therefore, the open letter that Parzival sends to every OASIS user is the breakthrough that leads to the battle of the classes, the proletariat resisting the domination of the capitalist.

### **How People of the Virtual World Bonds Better than the People in the Real World**

Nash and Calónico (1996) define social interaction as a process of communication and mutual influence involving a contact between two or more minds. They also stated that there are three basic elements of social interactions, which are memories and



background knowledge (when people have common interests) linguistic and other communication skills (the ways people communicate), and motivations and emotional involvement (what drives people to communicate).

The most obvious condition of social interaction in the real world is that everyone is so individualistic since often, if not most of the times; people are engaged in the virtual world. Even Parzival explains that he is introduced to the OASIS at a very early age. The software is basically his parents as he grows up with it. (p. 15). From this it can be assumed that growing up, he has limited communication skill in real life. It is not to mention that when his mother dies, he is taken in by his aunt, Alice, who adopts him only to get more monthly food voucher from the government (p.19). He does not have any emotional connection with the people he is living with in the real world.

Similar things also happen to the other main characters. Aech has a good relationship with her mother, but she has not spoken to her since her eighteenth birthday when she comes out to her mother as being gay. She leaves her house because her mother cannot accept it. (p. 320).

I didn't know anything about who Aech was in the real world, but I got the sense his home life wasn't that great. Like me, he seemed to spend every waking moment logged into the OASIS. (p. 39)

The description given by Parzival above implies that Aech does not spend a lot of time communicating with the people outside of the virtual world, like him. Daito and Shoto seem to be worse because they meet through a hikikomori support group, a support group for teenagers who withdraw from society to live in isolation. They definitely do not have the three the basic elements of social interaction in real life. Therefore, since everyone is always engaged in the virtual world, it is safe to assume that most of them have unhealthy social interaction in the real world.

However, in virtual world, social interaction becomes very interesting. People create their own avatars; they can create their own persona as they like. People can even control how their facial expressions are and how they sound. Mainly for this

reason, people prefer to go online rather than being in the real world.

I was a painfully shy, awkward kid with low self-esteem and almost no social skill—a side effect of spending most of my childhood in the OASIS. Online, I didn't have problem with talking to people or making friends. (p. 30)

Parzival does not have problem communicating in the virtual world because no one can see the real him, as in his physical features and appearance that even he himself thinks unattractive. Here, he can communicate with people without their prejudice over his body. In virtual world, people have more control over social interactions. There, people can mute others when they do not feel like listening to the other's opinion. This way, you can receive selective information as you like.

It is to be noted that virtual reality is not connected with the real reality. For example, Aech's mother accepts the fact that her daughter can have a white male avatar in the virtual world in order to have more opportunities and respects. However, it is not okay when Aech reveals to her mother that she is attracted to woman. His mother's refusal to accept Aech's sexuality is a clear sign that what accepted in virtual world are not always accepted in the real world. (Farris, 2017)

Furthermore, most of Parzival's interaction with other characters is based on their common knowledge and interest of the egg hunt. All of the characters communicate and come together because of the egg hunt; they own the same background knowledge and motivation needed to communicate. Their relationship transcends prejudices and superficial similarity such as race, physical appearance and gender.

As we continued to talk, going through the motions of getting to know each other, as well as any two people could. We'd known each other for years, in the most intimate way possible. We'd connected purely on mental level. I understood her, trusted her, and loved her as a dear friend, none of that had changed by anything inconsequential as her gender, or skin, or sexual orientation. (p. 321)

Parzival is completely aware of this because back then, in real life, he used to think that talking to girls was out of the question. He used to break out in cold sweat and lose the ability to speak when he goes near a girl. This really shows that virtual world makes people bond without prejudice.

### People of OASIS resisting IOI's Domination

According to Marx and Engels (1984), proletariat struggle will lead to the overthrow of capitalism and its supporters. This refers to the overthrows of any kinds of oppression that the proletariat faces. However, in this novel, the ending is not the absolute abolition of the capitalists, but a step towards that idea.

The following day after Parzival's open invitation to fight IOI, the Third Gate is crowded with thousands avatars with different shapes and sizes, all are eager to stop IOI from getting *the easter egg*.

"I must say, we are a bit surprised so many of you showed up here today. By now it must be obvious, to even the most ignorant among you, that nothing can get past our shield." His proclamation is met with a deafening roar of shouted threats, insults, and colorful profanity. (p. 332)

This marks the first contact of the representative of the corporation with the proletariat. Sorrento's remarks become a fuel to the people before the battle. Therefore, the battle begins. Parzival manages to get through the battle with the help of the group work of the other avatars including the High Five. However, when he is about to open the Third Gate, everything vanishes.

Apparently, IOI detonates a Catalyst, an artifact that can demolish a virtual planet and everyone inside. Knowing that the proletariat is so close to the resource, the company decides that it will be better if the resources are detonated instead. This shows that they are aware of the power the proletariat holds and the things that they can do if they achieve the resource. However, Parzival can still open the gate because when all the other avatars vanish, he gets an extra life in the form of a coin from a quest he conquers a few months before. (p. 344). In the end, he wins the *easter egg*.

After Parzival wins, Ogden Morrow, Halliday's best friend, shows him that there is a big red button of destruction that will launch worm and deletes the entirety of OASIS, including all of OASIS source code. This button can shut down the OASIS forever. (p. 364) In the last message, Morrow tells Parzival not to be imprisoned by the virtual world, because as terrifying and painful as reality can be, it is the only place people can truly find happiness, because reality is real. At first, Parzival wants to use the prize money to move to another planet and leave earth. However, after everything he goes through, he decides that he is going to end world hunger and make it a better place. (p. 371)

In the end, after failing to achieve the *easter egg*, Sorrento gets arrested by the federal agents as a suspect of murder. However, during the broadcast, he seems to be content knowing that he has an expensive attorney that can secure his release. (p. 367). This shows that the capitalists have the upper hand when it comes to controlling the government. Parzival still has no plan regarding how to overthrow IOI as a whole, but by attaining one of the resources of production, the proletariat is one step closer towards that possibility.

## CONCLUSION

*Ready Player One* is a popular science fiction novel that gives more insight about the existence of classes and the struggle and conflicts within those classes that are deeper than they seem. In this research, we analyze how the capitalist maintains and expands its power and how the proletariat resists such advancement.

From the previous discussion, it can be concluded that classes exist in the universe of *Ready Player One*. The two classes are identified as the capitalist or the dominant, and the proletariat or the subordinate. Their existence is sealed when conflict is identified. The two classes have conflicting intentions: the capitalist or IOI would like to stay ruling and expanding their regime, while the proletariat or the protagonist wants to stop the corporation from doing so. IOI have been using ideologies such as consumerism and rugged individualism to keep the proletariat subordinate.

For a long time, the proletariat struggles because of that. Their wage is only enough to fulfill food needs and they decide that succeeding alone is a virtue. Only when IOI is about to obtain the *easter egg*, the proletariat's only hope to turn their destiny, that the proletariat decides to join forces to resist IOI's. Alongside of that, the people in the virtual world bond better than the people in real life because communicating there topple any prejudices and connection due to superficial elements such as physical appearance, race, and gender.

However, to have the proletariat on top, they have to change the system as a whole. In *Ready Player One*, the people only make a small progress of toppling the ruling class because IOI does not only work on internet and communication business, but in many different branches. Nonetheless, no matter how small, it is a progress. There is definitely a possibility that their struggle will continue because Parzival mentions that they are going to feed world hunger and make the world a better place although he is still not sure how to do so.

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