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From Waste to Renewal: Circular Economy and the Ethics of Degrowth in *Record of a Spaceborn Few*

Del residuo a la renovación: economía circular y ética del decrecimiento en *Record of a Spaceborn Few*

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Abstract: This article examines the alternative future of Becky Chambers's *Record of a Spaceborn Few* through the frameworks of circular economy, degrowth, and critical posthumanism. As I shall argue, Chambers's novel envisions a future society that moves beyond extractive capitalism, emphasising a sustainable socio-economic system with communal labour and non-hierarchical social structures through the Fleet, a collection of ships inhabited by the descendants of the last humans on Earth. By analysing the Fleet's socio-economic system, this article explores how and to what extent Chambers criticises lineal capitalism and proposes an alternative mode of existence, potentially more aligned with critical posthumanism. Drawing on economic theory and speculative fiction, including science fiction, scholarship, the article argues that Chambers's novel offers a complex vision of post-capitalist futures, demonstrating the role of science fiction in imagining sustainable alternatives to the Anthropocene.
Keywords: Becky Chambers; speculative fiction; circular economy; critical posthumanism.
Summary: Introduction. The Fleet as a Model of Circular Economy. Death, Compost, and the Cycle of Life. Reconfiguration of labour. Limits to the Circular Model of the Fleet. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo examina el futuro alternativo de *Record of Spaceborn Few* de Becky Chambers a través de los marcos teóricos de la economía circular, el decrecimiento y el posthumanismo crítico. La novela de Chambers imagina una sociedad futura que trasciende el capitalismo extractivista, poniendo énfasis en un sistema socioeconómico sostenible basado en el trabajo comunitario y en estructuras sociales no jerárquicas, a través de la Flota, un grupo de naves habitadas por los descendientes de los últimos humanos de la Tierra. Al analizar el sistema socioeconómico de la Flota, este artículo explora cómo y hasta qué punto Chambers critica el

capitalismo lineal y propone un modo de existencia alternativo, potencialmente más alineado con el posthumanismo crítico. A partir de la teoría económica y de los estudios sobre ficción especulativa, el artículo sostiene que la novela de Chambers ofrece una visión compleja de futuros poscapitalistas, demostrando el papel de la ciencia ficción en la imaginación de alternativas sostenibles al Antropoceno.
Palabras clave: Becky Chambers; ficción especulativa; economía circular; posthumanismo crítico.
Sumario: Introducción. La Flota como modelo de economía circular. Muerte, compost y el ciclo de la vida. Reconfiguración del trabajo. Límites del modelo circular de la Flota. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

During the past years, the term "circular economy" has gained increasing attention (Geisendorf and Pietrulla 772). As Corvellec et al. succinctly explain, in just a few years, "circular economy" has emerged as key in policies in China, Africa, the European Union, and the United States (421). For instance, it is a key concept in the European 2030 agenda, aiming to double its rate from a 11,8% to a 24% by 2030 (United Nations). The idea of the circular economy can be traced back to 1966, when the term was proposed by Boulding in his work, "The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth" (Geisendorf and Pietrulla 772). However, the term "circular economy" is still a concept under construction and, therefore, also in dispute (Vence et al. 2). Nowadays, one of the major advocates for circular economy is The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a nonprofit organisation that encourages the inclusion of concepts with a circular approach from diverse areas such as the blue economy, cradle-to-cradle, closed-loop supply chains, industrial ecology, reverse logistics, resource efficiency, low waste production, biomimicry, and sustainability (Geisendorf and Pietrulla 772). According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation,

> [a] circular economy is one that is restorative and regenerative by design and aims to keep products, components, and materials at their highest utility and value at all times, distinguishing between technical and biological cycles. ("Circularity Indicators")

Hence, circular economy seeks to leave behind the disposable economy of current capitalist systems and move towards an economic system in which the amount of waste produced is, ideally, zero. In other words, the circular economy is to bring about perfect circles of slow material flows, to prompt

a shift from consumer to user, and to enable a decoupling of resource use and environmental impact from economic growth (Corvellec et al. 421).

Nonetheless, circular economy has plenty of detractors too. Corvellec et al., for instance, explain that the critiques to circular economy include its diffused limits, with uncritical, descriptive, and deeply normative policies that avoid controversies, and its focus on a win-win policy that is particularly difficult to criticise despite the "lack of any actual consensus on the magnitude of eventual economic, social, and environmental 'win-win-win' benefits" (Corvellec et al. 422).

In contrast, we find the concept of degrowth, a relatively new movement in the global North (Singh 138). Degrowth proponents emphasise that the movement is not "less of the same" but rather "different forms of organizing social and economic relations" that will evolve through confrontation with the existing world (Singh 138). In short, Singh explains, "instead of a concrete 'project,' degrowth advocates propose degrowth as a 'keyword' to provoke thought about alternatives and "decolonise the imaginary (of development) from growth" (138). Richter explains that, within degrowth,

> economic growth and environmental sustainability are thereby considered mutually exclusive. Sustainable degrowth is defined as an equitable down-scaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term. Degrowth first and foremost aims to abolish economic growth as a social objective. Its literature pays equal attention to social equality and ecological sustainability policies. The proposed socioeconomic overhaul would require political action on international, national, regional and grassroots levels. The term degrowth therefore not only encapsulates an academic debate, but a social and political movement. (3)

According to Schröder et al., circular economy and degrowth share a number of important principles and goals, despite the existence of non-negligible differences (190). As they argue,

> [t]here are also important degrowth elements within the circular economy narrative. These elements—at least in some versions of the circular economy—underscore the need for narrowing and slowing material flows, in addition to increasing circularity. In the long-term, there is a creative destruction—an industrial structural change—element of a transformation toward the circular economy. For example, the goal of the circular economy

> is to have extractive linear sectors of the economy shrink substantially. In particular, mining and fossil fuel dependent industries will need to constrict. These will be replaced with regenerative industries meant to restore the Earth's ecosystems while generating value. (Schröder et al. 191)

Moreover, as Schroder et al. argue, that although there is some agreement on the means and goals of the circular economy, there are many remaining issues that have yet to be fully resolved, including the means in which the emergence of circular economy is constrained by the context of neoliberal economic growth and the ideology of consumerism (190). According to Gertenbach et al., "[r]evolving around a critique of capitalistic regimes of growth, the main focus of the discourse on degrowth lies on alternative, often post-capitalistic social institutions, ecological reforms, and the realignment of human relationships to reassess what 'living a good life' (*buen vivir*) might mean beyond consumerist lifestyle" (387). In short, "[p]ost-growth, other than for example Green Growth, does not promote or pursue major technological efficiency improvements and shifts towards renewable energy production. Rather, it emphasises the need for, and benefits of changes in the ways in which societies and everyday life are organized" (Kuijer and Laschke 6). In this regard, as Vence et al. argue, "tackling the problems of climate change and the sustainability of life on the planet as we know it, with ambition and realism, requires much more profound changes" (2).

Strongly related to the ecological challenges that degrowth and circular economy seek to address is the philosophical framework of critical posthumanism. As Rosi Braidotti understands it, critical posthumanism represents a post-anthropocentric and zoe-centred[1] turn in thought, which rejects the human(ist) hierarchy that privileges human life (bios) over other forms of life (zoe) and dismantles the dualism between human and other-than-human entities (194). This philosophical stance calls for a profound epistemological shift, demanding that humans reconsider the ontological boundaries and ethical priorities that have structured Western thought for at least since the Enlightenment. Critical posthumanism thus undermines the human exceptionalism that has legitimised the instrumentalisation of non-human life and matter under capitalist and industrial paradigm.

[1] Braidotti states that the *zoe* is the "dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself" that includes human, non-human, and more-than human life (60).

From this perspective, crucial posthumanism resonates with the core principles of both circular economy and degrowth; while circular economy aims to replace the linear, extractive model of capitalism productions with regenerative and closed-loop systems, the degrowth advocates for a deliberate downscaling of production and consumption to foster social and ecological well-being, critical posthumanism provides the philosophical foundation for these socio-economic transformations. Moreover, critical posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric assumptions that underpin economic notions of "progress" and productivity, encouraging a reconceptualization of value beyond growth metrics. As Adelman notes, such a framework contests the humanist foundation of eternal growth (16) and opens space for envisioning sustainable social and economic systems.

Within this context, the ability to imagine alternative futures becomes a political and ecological imperative, particularly taking into account the almost cliché expression of how it is easier to imagine the world than to imagine the end of capitalism, often attributed to Fredric Jameson, who, according to Robert Tally, reiterated this claim in *The Ideologies of Theory* (Tally Jr. 267). Echoing this sentiment, science fiction writer Mark Bould remarks in an interview to authors Amy Cutler and David Higgins, that "we have stopped imagining the future" (Reimann). Degrowth, as Kallis and March contend, drawing from Latouche's vision of it, "is an imaginary that challenges the very spirit of capitalism" (365). It articulates an ecological and post-capitalist imaginary that diverges from Malthusian "limits to growth" discourses (Kallis and March 366), offering instead a vision rooted in justice, sufficiency, and conviviality. Hence, reactivating the imagination becomes crucial for envisioning and enacting post-capitalist, sustainable futures.

In this regard, one effective way to explore alternative futures is through fiction; science fiction, in particular, holds significant potential in this regard. R.B. Gill argues that the construction of alternative worlds in science fiction acquires meaning through the lens of the reader's own world and its established norms, providing a platform to either reinforce or challenge prevailing values and ideas (73). Similarly, Eva Menger highlights the genre's strength in its receptivity to diverse forms of alterity that might otherwise encounter strong resistance in more conventional contexts (3). Moreover, as Mitchell and Chaudhury argue, "science fiction regularly influences not only public imaginaries but also public policy" (319), turning science fiction into a powerful tool through which imagination is the instrument to shape our present and future. Given this,

it is of particular interest to examine how these ideas of economic articulation permeate contemporary works of fiction, especially those concerned with possible futures. Becky Chambers's work is especially relevant in this regard, as she actively engages with the exploration of alternative futures in many of her works.

Renowned for her imaginative ability in crafting worlds and character-driven narratives, particularly those centred around space exploration and extraterrestrial themes, Chambers[2] draws on a background that blends personal curiosity with a commitment to envisioning inclusive, sustainable futures.

This article focuses on *Record of a Spaceborn Few*, in which Chambers constructs a contemplative narrative centred on the lives of ordinary individuals aboard the Exodus Fleet, a spacefaring community formed by humans who fled a dying Earth generations earlier. A central feature of the Fleet's design is the Hex, a term referring to the hexagonal layout of its residential sectors. It is also worth mentioning that the novel is narrated through a multi-focal structure, unfolding through the interwoven perspectives of four central characters: Tessa, a mother and cargo worker grappling with the uncertainties of raising a family in space; Eyas, a caretaker who ceremonially transforms human remains into compost to sustain the Fleet's oxygen farms; Isabel, an elderly archivist whose encounters with other species, particularly a visiting alien, prompt reflections on the Fleet's identity and future; and Sawyer, a planet-born outsider seeking purpose in the Fleet's way of life.

M. Hajiyeva delineates a clear contrast in speculative literature narrative: "utopian literature envisions perfected realms characterized by

[2] Chambers's early exposure to space-related endeavours stems from a family deeply entrenched in NASA, with an astrobiology educator and a satellite engineer in her lineage (Kehe). Chambers's fascination with space ignited during her formative years and she later channelled this passion into her studies in the arts, earning a degree in theatrical arts at the University of San Francisco. In 2014, Chambers self-published her first novel, *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet*, securing successful funding through Kickstarter (Flood). The book received critical acclaim and garnered a nomination for the Kitschies, a literary prize focusing on " progressive, intelligent and entertaining works that contain elements of the speculative or fantastic" (The Kitchies) establishing its position as the first self-published novel to achieve such recognition. This achievement led to the reissue and publication of the work by Hodder & Stoughton and Harper Voyager. Serving as the inaugural instalment of the Hugo-winning Wayfarer series (Cox), the novel was followed by three sequels: *A Closed and Common Orbit*, *Record of a Spaceborn Few*, and *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*.

societal harmony and prosperity, often reflecting the aspirations and ideals of its creators," whereas dystopian texts typically depict "nightmarish settings characterized by oppression, surveillance, and societal decay" (83). Chambers's *Record of a Spaceborn Few*, however, resists a binary classification within this utopia-dystopia spectrum, potentially aligning itself with the legacy of authors such as Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Martha Wells, whose texts often engage with dystopian and utopian traditions from a self-reflexive and critical perspective (Rogan 310), to mention but a few. Rather than presenting an uncritical utopia marked by harmony and prosperity, Chambers constructs a more nuanced speculative world through a multi-focal narrative that foregrounds complexity and internal tension. Through shifting focalisation, Chambers refuses to render the Fleet as an uncomplicated utopia; instead, the narrative remains alert to fragility and imperfection. This is exemplified in the case of Sawyer, a newcomer to the Fleet whose unexpected death—though not directly caused by the Fleet itself, but by passing scavengers—disrupts any idealised reading of this spacefaring community and introduces an element of vulnerability and risk.

Moreover, by the end of the novel, each focalised character reaches a different choice. While Isabel chooses to remain within the Fleet, affirming its values, other characters—such as Eyas and Kip—navigate their own paths of questioning, with Tessa opting to leave for a planet-based colony. These divergent trajectories already suggest that the Fleet is not a monolithic utopia but a contested space of negotiation and choice. This way, Chambers's use of multifocal narration undermines a singular, idealised vision of the future and instead cultivates a polyphonic narrative in which multiple, sometimes conflicting, positions on community, belonging, and sustainability coexist, allowing her to explore this imagined future from multiple perspectives and thus avoiding an uncritical speculation. Accordingly, the aim of this study is twofold: first, to examine the extent to which the Fleet's community embodies a society shaped by circular economy principles; and second, to analyse how this model informs the novel's speculative vision of a sustainable and cooperative future.

1. The Fleet as a Model of Circular Economy

Record of a Spaceborn Few is set during the Anthropocene[3] era of the so-called Wayfarer universe (Roldán-Romero 85), its narrative unfolding within the Fleet, a spacefaring community composed of humans who are descendants of those left behind by their wealthier counterparts. These affluent individuals had relocated to the Martian colonies as soon as conditions on Earth became too inhospitable for survival (Chambers, *A Closed and Common Orbit* 48). This collection of ships is first described as follows:

> You could define the term [Fleet] literally: the collection of ships that carried the remnants of the Human species away from their failed planet. Perhaps the Fleet sparks some deeper association in you—a symbol of desperation, a symbol of poverty, a symbol of resilience . . . Though many Humans have never set foot in the great homestead ships, the journey of the Fleet is a history they all consciously carry. That lineage has inextricably shaped every modern Human community, regardless of foundational philosophy. In one way or another, it affects how they think of themselves, and how the rest of us see them. (Chambers, *Record* 36–38)

The narrator's description of the Fleet—both as a literal collection of ships and a metaphorical symbol of survival and resilience—compels readers to consider the ways in which systems of economic and social organisation shape identity and ecological relations. By defining the Fleet as a symbol of "desperation, poverty, and resilience," Chambers's (*Record*) text criticises the destructive trajectories of the Anthropocene and potentially offers an alternative vision: a society that moves away from capitalist consumerism and towards a degrowth and circular economy model.

Perhaps precisely because of the origin of the Fleet, with the first humans inhabiting these ships having witnessed first-hand the collapse of an extractivist and wasteful economic system, the surviving humans structured Fleet society around the principle of avoiding the same mistakes; a collective consciousness exists which is centred on resource efficiency and waste minimisation. Every material is reused, repurposed,

[3] The Anthropocene can be understood as a geological epoch in which there has been a significant shift in the relationship between humans and the global environment. Here, the human species has become a decisive and direct actor in the ongoing climate crisis (Steffen et al. 843).

and reintegrated into the system whenever possible, ensuring that waste is minimised and sustainability is maximised. Early in the novel, we read the following: "She found a nearby recycling station and put the mug and the throw-cloth in their respective bins, from which they would be collected, washed, and reused. She resumed her walk, dragging her own recycling along behind her" (Chambers, *Record* 65). From the onset of the novel, it is made evident that the Fleet naturalises not only recycling but also the reuse of all material items in a heavily organised way.

This cultural orientation leads to profound discomfort when the Fleet society is confronted with the conspicuous consumption and disregard for resources in others, particularly those of the Martian colonies, in which the wealthy first sought refuge after Earth became uninhabitable. The contrast between these two economic models—one built on equitable distribution and mindful resource management, the other on excess and disposability—becomes especially apparent in moments of cultural exchange. A striking example occurs when Kyp, a teenager Fleet inhabitant, watches a Martian soap opera:

> That scene had layers, seriously—and when the conversation was done, they just . . . left their food. Like, let the server come get it while they walked out of the place. The scene would've made sense if one of them wasn't hungry or had a stomach ache or something, but if that were the case, then the other one would've reached over and eaten the leftovers. But no. Both of them left. They left half-plates of food on the table. It was the weirdest shit. He couldn't imagine what cleaning dishes was like in a place like that. Dealing with half-eaten food sounded disgusting. (Chambers, *Record* 89)

Kyp's reaction encapsulates the deep cultural divide between the Fleet's circular, necessity-driven economy and the Martian colonies' more traditional, growth-oriented capitalist structure. To Kyp, leaving edible food untouched is not only irrational but almost unfathomable, reinforcing the idea that in the Fleet, waste is not merely discouraged but culturally unimaginable. His disbelief highlights how the Fleet's economic and ecologically sustainable systems are not just theoretical models but are embedded in daily practices and social norms that contribute to what kinds of presents and futures we are able to imagine and, subsequently, pursue.

Furthermore, this moment underscores the psychological and ethical transformation that occurs in a degrowth-based society. The Fleet's inhabitants are not merely participating in a sustainable system out of

necessity; they have internalised values that reject waste and prioritise mindful consumption. This aligns with the degrowth movement's advocacy for a shift in cultural attitudes—away from the pursuit of excess and toward a lifestyle that values sufficiency and long-term ecological responsibility (Singh 140). Through Kyp's reaction, the text demonstrates how the Fleet's degrowth-inspired economy fosters a mindset in which every resource is valued and treated with care, whereas the Martian economy, still operating under capitalist logics of abundance and disposability, normalises waste as an inconsequential byproduct of consumption. This contrast not only reinforces the viability of degrowth and circular economy principles but also suggests that an alternative to capitalist consumerism is not only possible but deeply transformative at both societal and individual levels.

Another aspect of the life at the Fleet is the energy used to sustain the necessary means to ensure the maintenance of the survival mechanisms such as those that produce clean water and oxygen. Early in the novel we are told that the first system for energy employed the use of hydro-generators. When Ghuh'loloan, a character of another sentient species, visits the Fleet, they discuss this matter with one of the human characters, the archivist Isabel:

> "Now, the batteries," Ghuh'loloan said, still taking notes. "Those store kinetically harvested energy, yes?"
> "Originally, yes, mostly. Well . . . right, let me back up. When the Exodans first left Earth, they burned chemical fuels to get going, just to tide them over until enough kinetic energy had been generated through the floors. They also had hydro-generators."
> "Water-powered?"
> "Yes, using waste water." The brewer dinged, and Isabel filled two mugs. "As it flows back to the processing facilities, it runs through a series of generators. That system's still in use. It's not our primary power source, but it's a good supplement." (Chambers, *Record* 73)

The use of hydro-generators is particularly significant in this context, as it exemplifies a closed-loop system that repurposes waste for productive use, embodying a core tenet of the circular economy. This approach aligns with one of the primary objectives of circular economy models: replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources and, more broadly, transitioning away from the linear, extractive logic of capitalist consumerism towards a

regenerative, circular system (Kopnina 364). Moreover, Isabel's casual statement that the system in question is "not our primary power source, but a good supplement" further reflects the Fleet's pragmatic approach to energy sustainability. Rather than relying on a singular, all-encompassing solution, the Fleet employs an adaptive, multi-faceted energy strategy, a stark contrast to the unsustainable monocultures of fossil fuel dependency characteristic of industrial capitalism.

However, as noted previously, hydro-generated energy is no longer the Fleet's primary power source; solar energy has taken precedence. In a conversation between Isabel and Ghuh'loloan, the human character acknowledges that while the Fleet was once self-sufficient with hydro power, their energy landscape shifted when the intergalactic government, the GC, provided them with a sun, and they started collecting solar power (Chambers, *Record* 74). This dialogue highlights the Fleet's transition through successive energy paradigms—from chemical fuels to kinetic harvesting, hydro-generation, and ultimately solar energy—each phase reflecting an incremental departure from extractive practices. This progression embodies the circular economy's emphasis on optimising resource efficiency and minimising waste, illustrating a systemic shift towards long-term ecological equilibrium rather than short-term exploitation.

Furthermore, the Fleet's solar energy infrastructure originates not from human innovation but from the intervention of another species. This, I argue, alongside the novel's interspecies dialogue, reinforces both the principles of the circular economy and the ethos of critical posthumanism, which seeks to de-centre the human figure in favour of more interconnected, multispecies perspectives (Calarco 30–31). The Fleet thus emerges as a vision of technological and ecological integration that directly challenges the extractive and anthropocentric logics of the Anthropocene. Instead, it offers a model of resilience and interspecies collaboration, one that gestures towards alternative futures where energy systems are designed to sustain life rather than perpetuate growth and consumption.

2. Death, Compost, and the Cycle of Life

The commitment to circularity in *Record of a Spaceborn Few* (Chambers) extends beyond energy systems and resource management to encompass the most fundamental biological process: death. The Fleet's approach to

mortality embodies the same regenerative principles that govern its economy, transforming human remains into a resource that sustains life. Nowhere is this philosophy more strikingly evident than in the treatment of compost. We read that when Eyas, one of the "oxygen workers," or composters, is at work:

> She spread the stuff around the roots with her gloved hands, laying down handful after handful of rich black nutrients. She wouldn't have minded getting compost on her bare skin but, much like pulling the wagon, it was a matter of respect. Compost was too precious to be wasted by washing it from her hands. She was meticulous about brushing off her gloves before folding them back up, about doing the same with her apron, about shaking every last crumb out of the canister. Each bit had to make its way to where it had been promised it would go. (Chambers, *Record* 65)

Hence, we can observe here that compost is treated with the utmost respect, which would align not only with environmentalism (Pergola et al. 744), but also with circular economy principles (De Corato 18; Rashid and Shahzad 2), and degrowth (Savini 6). Moreover, it is important to note the source of the compost used in the Flee, revealed in a conversation between Eyas and a visitor to the "oxygen farms" where compost is created out of organic matter:

> Eyas smiled. "Would you like to come see?" The boy shifted his weight from foot to foot, then nodded. Eyas waved him over. She spread some compost on her gloved palm. "Did M here tell you what this is?"
> The boy rubbed his lips together before speaking. "People." (Chambers, *Record* 66–67)

This excerpt highlights a restorative and regenerative process in which human bodies, after their death, are composted to nurture plant life and, by extension, create oxygen. This practice embodies the core principle of circular economy, albeit to an arguable extreme; that of maintaining the utility and value of materials, regardless of their origin, by reintegrating them into biological cycles. The actions of Eyas exemplifies how waste, in this case human remains, is not discarded but transformed into resources that continue to sustain life at the Fleet. This aligns with circular economy and the principle of Cradle to Cradle, which offers an opportunity to radically revise the current take-make-waste system of production and counter the built-in obsolescence in consumer products; circular

production is supposed to eliminate waste and limit, if not halt, the use of virgin materials (Kopnina 362). In this way, the novel aligns with the definition of circular economy given in this paper, as the Fleet shows a high degree of intentionality in closing biological loops and avoiding unused waste, where the death of one element enriches the ecosystem, ensuring that no material is wasted.

The practice of composting human bodies in the Fleet extends far beyond a simple ecological necessity; it is a deeply ideological, fundamentally imaginative reshaping of the way life, death, and materiality are understood. This practice challenges the extractive, wasteful ethos of capitalist consumerism, replacing it with an ecological vision where death is not an end but a transformation. In this way, Chambers's novel (*Record*) presents a society in which human remains are not discarded or cremated but fully and consciously reintegrated into the cycle of life, reflecting a radical departure from the dominant paradigm of burial or cremation, both of which often contribute to environmental degradation rather than renewal in modern capitalist societies (Singh 140).

Donna Haraway's concept of *humusities*—as opposed to *humanities*—provides a compelling theoretical lens for analysing this practice. Haraway rejects the anthropocentric hierarchies that position humans as distinct from and superior to other forms of life, instead arguing for a perspective in which all living beings, human and non-human alike, are enmeshed in ongoing processes of composition and decomposition. As she asserts, "[w]e are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities" (Haraway 114). This perspective reframes human identity not as separate from or elevated above the natural world but as fundamentally embedded within it. The novel's portrayal of human composting thus embodies Haraway's vision of multispecies entanglement, dissolving rigid distinctions between human and nonhuman, life and death, subject and object. As Haraway further emphasises, all beings—"critters, human or not"—compose and decompose one another, participating in the continuous processes of ecological, evolutionary, and developmental world-making (114). Under this vision, the Fleet's burial practices emerge not simply as a pragmatic solution to resource scarcity but as an ethical and philosophical commitment to interdependence, regeneration, and non-extractive forms of existence.

In contrast to capitalist societies, which prioritise individual legacy and the preservation of the human body through costly, resource-intensive

funerary practices,[4] the Fleet's approach embraces an ethic of communal sustainability. Eyas, one of the caretakers of the dead, describes the process of composting human remains with a reverence that reinforces this ideological realignment: "[p]eople got so hung up on what a thing had been, rather than what it was now. That was why publicly distributed compost was reserved for oxygen gardens and fibre farms, the only public places in the Fleet that used soil" (Chambers, *Record* 65). Here, the novel directly admits the human tendency to become fixated on the past rather than trying to imagine transformational futures. The Fleet instead embraces impermanence and cyclical materiality, ensuring that no resource, not even human bodies, is squandered. This perspective is made explicit in a conversation between Eyas and the "oxygen farm" visitor mentioned earlier. When asked about whether or not the compost is made of "people," Eyas patiently explains:

> "Mmm, not anymore. It's called compost. It used to be people, yes, but it's changed into something else. See, what I'm doing here is putting this onto the plants, so they grow strong and healthy." She demonstrated. "The people that turned into compost now get to be part of these plants. The plants give us clean air to breathe and beautiful things to look at, which keeps us healthy. Eventually, these plants will die, and they'll get composted, too. Then that compost gets used to grow food, and the food becomes part of us again. So, even when we lose people we love, they don't leave us." She pressed her palm flat against her chest. "We're made out of our ancestors. They're what keep us alive." (Chambers, *Record* 66)

This passage encapsulates the novel's "compost" perspective by rejecting rigid distinctions between human and other-than-human, blending human and plant categories, potentially embracing a non-anthropocentric view of life and of what Rosi Braidotti terms the *zoe.* In contrast to capitalist societies, where death is often sanitised and distanced from everyday life, the Fleet integrates it into their ecological consciousness. In doing so, they not only embrace a circular economy but also reinforce a communal ethos

[4] As Katsumi Shimane explains, in the past, the removal of the deceased and the performance of funeral rites were carried out collectively by relatives and members of the local community. In contemporary late-capitalist societies, however, this communal involvement has largely been replaced by monetary transactions and professional outsourcing. The social disengagement from funerary practices thus comes at the price of commodification (4–5).

in which past generations are literally and symbolically incorporated into the living world while ensuring the survival of human characters.

Chambers's approach to human composting also engages with Stacy Alaimo's idea of trans-corporeality, which similarly disrupts the notion of the human subject as a discrete, sovereign subject (17). In *Record of a Spaceborn Few* (Chambers), we read that "the people that turned into compost now get to be part of these plants," which, in turn, "keeps us alive" (66), the idea of which reflects Alaimos's understanding of the body as inherently connected with the wider environment, or indeed, the *zoe*. The novel further complicates the relationship between humans and the more-than-human by exploring the implications of bodily decomposition beyond planetary existence. The Fleet's inhabitants, despite having never set foot on Earth, remain materially and spiritually connected to it. Eyas reflects on this profound continuity:

> death is not an end. It's a pattern. A catalyst for change. Death is recycling. Proteins and nutrients, 'round and 'round. And you can't stop that. Take a living person off Earth, put them in a sealed metal canister out in a vacuum, take them so far away from their planet of origin that they might not understand what a forest or an ocean is when you tell them about one—and they are still linked to that cycle. When we decompose under the right conditions, we turn into soil—something awfully like it, anyway. You see? We're not detached from Earth. We turn into earth. (Chambers, *Record* 230)

This passage reinforces Haraway's argument that human identity cannot be divorced from ecological processes and Alaimo's idea of all bodies being interconnected and vulnerable to the environment rather than isolated entities (63). Even in the artificial environment of the Fleet, humanity remains bound to Earth's cycles of decay and renewal, rejecting anthropocentric ideas of human exceptionalism and the illogical nature of lineal extractivist capitalism. In other words, the text does not merely show circular economy and degrowth in a fictional setting, rather it proposes a radical reconfiguration of subjectivity and embodiment in alignment with the feminist materialist ecologies of academics such as Alaimo.

3. RECONFIGURATION OF LABOUR

The vision of the Anthropocene as laid out in Chambers's novel aligns with discussions on the influence of consumer identity in shaping our

socio-economic systems. As Frank Trentmann argues, the emergence of consumerism as a defining aspect of Western societies has reinforced the logic of growth and disposability by turning the concept of the consumer into a collective category beyond individual explanations (14). Trentmann notes that the consumer has become so pervasive in politics, media, and academia that they are now seen as an almost "quasi-natural being" (1). Western societies have since been structured around overconsumption and material accumulation, reinforcing a capitalist logic of growth and disposability. Serge Latouche further argues that this consumer identity is a direct consequence of the growth imperative, sustained by overproduction, planned obsolescence, and the normalisation of waste (279).

In contrast, degrowth challenges this ontological framework by arguing for a fundamental shift: people must cease to be consumers and become users. Kuijer and Laschke highlight how deeply embedded consumerist mindsets have become in Western societies, to the extent that individuals, when asked about their desires, almost instinctively frame their aspirations in terms of material goods (8). For a post-consumerist society to emerge, degrowth theorists propose a dual shift: first, from individual ownership to commons-based systems where access replaces accumulation (Kuijer and Laschke 6), and second; from economic dependence on market-driven cycles to self-sufficiency and communal exchange (Kuijer and Laschke 10). This could mean the fostering of practical skills, self-sufficiency, and communal exchange, ensuring that the population is no longer dependent on market-driven cycles of production and systemic disposal of waste, as well as a reconceptualisation of the concept of labour.

In Chambers's novel, we find a society that embodies this shift, where the concept of labour is profoundly different from that of capitalist systems, with the motto of the Fleet reading "Everybody had a home, and nobody went hungry" (*Record* 85), according, at least, to the archivist Isabel. This systemic security eliminates the fear of financial instability that often fuels overconsumption in capitalist societies, where material accumulation is perceived as a safeguard against economic uncertainty—despite the paradox that such accumulation frequently exacerbates anxiety (Solér 22). In contrast, the Fleet does not measure individual worth through purchasing power but rather through communal contribution.

This change from consumer to user is evident in the ways skill, labour, and communal work are structured in the novel, fundamentally rejecting

the market-driven valuation of work found in capitalist societies. The emphasis on skill over consumption is subtly introduced early in the novel through the character Tessa's workbench, which is described as a space where she actively engages in practical work (Chambers, *Record* 15). The mere presence of a workbench—a site of creation, maintenance, and repair—establishes a setting in which personal skill and craftsmanship hold central value. Unlike in consumerist societies, where broken items are often discarded and replaced with new purchases, the Fleet prioritises repair and resourcefulness. This is further reinforced when Tessa attempts to fix a cleaner bot using said workbench (Chambers, *Record* 16), displaying an important kind of skill in the context of degrowth. Her action is not automated, nor is it financially compensated; rather, she repairs the bot because it is necessary for the Fleet's daily operations. The absence of commodification in labour signifies a radical shift away from capitalist work structures, aligning with degrowth principles that advocate for the de-commodification of basic services and communal access to goods, rejecting market-drive valuation of work. By rejecting market-driven valuations of work, the Fleet cultivates an economic system in which labour is not a means of individual survival but a collective practice that sustains the entire community.

The Fleet's approach to labour also dismantles hierarchical distinctions between professions. While individuals freely choose their careers based on personal interest and skill, work remains inherently collective. Apprenticeship is structured as an exploratory process in which adolescents engage with different trades until they find a profession that suits them with monetary compensation not being a factor (Chambers, *Record* 43). The lack of coercion in job selection removes economic pressure from career decisions, allowing individuals to work in fields where they find fulfilment rather than being forced into jobs dictated by market demand. This system aligns with degrowth's vision of labour as a means of communal well-being rather than an instrument for profit accumulation.

However, the arguably most radical departure from capitalist labour structures is the Fleet's mandatory participation in sanitation work. The novel presents a striking contrast to market economies, where certain jobs—particularly those related to sanitation and waste management—are often assigned to marginalised workers and remain largely invisible to the rest of society (Murphy 50). In the Fleet, sanitation is a shared responsibility, reinforcing the idea that no task is beneath anyone, all

labour holding inherent value. This is made explicit when Sawyer, a planet-born newcomer to the Fleet, initially refuses sanitation work, failing to understand why it is universally required and feeling offended by being offered this kind of job. Eyas, the caretaker of the dead, explains:

> [t]hey tried to give you a sanitation job because everybody has to do sanitation. Everybody. Me, merchants, teachers, doctors, council members, the admiral—every healthy Exodan fourteen and over gets their ID put in a computer, and that computer randomly pulls names for temporary, mandatory, no-getting-out-of-it work crews to sort recycling and wash greasy throw-cloths and unclog the sewage lines. All the awful jobs nobody wants to do. That way, nothing is out of sight or out of mind. Nothing is left to lesser people, because there's no such thing. (Chambers, *Record* 136)

Eyas's explanation underscores the deeply egalitarian ethos of the Fleet, where labour is distributed equitably, and essential but undesirable tasks are shared rather than relegated to an exploited underclass. In contrast to capitalist societies, where occupations are stratified based on income and perceived prestige, the Fleet acknowledges that all jobs serve a purpose and contribute to the common good. This is made explicit later in the novel:

> Everything has a purpose, a recognisable benefit. If you have food on your plate, you thank a farmer. If you have clothing, you thank a textile manufacturer. If you have murals to brighten your day, you thank an artist. Even the most menial of tasks benefits someone, benefits all. (Chambers, *Record* 191)

The text dismantles the capitalist tendency to devalue certain types of labour, instead positioning work as inherently communal and interdependent. The novel explicitly reframes labour's purpose, replacing the capitalist question "What do you do?"—which exhibits a rather individualistic focus—with a more collectivist inquiry: "When an Exodan asks 'what do you do?', the real question is: 'What do you do for us?'" (Chambers, *Record* 191). This linguistic shift is crucial. In capitalist societies, labour is individualistic, evaluated by its financial returns rather than its social function. In the Fleet, by contrast, work is embedded within a system of mutual reliance, reinforcing a degrowth-oriented economic model that emphasises contribution over individual economic profit.

Furthermore, this collective ethic extends beyond formal labour and into the organisation of everyday chores; that is, the domestic sphere. Household responsibilities are distributed among neighbours within a hex (six dwellings surrounding a common area) in a way that reflects communal support rather than individual burden (Chambers, *Record* 105). This cooperative approach to labour ensures that no individual is overburdened, while also highlighting how degrowth's emphasis on skill and self-sufficiency is supplemented by strong social bonds. The Fleet's model does not advocate for isolated self-reliance but rather for interdependent resilience, where tasks are distributed according to ability and preference, rather than financial necessity. It is worth noting that the novel also extends this ethos to child-rearing, demonstrating how care work—often undervalued in capitalist economies (Huws 9)—is integrated into communal life. For instance, Tessa reflects on the flexibility of caregiving arrangements within the hex: "she could've asked the Parks of a hand. They didn't have any kids, and they often helped out around the hex in terms of bathing and bedtime stories" (Chambers, *Record* 114). This casual, reciprocal system of childcare stands in stark contrast to capitalist societies, where care work is frequently privatised, expensive, and disproportionately placed in the hands of women (Huws 10). By integrating caregiving into the broader communal structure, the Fleet reinforces an economy of care that aligns with degrowth's prioritisation of communal well-being over profit.

4. Limits to the Circular Model of the Fleet

Despite the focus on circular economy and reuse, the novel does not present the Fleet as an uncritical utopia, nor does it depict its society as free from challenges, uncertainties, or the need for adaptation and improvement. Rather, *Record of a Spaceborn Few* (Chambers) offers a deep exploration of a possible alternative to capitalist consumerism—one that, while more sustainable and community-driven, is still subject to risk, loss, and existential uncertainty. The opening pages immediately disrupt any notion of the Fleet as a flawless society by presenting the sudden and catastrophic explosion of one of its ships, the *Oxomoco*, resulting in the loss of all lives aboard (Chambers, *Record* 18). This event reverberates throughout the Fleet, reminding its inhabitants—and the reader—that no system, no matter how carefully structured, is immune to disaster. The material and psychological consequences of the *Oxomoco*'s destruction

are evident in characters such as Tessa, who, while working in cargo, finds herself confronted with the wreckage: "a never-ending backlog of support trusses, floor panels, empty oxygen tanks. Things that had been vital. Things that had been viewed as permanent" (Chambers, *Record* 41). This passage underscores the fragility of even the most self-sustaining systems, as what was once deemed essential and enduring is suddenly rendered into debris. The *Oxomoco*'s destruction also has a profound emotional impact on Fleet's inhabitants. Tessa's child, for instance, develops an acute fear of living on a ship (Chambers, *Record* 326), demonstrating that, despite its commitment to security and well-being, the Fleet cannot entirely shield its people from trauma. By foregrounding such vulnerabilities, Chambers resists constructing an idealised vision of a post-capitalist society and instead presents a model that, while sustainable and cooperative, remains contingent upon the material and emotional realities of its inhabitants.

Furthermore, the novel does not romanticise the Fleet as a futuristic vision of human exceptionalism. The Fleet is not framed as an organic, self-sustaining paradise, but rather as a manufactured and precarious experiment, where survival depends on artificial mechanisms and meticulous management. As one character explains:

> "We live inside machines. We've replicated the systems on Earth. There is no wind to move our air, there is no water cycle, there is no natural source for photosynthesis. This is a lab experiment. A biologist could make no real conclusions about our natural behaviour. They'd have to add the caveat 'born in captivity' to everything they recorded." (Chambers, *Record* 229)

This reflection forces the reader to reconsider the Fleet's status as a desirable alternative to planetary life. The comparison to captivity problematises the Fleet's existence, raising questions about the long-term viability of a human society entirely dependent on technological mediation. Unlike many utopian narratives that portray the future as a return to an unspoiled, self-sufficient world (Browne 64), Chambers's novel acknowledges the limitations of spacefaring societies.

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the Fleet represents a vision of hope as well as choice. In the case of *Record of a Spaceborn Few* (Chambers), this ethos is illustrated by Sawyer's decision to leave behind the exploitative economy of Mushtullo and seek a different way of life: "He'd left for good reasons, he told himself. He'd left for the right reasons. What was there for him on Mushtullo, beyond working jobs he didn't care

about so he could buy drinks he'd piss away and shirts he wouldn't like later?" (196). Sawyer's rejection of a planet-bound existence shaped by capitalist alienation suggests that, despite its difficulties, the Fleet offers an alternative framework in which individuals are not reduced to their economic productivity or consumption habits. As Beatriz Hermida-Ramos argues in relation to another novel by Chambers, *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet,* Chambers's text frames hope as an act of political resistance rooted in vulnerability and communal care (43), where characters refuse to dehumanise one another in pursuit of capitalist gain (30), a notion that clearly extends to *Record of a Spaceborn Few* through characters like Sawyer. His choice reflects a broader theme in the novel: the search for meaning and a community where he ceases to be dehumanised by the extractivist logic of capitalism and the search for a community where he can belong, a way of life beyond consumerism, even in an environment that is neither idyllic nor without hardship.

Notably, the Fleet is not an isolationist entity but actively engages in both immigration and emigration. While many Fleet inhabitants remain within the community for life, others choose to leave, and the Fleet ensures that they are equipped with the necessary tools to survive beyond its borders. This is exemplified by the existence of the emigrant resource centre, which helps prepare Exodans for integration into the Galactic Commons, to "prepare GC-bound Exodans for life beyond the Fleet" (Chambers, *Record* 246). The very existence of such a resource suggests that the Fleet does not position itself as a closed utopia, resistant to external influence, but rather as a flexible and evolving system that acknowledges the reality that some of its members may wish to pursue other ways of life. The justification for maintaining this centre further reinforces the Fleet's pragmatic and communal ethos:

> Look—there's no denying that more Exodans are leaving than coming back, but we're hardly in danger of dying out. Farms are still working. Water's still flowing. The Fleet is fine. The people I teach, they'd leave whether or not classes were available to them. But if they left without taking a class or two, they won't know what's what out there. That way lies trouble. All we're doing is giving them the tools they need to stay safe. Exodans helping Exodans. Isn't that what we're supposed to be about? (Chambers, *Record* 249)

This passage underscores a key ideological distinction between the Fleet's society and capitalist nation-states, which often view emigration as the consequence of a poor economic resources and as a loss of "human capital" (Trebilcock and Sudak 234). The Fleet does not operate under a scarcity-driven mindset, nor does it attempt to hoard human capital. Instead, it recognises that individuals may choose different paths and that preparing them for life beyond the Fleet is a form of collective responsibility rather than betrayal. The Fleet's willingness to facilitate its inhabitants' transition to external societies further underscores its non-coercive and non-totalitarian nature.

Moreover, the novel extends this non-exclusionary philosophy even further by introducing the possibility of welcoming non-human immigrants into the Fleet. Just as it has developed resources for those who leave, the Fleet has begun initiatives to integrate alien species into its community, establishing an immigrant resource centre similar to the one created for departing Exodans. In sharp contrast to the detention centres proliferating across—institutions that increasingly criminalise human mobility (Flynn 2) under the logic of global capitalism (Flynn 6)—the centres within the Fleet are not punitive spaces but sites of hospitality and preparation for the communal life of the Fleet. It is also worth noting that, while initial efforts to attract non-human inhabitants are met with scepticism and limited interest, the eventual arrival of three alien students signals the beginning of a multispecies society within the Fleet. The official in charge of this initiative emphasises the continuity between this project and the Fleet's existing ethos of mutual aid and resource sharing: "Our goal here today is to give you a good starting point for finding the resources and assistance you need to begin a life in the Fleet" (Chambers, *Record* 357). This moment is significant not only because it marks a shift in the Fleet's demographic makeup but also because it suggests that the Fleet's post-capitalist, circular economy model is not strictly human-specific, embodying an ethic of interspecies solidarity and coexistence.

The potential for a multispecies cooperative society further reinforces the novel's posthumanist perspective, challenging anthropocentric assumptions about economic and social organisation. Rather than positioning the Fleet as a fixed utopia, Chambers depicts it as a continuous project, one that must remain open to adaptation, migration, and interspecies collaboration. Hence, Chambers's text does not present the Fleet as an infallible utopia but rather as a realistic experiment in alternative socio-economic organization. By foregrounding its

vulnerabilities, challenges, and adaptability, the novel resists both romanticisation and dystopian fatalism, offering instead a vision of pragmatic hope. This dynamic fluidity reinforces the novel's central argument: resistance to capitalist commodification and consumerism does not require rigidity or exclusion but can be an ongoing, flexible process of adaptation and collaboration.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the novel presents the society of the Fleet as an enduring symbol, a philosophy, and a way of life that extends beyond those who inhabit it. The Fleet is not merely a collection of ships orbiting in space; it is a mindset, an ethical framework, and a historical consciousness that shapes both those who live within it and those who leave it behind. Through its material origins, its cultural practices, and its impact on those who encounter it, the Fleet functions as a living archive of humanity's past failures and a blueprint for its potential future. An alien observer reflects on the origins of the Fleet:

> When their planet could no longer sustain them, the waning Humans dismantled their cities. Down came the shimmering towers of glass and metal, beam by beam, bolt by bolt . . . The Humans who did this knew they would not live to see the end result. Their years were almost universally cut short by famine and disease, but even if they had been as healthy as their ancestors, the work was too great for one lifetime alone . . . "A city made of cities," my host told me during our first day. "We took our ruins with us." (Chambers, *Record* 351)

This passage reinforces the notion that the Fleet is both a product of and a memorial to the Anthropocene, an era marked by human-induced ecological collapse. The phrase "We took *our* ruins with us" (emphasis added) serves as a stark reminder that the Fleet is not a society born out of idealism, but out of necessity. Every piece of infrastructure aboard the ships is a direct link to the failed systems that preceded it, ensuring that the inhabitants of the Fleet never forget why they had to change their ways in order to survive. Rather than constructing a utopian vision of the future in which past mistakes are erased or overcome, the Fleet is constructed upon the ruins of its history, embedding memory and accountability into its very architecture. In this sense, the Fleet does not turn human corpses into humus only physically, but also ideologically: there is no idealised post-human form but rather a messy compost that exposes human's vulnerability.

The idea that the Fleet is more than just a location is further reinforced through the reflections of an alien researcher who has spent time studying its inhabitants. Long after leaving, this researcher finds themselves still reflecting on its principles:

> though I have travelled far from Risheth, I have brought the Fleet with me. There is no place I can go, no activity I can engage in without thinking of them. I can't see a garden without thinking of how theirs differ, nor can I watch a sunset without thinking of the mimicked rhythms of their abandoned sun. (Chambers, *Record* 352)

This passage underscores the Fleet's capacity to influence even those outside its direct sphere. The researcher's observation highlights how the Fleet is not simply a self-sustaining, closed-loop system but a model for sustainable futures that lingers in the minds of those who encounter it. It is not an insular utopia removed from the rest of the universe but an ideological framework that can be carried forward, implemented elsewhere, and reimagined in new contexts.

One of the most compelling demonstrations of the Fleet's enduring impact is found in the characters who choose to leave it, yet remain deeply influenced by its philosophy. By the end of the novel, Tessa decides to move with her husband and children to a planetary colony. Her decision is fraught with uncertainty, as she deeply values the Fleet and what it represents. However, her husband reassures her:

> "Honestly, Tess, you're the best kind of person to join a colony, because you'd bring all those right reasons with you. You believe in our way of life here? Cool. Implement those ways planetside. Make sure people don't forget. Make sure people remember that a closed system is a closed system even when you can't see the edges." (Chambers, *Record* 328)

This moment is crucial because it rejects the notion that degrowth-oriented, sustainable societies must be geographically confined. Instead, the Fleet's principles can migrate, influencing new communities and shaping the values of those who were never physically part of it. This directly challenges the idea that post-capitalist futures must be small-scale, localised, or exclusionary; instead, the Fleet's sustainability ethos is shown to be scalable and adaptable to different environments. Additionally, Tessa's new house retains a distinctive feature of Fleet homes: the

handprints of its inhabitants painted by the poor (Chambers, *Record* 370). This small yet significant detail reveals how cultural practices tied to circularity, sustainability, and communal identity endure even in new environments. The Fleet's legacy is not just its physical infrastructure but its values, its traditions, and its way of seeing the world—one that resists capitalist commodification, waste, and hierarchy in favour of an interconnected, regenerative existence.

CONCLUSIONS

Record of a Spaceborn Few offers a thought-provoking exploration of a possible future, allowing its analysis from the perspectives of circular economy, degrowth, and critical posthumanism, presenting an alternative socio-economic system that moves beyond the extractive, wasteful, and hierarchical structures of late capitalism. Through the depiction of the Fleet, the novel imagines a world in which economic value is no longer tied to consumerism but instead measured by contribution, skill, and community well-being. The novel's rejection of profit-driven labour structures, its commitment to resource regeneration, and its de-commodification of human life and death collectively challenge the ideological foundations of capitalist growth economies.

It is important to highlight that the Fleet is presented as an adaptive socio-economic experiment—one that, while largely successful in fostering sustainability and social cohesion, is also subject to risk, trauma, and external influences. The destruction of the *Oxomoco* proves the fragility of even the most carefully designed systems, while the Fleet's decision to prepare emigrants for life beyond its borders suggests a willingness to engage with external realities rather than retreat into isolationism. Similarly, the introduction of an immigrant resource centre signals an evolving, posthumanist ethos, where multispecies cooperation becomes the next step in the Fleet's socio-economic trajectory. By situating the Fleet within broader discussions of degrowth and circular economy, Chambers's novel illustrates the power of science fiction to explore alternative economic models. The Fleet's inhabitants do not merely follow sustainable practices out of necessity; they internalise values of resourcefulness, mutual care, and ecological responsibility, demonstrating that sustainability must be cultural as much as it is structural.

Thus, *Record of a Spaceborn Few* serves as a powerful literary meditation on what a possible future might look like, offering neither a rigid blueprint nor an unattainable utopia, but rather a provocation—a vision of a world where adaptation, cooperation, and circularity replace extraction, hierarchy, and disposability. As speculative fiction continues to engage with ecological and economic crises, novels like Chambers's play a crucial role in expanding our economic imagination, challenging us to consider how alternative systems might emerge from, and respond to, the failures of the Anthropocene.

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