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The Politics of Caregiving in Octavia Butler's *Bloodchild and Other Stories*

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The Politics of Caregiving in Octavia Butler's *Bloodchild and Other Stories*

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B.A., Emory University, 2018

Advisor: Michelle Gordon, PhD, Michelle Wright, PhD

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In English
2019

Abstract

The Politics of Caregiving in Octavia Butler's *Bloodchild and Other Stories*
By Katherine Dautrich

Within Octavia Butler's short stories, "Bloodchild," "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," and "Speech Sounds," protagonists share a critical character arc as they reluctantly chose to care for others at climax of the narrative. Their decisions, occurring in wildly disparate circumstances, offer a radical potential to reshape their social worlds, fantastically imaged by Butler through the invocation of alien life forms, a Frankensteinian genetic disease and an apocalyptic aphasia. Within this thesis, I excavate caregiving from a marginalization or outright erasure from a Western capitalist dialogue, utilizing Butler's alien environments to estrange caring labor from a normative cultural context. Using theories of feminist ethics and disability studies, I underscore the key parallels between Butler's fictional imaginings and the concerns facing contemporary human beings in regard to gestational surrogacy, healthcare, and community organizing. This thesis engages the complex dimensions of carework within Butler's writing, addressing its potential for corruption, the factors impacting the quality of labor, and the political location of care's occurrence and its involved parties. By examining these texts as both calls for care and critiques of it, I ultimately discover care to be Butler's biological imperative, necessary for structuring any social world and subsequently for the survival of the highly social human species.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without immense support from incredible faculty members, friends, and family. I would like to begin by thanking my thesis committee. I am indebted to Dr. Michelle Gordon, whose teachings and pedagogical practices have shaped me as both a scholar and a person, laying the groundwork for this project and helping me to tangle with its application beyond the academy. I am honored to have studied under Dr. Michelle Wright and benefited from her always brilliant insights that pushed me out of my comfort zones in the best possible way in writing this thesis. Her impact on my theoretical scholarship and on my writing cannot be understated. Additionally, I am immensely grateful to Dr. Valerie Babb, who time and time again demonstrated her kindness as a mentor and her wisdom as a reader.

During my time at Emory University, countless faculty members and staff contributed significantly to my academic and professional trajectory. I specifically want to recognize the mentorship and friendship of Dr. Donna Troka, Dr. Jim Morey, and Professor Hank Klibanoff, who offered me countless opportunities to grow and demonstrated a deep faith in my goals. I additionally am glad to have had the support of Emory University professionals, Rebecca Watson, Sherry Ebrahimi, and Giselle Martin, during this past year.

My sincerest gratitude is also owed to a number of dear friends who supported me throughout the highs and lows of this project. I must extend specific thanks to Will Martinez, for five years of friendship and critical insights, to Namrata Verghese, for seemingly endless optimism, to John Wang, for rational critiques, and to Michelle Lou, for tofu soup.

Finally, I want to express my greatest gratitude to my family, to my brothers, Jack and Chase, and specifically to my parents, Bobbie and Jim Dautrich. In writing about care, I have thought constantly about you. I am overwhelmed by the depth of your love and eternally grateful for you.

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*"*I have written books about making the world a better place and how to make humanity more survivable. [...] You can call it save the world fiction, but it clearly doesn't save anything. It just calls people's attention to the fact that so much needs to be done and obviously there are people who are running this country who don't care*"* - Octavia Butler, speaking with Kazembe Balagun.

Every Saturday in the early 1980s, Octavia Butler collected the past week's writing and boarded a bus to go "[watch] her friend die" of multiple myeloma (Butler 109). While Butler hated the visits, hated watching the disease and the pain consume her friend, she made the weekly voyage for a year, each time bringing the most recent chapter to her unpublished novel, *Clay's Ark*. She was Butler's first personal friend to pass and the first young person she had known to die so slowly. The circumstances felt profoundly unfair and filled Butler with "weariness, depression, and sorrow [...] feeling little hope or like for the human species" (109). In the time following this significant moment, Butler produced three short stories "Speech Sounds" (1983), "Bloodchild" (1984), and "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," (1987), an outlier for an author who found her interests lying in big ideas, the exploration of which "takes more time and space than a short story can contain," (viii). Literary biographer Gerry Canavan read these texts as Butler's "mournful grieving" of her friend, yet he also noted that the first short story, "Speech Sounds," provides Butler's most "uncomplicatedly 'happy,' ending" out of her entire oeuvre (86-7).

This observation best embodies Butler as an author and a philosopher to me. From an end, Butler found a new beginning, a new hope, a new happiness, out of necessity. Butler's work often addresses similar situations, purposefully written to inspire fear in her readers as to what

might be if humanity fails to change: “I’d like to consider some of the solutions. Not *propose* solutions, you understand—what I want to do is look at some of the solutions that human beings come up with when they’re feeling uncertain and frightened, as they are right now. When people don’t know what they’re frightened of, they tend to find things” (Fry 132). Perhaps Butler spoke from personal experience in that statement, reflecting back on how she, deep in mourning and depression, found an uncomplicated happiness because she was forced to imagine something different. While Butler’s work always sought to inspire a fear and hope for the future, I found these texts particularly striking, initially selected for this thesis project on the basis of their shared structure, after I came across them amidst six other narratives contained with *Bloodchild and Other Stories* with no idea as to their history. Despite their diverse settings—an alien planet, a medical facility for individuals in a zombie-like state, and a post-apocalyptic imagining of the United States—each short story finds their climax in a simple decision: a choice to care.

I see care in “Bloodchild” when Gan opts to become pregnant with alien offspring that can kill him because of love for his family and for the alien mother in question. Care manifests in “Evening,” when Lynn reluctantly decides to devote her life to treating patients in spite of her own traumatic history with the disease. In “Speech Sounds,” a hopeless Rye embodies care as she takes up responsibility for two orphaned children in a violent apocalypse. Finally, I see care in Octavia Butler herself, as, week after week, she crammed herself into a crowded bus just to spend a Saturday reading to a dying friend and hating every moment of it.

In spite of its necessity for human existence, care so often evades attention, buried under a thousand other cultural processes and only visible in its failure. Often conflated with women’s work, care resists adequate attention or compensation in a Western labor market structured by capitalism and patriarchy. Within this thesis, I attempt to repair such a gap and consider care as a

critical and complicated mode of labor, replete with its own political and ethical elements that require intensive scrutiny. In conducting this mediation, I employ two definitions of care, the first established by sociologist Hilary Graham and the second by political scientist Joan Tronto. Graham, emphasizing the caregiver rather than the care recipient, understood care as a behavior that defines "both the identity and activity of women in Western society," and more sentimentally "what it feels like to be a woman in a male-dominated and capitalist social order" (30). Tronto considered care from a more universal standpoint and engaged the further reaching implications of an individual behavior, describing it as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world,' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (40). These two definitions reflect a history of caregiving as women's work, a categorization deeply connected to its undervaluation, as well as the significant role care plays in the survival of the species and the shaping of the social world. In considering care as a mode of labor, it is critical to consider the impact individual actions make on a collective society, reinforcing the highly political nature of any single act of care.

The necessity of care as well as the choice to care made at the climax of each narrative by Butler's protagonists serve as key reminders as to the radical potential of care to restructure a society. In considering that Butler wrote these texts in a moment of mourning, finding her way back to hope in spite of and because of a deeply sorrowful circumstance, the potential of these short stories appears immense. Is the human race, like Butler, not always in mourning, suppressed just enough to survive in a world marked by catastrophes of war and genocide, in a nation born out of discrimination and dehumanization, in a society complicit in slow deaths by attrition? These texts provide an opportunity to recognize the cause of such a grief, inspiring

readers to "[make] the world a better place" and teaching them "how to make humanity more survivable" (227).

In Chapter One, I begin my investigation of carework in "Bloodchild" by situating the necessary function of speculative fiction in estranging carework from its typical circumstances. By transporting her audience to a new planet and constructing key relationships with new species, Butler eroded the cultural context obscuring care from easy observation, allowing the practice to be examined on a material level. Following this effective alienation of care, I return to an Earthly circumstance, establishing significant parallels between the gestational surrogacy of "Bloodchild," with the contemporary phenomenon of reproductive tourism, an industry supported by an ever-expanding global capitalism. While nuancing the circumstances of reproductive tourism in terms of its possibility for abuse, I reinforce care's radical potential by reading "Bloodchild" through the scholarship of Black feminists Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis who closely link up care work with social justice within the Black community.

Having inspired a new attention to care in Chapter One, in Chapter Two I move to a more familiar rendition of this labor within the medical field in "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," read through a scholastic lens of disability studies and a feminist ethics of care. Close readings of Butler's treatment of the fictional Duryea-Gode Disease in tandem with her commentary in interviews offer important perspectives into disability's construction under capitalism, defined by one's ability to do waged labor, as well as modes of mediating stigma through the provision of care. I, regarding the occurrence of disability as a political process rather than a biological actuality, argue that "Evening" demonstrates a radical means of translating disability into body power a restructuring of social citizenship by establishing a healthcare model that emphasizes accommodation rather than elimination.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I engage “Speech Sounds” and its themes of collaboration and community as a more explicit solution to the many problems Octavia Butler identified as stemming from the interactions of adaptations of hierarchical behavior and intelligence in the human race. In a post-apocalyptic Earth marked by violence, loneliness, and desires for domination, Butler’s protagonist desperately desires community and finds it only when she overcomes her biases and elects to care for two orphaned children. I situate this text within the scope of Butler’s better-known novels, regarding the community of “Speech Sounds” as the intra-species corollary to the inter-species acts of mutualistic symbiosis that Butler takes up within her other works. By closing reading the action of this short story against sociological research on violence and isolation, I suggest that the anarchy of “Speech Sounds” provides an opportunity for the human species to change for the better. In concluding with “Speech Sounds,” Butler’s most “uncomplicatedly ‘happy’ ending,” I return to the humanistic potential of care, accessible through the sole act of communion, and imbued with the ability for replication into the future.

CHAPTER ONE

ALIENATING AND ESTRANGING CARE IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S "BLOODCHILD"

Early on in her 1997 monograph *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, legal scholar Dorothy Roberts invoked the voice of Lizzie Williams, a black woman formerly enslaved, to nuance the punishment pregnant mothers received under slavery, "'Dey [the white folks] would dig a whole in de ground just big 'nuff for her stomach, make her lie face down an whip her on de back to keep from hurtin' de child'" (40). In this horrific image, the slaveholder simultaneously renders the fetus alienable from its mother and alienable from itself as its body is prioritized and purchasable prior to birth. Little more than a decade prior to Roberts's publication, science fiction author Octavia E. Butler described a similar conflict in her novella "Bloodchild," as she imagined a sentient alien species purchasing the bodies of human refugees as a means of "paying the rent," (31) willing to let the hosts die if it means letting their children survive. Within both of these scenes, what feminists term a "maternal-fetal conflict," or "the way in which law, social policies, and medical practice sometimes treat a pregnant women's interests in opposition to those of her fetus," (Roberts 40), manifests in such a manner that the mother's body is rendered a means to an end.

The maternal-fetal conflict extends beyond the specter of slavery, present in a contemporary moment as pro-life activists campaign against abortion rights but also in the conscientious alterations to her diet a woman makes when she learns she is pregnant. The fetus and future child can be simultaneously an obligation, an assignment, and a loved one, complicating any interaction between the pregnant woman's body and the fetus contained with. However, as Roberts and Butler demonstrated, the invocation of capital and the commodification

of the human body overwhelming prioritizes the fetus to an extent that threatens maternal identity and claim to the future child. It is easier, in looking to Robert's rendition of the past and Butler's imagining of the future, to identify the problematic elements of purchasing a person's body for reproductive labor. It is much more difficult to acknowledge the ways in which the same issues manifest in the present moment as parts of human body, rather than its entirety, are rendered alienable when reproductive labor enters the marketplace.

Despite the abolition of chattel slavery, the trade of human material persists within the Western hemisphere, enabled through an ever-expanding global capitalism and the advent of new reproductive technologies. While technologies like abortion or birth control allow women greater autonomy over their bodies, prioritizing themselves within the maternal-fetal conflict if not avoiding it all together, productive compensated technologies like the donation of genetic material and gestational surrogacy offer immense potential for coercion and corruption. Under capitalism, these technologies render the child a product, desired more so for emotional reasons than the labor they might provide, as in the instance of slavery, the creation of which can be outsourced to a third party. As Dorothy Roberts argued, the desire for a child is not necessarily wrong, but current systems are structured in such a way that women are treated as objects "rather than as valuable human beings" (277). The purchase of the womb falsely implies an internal alienability of the body, such that it can be divided from itself while still a single contiguous entity. To purchase one part is to purchase all and Roberts contended that although not equivalent to the inhumanity of slavery, "our understanding of the evils inherent in marketing human beings stems in part from the reduction of enslaved Blacks to their physical service to whites" (278).

Yet at the same time, other feminist scholars take up gestational surrogacy and the self-commodification of one's body parts as a means of empowerment, pointing to the reality that women conduct the same valuable labor within their own families using these materials without compensation (Gupta 32). The latter commentary is not untrue; familial care often eludes the market place due to care's status as a labor of love—which complicates its compensation—it's covert role in producing and maintaining society—which renders it invisible— and its association as women's work—which historically occurs within the private sphere and is expected to be compensated by a breadwinning husband's financial protections—. Sociologist Hilary Graham further identified the difficulty in describing carework due to its nature as "an unspecific and unspecificable kind of labor, the contours of which shift constantly […] since it aims, like so much of women's work 'to make cohesive what is often fragmentary and disintegrating,' it is only visible when it is not done" (26). Graham's analysis leaves behind key questions as to how a labor that cannot be quantified or even clearly identified can be justly compensated. Care is embedded, inextricably, into the fabric of every culture, yet under capitalism, these unquantifiable and invisible qualities render carework virtually worthless, compensated only when absolutely necessary.

Carework only gains value when the human being is not understood as a human being, but as a product, who in turn will reinforce the dominant system of capitalism as a purchaser and producer in a vicious circle, a reality made particularly apparent in the rise of gestational surrogacy. Yet as Graham demonstrated, capitalism can never fully conceive of or compensate carework. This is not to say, carework should not be compensated, but to demonstrate the need to evaluate care based on parameters defined by something other than capitalism. However, care resists contemporary or even retroactive examination by virtue of a culture's "deficiency of a

scientific apparatus which is blind to the very phenomenon [they] wish to make visible" (Graham 14). To consider care, its material and political power, one must elude the familiar and examine the utterly alien.

Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild," bearing immense similarities to the practice of reproductive tourism, provides a means of disengaging Graham's deficient scientific apparatus by juxtaposing caregiving and human capital alongside literal aliens, allowing her audience to better assess carework. Such a premise is nothing new to science fiction as Simon Spiegel demonstrated in his investigative unraveling of the employment of "estrangement". Although Darko Suvin is best regarded for his theory of cognitive estrangement, Spiegel looked to his predecessor, Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky's and his theory of *ostranenenie*, which Spiegel translated as "the breaking up of established habits of reception," (369). *Ostranenie* operates on the principle that individuals only ever regard the world through a superficial lens as they are far too familiar with the world to ever accurately assess it. Only by estranging the familiar and then normalizing the alien can the world be evaluated as it materially is, making estrangement a key facet of art. Science fiction, rooted in reality but crafted through alternative possibility, provides a means of critically engaging the exterior world. By relocating her audience to a new planet, informed by alien life and distinct societal structures, Butler effectively estranged care from a Western context.

In the afterword to "Bloodchild," Butler characterized the novella as a love story, a pregnant man story and a coming of age story (30). The novella functioned as both a mode of cognitive digestion and experimentation for Butler as she wrote in hopes of reconciling her fear of botflies, who laid their eggs in the flesh of other animals, and to see if it would be possible to write a believable story of male pregnancy. Rather than taking the issue up along biological

lines, Butler greater interest lay in men taking up pregnancy as an act, “in spite of as well as because of surrounding difficulties” (Butler 30). Implicitly, Butler acknowledged the gendering of carework, which in the scope of human existence, begins within the womb as gestational mothers involuntarily nourish a fetus and may consciously modify their behavior to ensure the fetus’s safety. For Butler to write a “believable” story of male care, she found it first necessary to craft a foreign planet populated by extraterrestrial life forms and create an Earth so catastrophic that it drove humans to seek solace in the unknown circumstances of outer space.

“Bloodchild” follows Gan, a rare male protagonist within Butler’s otherwise women-centric work, a human young man living alongside the sentient centipede-like Tlic people. The Terrans, as Butler renamed her human population in honor of their Earthly origins, fled their homeworld out of fear death or enslavement by their fellow human beings. The refugees arrived on the Tlic planet when the inhabitants were on the brink of extinction due to a lack of suitable hosts for their eggs (Butler 25). Like the botfly, the Tlic needed to lay their eggs into another animal whose body, in this instance, blood, would nourish them until they were ready to hatch. In desperation, these species made an agreement: in exchange for residence on the Tlic planet, the Terrans would host Tlic eggs. Gan, several generations removed from the original agreement, lives within a safe sector for humans known as the “Preserve,” raised from childhood with the knowledge that he will one day host eggs for T’Gatoi, his mother’s friend and an important political figure (Butler 8). His familial affection for T’Gatoi allowed for easy acceptance of this duty until he witnesses a hatching gone wrong, pushing him to question the nature of Tlic-Terran relationships and his freedom of choice.

Gan provides the primary mode through which the audience experiences estrangement of care from its Western conception as women’s work, by virtue of his gender identity as well as

perception of child birth as abject. Hillary Graham's claim that care defines "both the identity and activity of women in Western society" and "what if feels like to be a woman in a male-dominated and capitalist social order" (30) underscores the fantastical nature of Gan's choice. To be clear, when Graham spoke of care in terms of womanhood, she did not deny the possibility of men performing carework, but simply noted that care is not considered a defining element of men's gender identity. "Bloodchild" merits specific critical attention within this subject by virtue of Butler's establishment of a world in which care defines both men and women's "identity and activity."

Within the realm of "Bloodchild," men overwhelmingly constitute the population of Terran hosts, crafting a version of manhood where caring serves as their entry point into the marketplace. The Tlic justified this division by emphasizing the necessity of human reproduction and raising of more hosts, meaning that women still retain the gendered task of caregiving during pregnancy (Butler 21). Gan's father, deceased by the start of the story, hosted three clutches of eggs during his life-time, setting an example for his son in terms of the labor he would one day take up (Butler 22). Conditioned to do this work, Gan initially viewed this labor in the same way his siblings view the family agriculture business. It is only when Bram Lomas, a local man presently carrying Tlic eggs, or "N'Tlic," stumbles up to their doorstep that Gan is forced to consider the unique circumstances of caring labor along with the strain of such work. In the violent hatching scene that ensues, T'Gatoi surgically opens Lomas up to extract grubs, saving the lives of Lomas and the Tlic young. Regardless of this outcome, Gan psychologically distances himself from T'Gatoi after witnessing the violence of this particular work.

> She opened him up. His body convulsed with the first cut. He almost tore himself away from me. The sound he made…I had never heard such sounds come from anything human .T'Gatoi seemed to pay no attention as she lengthened and deepened the cut, now and then pausing to lick away the blood. His blood vessels contracted, reacting to the chemistry of her saliva and the bleeding slowed. I felt as though I were helping her to torture him, helping her consume him. I knew I would vomit soon, didn't know why I hadn't already […] She found the first grub. It was fat and deep red with his blood—both inside and out. 15

The scene is undeniably abject to Gan, as he struggles to reconcile his disgust with the reality in front of him. John Carlo Pasco, Camille Anderson and Sayantani DasGupta engaged this scene within their scholarship on visionary medicine, however, they read the scene as a discomforting blurring of boundaries between the human and the alien. They emphasized both the eggs and T'Gatoi intersecting the human form, troubling binaries of the interior and the exterior as well as the tribalism of "us" versus "them". Interestingly, Pasco, Anderson and DasGupta invoked this scene as part of an argument for medical professionals to take-up a pedagogy of discomfort, emphasizing the alien elements of the scene rather than what is familiar. While the grub mentioned by Gan lacks a specific visual parallel in the human birthing process, Gan's disgust and alienation precedes their visibility within Lomas's flesh, emphasizing bodily violence as the true source of Gan's discomfort.

Contrary to popular depictions of the mother as a symbol of peace, most prevalently displayed within the iconography of the Madonna and the Christ Child, pregnancy and childbirth

are wrought out of immense violence. In the moments of conception, a single sperm out of an army of its siblings manages to surpass the protective membrane of the egg, beginning the biological process with a bodily invasion of the cell. As the fetus grows, it demands nourishment of the gestational mother, forcing an increase in consumption for both to survive, however, the gestational mother is unable to consciously allocate which nutrients go where. To accommodate the growing fetus, the body swells and changes, displacing organs. Despite the evolutionary necessary of reproduction for the perpetuation of the species, the human body has yet to establish a peaceful process.

Furthermore, as Elizabeth G. Raymond and David A. Grimes found in their survey of maternal mortality and morbidity within the Center for Disease Control Prevention's Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System and studies published on PubMed, "the risk of death associated with childbirth was approximately 14 times higher than that with abortion" (216), demonstrating the dangers of human birth processes. Marginalized groups are particularly at risk, according to a recent 2014 report by the Center for Disease Control Prevention surveying births between 2011 and 2014, which found that Black women die at more than triple the rate of white women during childbirth. This horrific discrepancy reveals two things: first, that pregnancy remains a dangerous and potentially fatal process, and second, the risks surrounding pregnancy can be mediated.

Maternal theorist Sara Ruddick embraced the often censored elements of birth, describing "a woman's birthing body—bloody, swollen out of shape, exposed in its pain, its otherwise concealed parts broken open," (190): depictions Octavia Butler chose to take up in rendering the hatching scene. Bram Lomas's body, Butler characterized, as disturbed by "seemingly random pulsations moving his brown flesh," [convulsing] with the first cut," and ultimately "alien" (14-17). The parallels between the human birth process and the Tlic hatching process forces the

reader to question whether young Gan, only on the brink of adulthood, can conceive of the birthing labor that his own mother had taken up on his behalf. *All* birthing scenes, Ruddick argued are "disturbing in [themselves] and because [they force] on any onlooker the intimate knowledge of his or her own fleshly beginnings" (190).

The interiority of the body and the body in pain are often sights removed from the public eye, in actuality and in representation, specifically in regards to child birth. Sociologist Imogen Tyler and artist Jessica Clements identified aesthetic breaks in the representation of vaginal childbirth, noting that visual representations tend to utilize angles to obscure the birthing body (135). Such censorship renders the birthing body pornographic and subsequently relays a false image of the practice, devoid of bodily fluids and of pain. Gan receives similarly censored diagrams of the birthing process within his education, leading him to reflect "I had been told all my life that this was a good and necessary thing Tlic and Terran did together—a kind of birth. I had believed it until now. I knew birth was painful and bloody, no matter what. But this was something else, something worse. And I wasn't ready to see it. Maybe I never would be" (Butler 16-17). The visual graphics Gan received in his life time were insufficient for the realities of birth, leading to feelings of alienation between himself and T'Gatoi, who transforms in his eyes from a maternal figure to a near-murderer as she facilitates the birthing scene.

Gan's estrangement, Ruddick might argue, is certainly understandable given the ways in which birth is often removed from the public sector, occurring in private spaces. Xuan Hoa, Gan's older sister whom he briefly considers allowing to host in his place, might have been vulnerable to the same aversion had she observed the same birthing scene but her relationship to human childbirth suggests otherwise. Like, Gan, she also grew up with the expectation to one day carry life, albeit "human young who should someday drink at her breasts, not at her veins"

(Butler 26). However, Xuan Hoa likely received biological precursors to this reality through the monthly menstrual process. Menstruation, Ruddick argued, evokes a similar disgust as the birthing process, in terms of the ways it reminds individuals of their bodily origins (190). The blood and uterine lining ejected each month serve as reminders of the potential for pregnancy, already preparing the individual for the bodily excretions as well as the pain. By selecting Gan as her protagonist, wholly unprepared for the literal labor of going into labor, Butler heightened the grotesque and painful nature of pregnancy, using his aversion to bring light to the true stresses and struggles conferred within gestational caregiving.

To Butler, as she relayed in an interview with Randall Kenan in 1990, the hatching scene is no more violent than human birthing practices. "'Bloodchild,'" she clarified, "is very interesting in that men tend to see a horrible case of slavery and women tend to say that, oh well, they had cesareans, big deal" (31). While the parallels between the surgical hatching process and the cesarean section employed on women's bodies during childbirth are undeniable, her allegations of divisive gendered readings warrants further attention due to the contradictory scholarship of Elyce Rae Helfod and Alys Weinbaum. Although a history of reproductive slavery informs the Tlic-Terran society, as Gan reveals how the Tlic once forcibly bred the Terrans like cattle during their early interactions (Butler 9), Butler firmly argued that "Bloodchild" is not "a story of slavery" (30). Literary scholars Helford and Weisbaum, however, both directly aligned the present relationship between T'Gatoi and Gan with the institution of chattel slavery, such that Helford read it "through the metaphor of white male slavemaster and enslaved female" (266) and Weinbaum characterized the entirety of "Bloodchild" as "a story about sadomasochism in slavery, a story about a slave who chooses love for his master over revolt, about a slave who nurtures his desire for unfreedom" (64).

Such interpretations feel reminiscent of Roberts's earlier argument that links up the purchase of genetic material, or in this circumstance--the rental of human material-- in regards to reproduction with the historic purchase of human bodies through chattel slavery. Without delving into the controversial space of arguing whether "Bloodchild" constitutes slavery, an issue already problematized by the discrepancy between limited scholastic interpretations and Butler's allegations that such readings are incorrectly influenced by her race (Potts Interview 66), a nuanced reading of the novella through a lens of reproductive tourism can enable investigation of these issues. Characterized as "a form of outsourced industrial labor that is used when people from developed nations travel to countries, such as India, to find surrogates at discounted rates" (Dunn 299-300), reproductive tourism intersects concerns regarding the purchase or rental of human materials and Butler's contention that her novella represents a mode of "paying the rent". Having previously begun to address the subject of compensated gestational surrogacy through the scholarship of Gupta and Roberts, reproductive tourism further complicates the issue through the power disparity and reflections of imperialism contained within the relationship between employer and employee.

Heather Dunn's particular engagement of reproductive tourism in regard to Indian surrogates most strikingly parallels the scenes depicted within "Bloodchild," an uncanny prediction on Butler's part given that compensated surrogacy would not be legalized in the nation until 2002 (305). Although the Tlic cannot be read as an imperializing population, given that the Terran people settled on their already occupied planet, the Terrans undoubtedly lack systemic power within the arrangement. Much like the Indian surrogates surveyed, the majority of whom lived below the poverty line, the Terrans must do reproductive labor in order to survive

(Dunn 305). Subsequently, the desperation informing the entrance of both groups into these contracts limits their ability to negotiate on an equal playing field.

Despite Gan's, perhaps naive assertion, that the Terrans function as an "independent people," they lack political representation in engagements with the Tlic (Butler 5). While T'Gatoi, a government official, secured better working conditions for the Terran people and helped to abolish the slavery-like practice that Gan briefly addresses, such changes came about in response to the material needs of the Tlic (Butler 12). Resistance on the part of the the Terran people, such that they might attempt to escape, extract fertilized eggs, or even attempt suicide serve neither party. However, in the case the agreement were to fall apart, the Terrans would be expelled from the planet immediately, almost certainly dooming them, while the Tlic had valuable time to seek out a new host species. Similarly, due to the dire need to work for survival under an expansive global capitalism, the impoverished surrogates might be forced to accept lower compensation than originally promised as they risk their lives through the process of pregnancy and childbirth.

In interviews, Butler identified financial coercions like these as part of a practice of "throw-away labor," a dangerous alternative to slavery in which technically-free individuals enter into unjust work contracts out of necessity (Jackson 44). The ever-expanding global capitalism places the onus of survival on the individual, or on the individual's parents, and routinely privileges the already powerful as Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* relates. While on one hand, the power to save the lives of one's family should not be undervalued, the necessity of salvation only being possible when one breaks their body down into "saleable and disposable parts" (Gupta 32) remains tragic. At some point, the sale of body parts, particularly when it risks

an individual's health, transforms into selling the rights to both one's life and one's death, stripping away humanity until only a corpse remains.

"Bloodchild" is largely concerned with the prospect of disposability as Gan worries whether human life matters on an individual scale to the Tlic or if he and his fellow Terran are merely a means to an end. Despite the affectionate and intimate relationship shared by T'Gatoi and Gan, Bram Lomas's birthing scene, in terms of its grotesqueness as well as T'Gatoi's cavalier attitude, disrupts their intimate trust. In helping pin down Bram Lomas during the birthing process, Gan feels "as though I [he] were helping her to torture him, helping her consume him" (Butler 15) and as she licks the blood away from a new hatchling, he wonders whether she enjoyed the taste (Butler 17).

The calm surgical precision with which T'Gatoi operates disturbs Gan, despite that had she been emotional and chaotic, Lomas's life might not have been saved. He reads her affect as ambivalent, describing how "T'Gatoi picked up the writhing grub carefully and looked at it, somehow ignoring the terrible groans of the man," leading him to conclude that "she felt nothing" (Butler 16). His perception of the grubs further inflames his aversion to T'Gatoi, who partook in a similarly parasitic process within his own father's body. While well aware that the grubs feed unconsciously on their host's bloodstream throughout gestation, and will consume the host if not extracted during hatching out of a biological necessity, Gan begins to regard them as sentient malicious beings warranting "revenge" (Butler 15). In regarding the grubs as actively and intentionally exploiting human bodies, he imagines their early regard of human beings as no more than means to an end informing the rest of their life trajectory, wondering whether T'Gatoi's "childhood habits die hard—or not die at all?" (Butler 17).

The questions of worth and value Gan begins to consider come to a head when he finally flees the birthing scene to vomit, only to be approached by his emotionally distant brother, Qui. After witnessing a birthing scene gone wrong in his youth, Qui began to use his brother as a shield from the Tlic, "looking out for [Gan] in a way that made [Gan] all but hate him—a way that clearly said, as long as [Gan] was alright, [Qui] was safe from the Tlic" (Butler 19). Qui shares the circumstances of Gan only after the latter witnesses something similarly traumatic, seeking company in his misery within the Preserve. Qui describes how:

> The Tlic wouldn't open the man because she had nothing to feed the grubs. The man couldn't go any further and there were no houses around. He was in so much pain, he told her to kill him. He begged her to kill him. Finally, she did. She cut his throat. One swipe of one claw. I saw the grubs eat their way out, then burrow in again, still eating. Butler 20

While Gan expresses sympathy over Qui's trauma, he still has faith, albeit shaken, in the Tlic-Terran relationships and in T'Gatoi. Qui, however, cannot resist attempting to further rupture Gan's notion of the Tlic, regardless of the fact that Gan, not Qui, is the one already bound to host. Gan, troubled by the persistent and potentially rational argument, responds with violence. The brothers fight until Gan falls unconscious. When he awakes, alone, Gan returns home and locates the families' contraband rifle, illegal within the Preserve but privately maintained by his father. He sits and waits for T'Gatoi and when she arrives, he lifts the rifle to his chin, threatening suicide (Butler 24).

If the Terrans are simply host animals to the Tlic, then the characteristics of the human body, which are the basis for their treatment, simultaneously serve as their negotiating chips

within these circumstances. Rather than use the rifle to kill T'Gatoi, to whom he is bound, Gan recognizes that the destruction of a single contributor to the system will not destroy it. He learns from Qui's mistakes, who falsely believes he can outrun the societal structure, and realizes he must learn to work within it. Gan harnesses his disposability, and uses it navigate some degree of agency within his circumstances as he pushes T'Gatoi to ask for his consent, or risk losing access to his body all together. T'Gatoi, however, verbally resists, resorting to pleas for the life of her children as well as for the life of his people: "Your ancestors, fleeing from their own kind who would have killed or enslaved them — they survived because of us. We saw them as people and gave them the Preserve when they still tried to kill us as worms" (Butler 25). Despite her refusal to explicitly cede power by asking for Gan's consent, T'Gatoi's attempt to guilt him into agreement reflect her awareness of his autonomy and capacity to choose.

Negotiations, however, stop cold when Gan visibly cringes at her language of "worms" as he thinks back to the grubs floating in Bram Lomas's flesh. T'Gatoi immediately gives up on Gan as a host, no longer trusting him to adequately care for her children and decides to go to Xuan Hoa, Gan's willing sister in order to implant her eggs. Yet as she leaves, Gan drops the gun from his throat, unwilling to sacrifice his sister on his behalf and simultaneously, unwilling to sacrifice the relationship which he has with T'Gatoi (Butler 26). Out of love, because of and in spite of those difficult decisions Butler mentioned, a man decides to become pregnant. Yet Gan's adherence to the terms of the Terran-Tlic conflict does not reify the past power dynamic.

When T'Gatoi attempts to confiscate the rifle, Gan resists, maintaining his capitalization upon his own commodification, arguing "'If we're not your animals, if these are adult things, accept the risk. There is risk, Gatoi, in dealing with a partner'" (Butler 26). Reluctantly, she concedes. Ultimately, Butler does not take up the oft quoted sentiment of noted Black feminist

Audre Lorde in her proclamation that “One cannot dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools”. Pessimistically, Butler believed that, burdened with the evolved tendency to hierarchize along with the capacity of sentience, human beings will never truly transcend discrimination or racism (McCaffery and McMenamin 23). Her work reflects this perspective, rarely taking up utopian themes and instead serving as warnings, attempting to deter humankind away from certain directions without precisely knowing the path that should be taken instead. She employs a practicality, a means of making do within undesirable circumstances to move towards a liberation.

Similarly, the reproductive surrogates whom Heather Dunn identified as exploited and oppressed, find a sense of empowerment within their own experiences as surrogates. She linked up the experience of Indian surrogates with Israeli surrogates. The former group speak to a “blood tie” that interrupts and destabilizes a patriarchal emphasis on genetic connection (308). Although blood typically is utilized to rhetorically identify biological family linkages, the Indian surrogates use blood to refer to the bodily nourishment they provided the fetus and contend that tie intertwines the child’s and the surrogates’ lives. Perhaps unknown to the surrogates at the time, these “blood ties” are scientifically substantiated by recent findings that exchanges occur between the endometrium of the gestational mother and the embryo, despite bearing no genetic connection (Viella). Dunn positioned the “blood ties” in relation to Elly Teman’s language of “blood connections,” which emerged between Israeli surrogates and the children they carry, as the former perceive themselves as “caring and selfless individuals” who have aided parents in growing their family (309). In both circumstances, the surrogates in question see an immense value in their labor, both in terms of the child and in terms of the parents who shall raise them. Without necessarily destroying the circumstances of global capitalism that allow for

commodification of the body, these women manage to find a bright spots in their work, as they persist in the care work which so often defines female identity and action.

Although it is uncertain what Octavia Butler's title particularly refers to, the grubs in Bram Lomas or perhaps Gan himself, I prefer to read it in connection with the testimony of the gestational surrogates, identifying the furnishing of one's body as a significant and noteworthy occurrence. The "Bloodchild" Gan carries marks a space of a sincere potential for change within the Preserve as following the implantation of T'Gatoi's eggs, Gan begins to negotiate on behalf of his people. When reflecting back on the day's incidents, T'Gatoi states "'Terrans should be protected from seeing," the brutality of birth. Gan disagrees, however, and verbalizes such: "'Not protected,' [he] said. 'Shown. Shown when we're young kids, and shown more than once. Gatoi, no Terran ever sees a birth that goes right. All we see is N'Tlic pain and terror and maybe death'" (Butler 29). Although Gan personally reconciles terror of the event, he thinks of the human community beyond himself and theorizes ways through which this work can be normalized, such that future hosts are properly prepared. He does not believe that future hosts should have to be blindsided by the experience and suggests that birthings, beginning with his own, enter the public sphere. Although hesitant, Gan can feel T'Gatoi softening to the idea and carries hope for the future.

In spite of the difficult circumstances at hand, despite the conditions that some deem slavery, Gan uses care as a means of empowerment as he begins to affect change within his own community. Although he does not necessarily become a mother in these moments, as Sara Ruddick argues that all mothers are adoptive upon birth (51), he takes up the power of the maternal in a manner consistent with the rest of Butler's work. Poet and critic Dorothy Allison

identified pervasive depictions of mothers in Butler's expansive literature, although she troubled the trend, characterizing her own response:

> I love Octavia Butler's women even when they make me want to scream with frustration. The problem is not their feminism; her characters are always independent, stubborn, difficult and insistent on trying to control their own lives. What drives me crazy is their attitude: the decisions they make, the things they do in order to protect and nurture their children--and the assumption that children and family always come first. 471

Butler likely would support such an assertion, agreeing that reproduction and family remain key themes within her work, despite never marrying or having children herself, "as [family] is so much of what we are" (Potts 68). However, where Butler rendered mothers as troubled but imbued with a deep power, Allison these salvation narratives, dependent on women's self-sacrifice, as reifying the assumption of motherhood for all women and subsequently, reinforcing the oppression of women.

While Allison's interpretation is not without merit, within the Black feminist tradition, a space exists through which maternity can be understood outside of its practice under patriarchy and reconceived as a powerful endeavor. Black feminism, like mainstream feminism within the West, remains a complex enterprise, fraught with contradictions of experience and opinions that leaves pivotal Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins unable to pin down a single definition. Collins, instead offered a framework through which to situate the school of thought, understanding Black feminism as centering the experience of Black women and their unique location within the political landscape by virtue of race, gender, and class, such that a single

element cannot be regarded without acknowledgement of another (25). While Black feminism hinges on the experience and the self-determination of black women, Collins further argued that is a project for all: "[with]in a context of intersection oppressions, black feminism requires searching for justice not only for U.S. Black women, but for everyone" (43). Subsequently, Black feminist readings of maternity suggest a cross-sectoral radical humanist potential.

The scholarship of Dorothy Roberts, whose work assisted in opening this chapter, centers on the ways in which the United States government has pathologized, punished, and prevented black motherhood. Jennifer Nash, regarding this history, argued that in response to these attempts to portray black motherhood as a "death-world," "black feminist theory has become squarely invested in reimagining and amplifying the potential, power, and possibility of black motherhood" (702). In employing Nash's argument, it remains critical to distinguish that such a sentiment is not representative of all opinions within the discipline and I do not seek to argue it as a universal philosophy but rather to emphasize the political potential of motherwork in seeking justice.

Motherhood, remains complex, however, even when imbued with a political potential. But the capacity for care under oppressive and awful circumstances reveal a necessary hope for the future. Angela Davis troubled the dehumanization and objectification of slavery through carework within the slave community. In tending to their own husbands and children, Davis argued, black women performed "the *only* labor of the slave community which could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor," both allowing her a sense of autonomy deprived of others and rendering her "essential to the *survival* of the community" (5). Despite the slaveholder's attempt to regard the Black mother solely in terms of her productive capacity, caring for her husband and children offered her a mode of resistance.

Lien, Gan's mother, feels especially reflective of this sentiment, as it was she who promised Gan to T'Gatoi prior to his birth. She remains a complex figure throughout the novella, often eluding focus in literary criticism, as she emotionally struggles with a sensation that she is simply raising her son up to slaughter. Despite her aversion to the commodification of Gan's body, her words inform the text and inspire the first moves towards justice and self-determination within the Preserve. Butler exits "Bloodchild" with Lien's voice in Gan's mind: "*Take care of her*, my mother used to say" and T'Gatoi's parallel promise in his ears, "'I won't leave you as Lomas was left—alone, N'Tlic. I'll take care of you'" (Butler 29).

Lien's mothering ensures Gan's survival and enables him with the ability to mediate on behalf of his own people by embracing maternity himself, both in regard to T'Gatoi's eggs and the larger Terran community. While his reproductive capacity enables him to utilize his body within negotiations for greater autonomy, Gan also invokes the maternal power sometimes espoused within Black feminist through community care and pedagogical tradition. Patricia Hill Collins identified the significance of community othermothers who serve their collectives through "ethics of care and personal accountability," and tasked them with the responsibility of assisting others in attaining "the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance" (192-193). These othermothers build family beyond biological or legal definitions, perceiving care for the individual as a care for the larger community. Gan, with nothing to gain after he reconciles his own discomfort with hosting, offers to use his body as a pedagogical tool for the good of others. In the brevity of his life, he hopes to create a longer lasting impact that reduces the trauma of future generations and enables more transparent interactions. Gan's maternal project is equal parts creative as well, as in developing these pedagogical modes, he suggests a system of knowledge inheritance that might transcend generations.

"This," Dorothy Allison wrote, "is the essential vision of Octavia Butler": ", the mother making possible her children's lives and freeing them to choose their own destinies" (478). Certainly, however, there remains reason to be skeptical of motherhood or caregiving as unilaterally empowering. Allison's original argument, that scripting motherhood as the sole means to salvation places the onus of such work onto already oppressed women, holds merit. The maternal-fetal conflict transcends the womb, demanding persistent and perceptual sacrifice of all women, everywhere. A liberation theology of motherhood remains dangerous when only practiced by women and when foisted upon all women without question.

It is when mothering and caring become actions taken up by all people, regardless of gender, that these practices achieve their true radical potential. It is through the estranging vessel of Gan's gender identity that the power of maternity and the power of caring is revealed, simply because it is practiced by someone who has not incorporated such a behavior as a defining feature of their identity. In caring for her own children, as Angela Davis noted, a mother undergoing oppression can sow seeds for resistance by ensuring the survival of her children. By taking up a model of community care and responsibility, as Patricia Hill Collins described in terms of community other mothers, mothers can act as forces for political change. And as the maternal tradition laid out by Alice Walker in her text, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, revealed, mothers can be understood beyond individual specialized care and can be seen as intellectual predecessors and educators whose words and thinking shape the next generation.

Butler's "Bloodchild" reveals the magnificent capacity of motherwork and care, such that it materially transcends the ultimately limited parameters of any political or economic system. In the present moment, however, within the West as well as the world increasingly touched by capitalism, it is imperative to value care adequately and appropriately. Octavia Butler, ultimately,

never imagined herself as a utopian thinker and rarely provided clear solutions for the problems she responds to in her work. She remained a pragmatist, encouraging individuals to take steps towards liberation even within the most oppressive of circumstances. Under a capitalist system informed by patriarchy and white supremacy, the first steps lie in the work Butler began with "Bloodchild," returning to the basics, the labor that informs and enables any and all societal progress: caring.

CHAPTER TWO

"HOW BEAUTIFUL THAT TIGER IS [WHEN] IT'S GOT YOU BY THE ARM": DISSECTING DISABILITY IN "THE EVENING AND THE MORNING AND THE NIGHT"

While her work is often characterized by its estranging extraterrestrial engagements, Octavia E. Butler remained fascinated throughout her literary career with the hard reality of the human body and the biological processes within it, believing it to be both cause and cure to the ailments which plague our world. Avoiding a teleological narrative of human existence, or a conception of the species as outside of evolution, Butler invoked alien life or otherworldly circumstances as catalysts to explore the most spectacular possibility, human adaptation. Her aliens are never outright antagonists but allies in a project of growth, inhabiting the same ecosystem and by extension, "forced to change" in order to survive (Potts 21). Rather than falling prey to what her texts construct as the human tradition of domination and violence, Butler's work encourages compassion and collaboration. Her writing offers the opportunity to work with other species, one another, even our own bodies and that which we imagine as always attempting to destroy us—our most difficult enemy to reconcile—disease.

Butler reads disease as horrific in its present impact, but perhaps underappreciated in its potential, noting

> I understand why we've gone about things as we have, in fighting disease, because disease appears to be fighting us. You don't stop and think how beautiful that tiger is if it's got you by the arm [...] I think we'll learn, if we survive, to partner them more than to fight then. That's really going to be our only chance, because in fighting

them, all we've really done is cull them and make them stronger.

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Such a sentiment comes to fruition within Butler's short story, "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," where the speculative element lies in the Duryea-Gode Disease[1], a dominant hereditary disorder that produces a violent fugue state in the afflicted. While Butler's characters initially perceive the disease as something to be eradicated, they discover that its most deleterious behaviors can be redirected and reinterpreted to produce positive outcomes, inaccessible to an able-bodied person. Here, humans learn to tame the tiger, working alongside it to imagine new modes of achieving citizenship and the potential gains enabled when societies value, rather than demonize, difference.

Butler's imagining of disease troubles American cultural norms of disability and care, political constructions deeply intertwined with one another. In using the term disability, I intend to utilize the specific understanding of the term emerging out of disability studies. As Michael Ralph explains, *impairment* is a bodily difference or lack, for example, a missing limb or the inability to see, whereas *disability* "refers to the process that converts a perceived deficiency into an obstacle" (107). A lack of a limb or eyesight only becomes a disability when the society one exists within assumes that all of it citizens have access to them and subsequently fails to account for their absence in constructing their social world. The existence of disability, then, read through the theoretical framework of philosophers Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher, wherein they defined care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world,' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (40), reveals the ways in which non-normative bodies are marginalized and excluded from full citizenship within their social 'world.'

[1] Butler utilized "DGD" as an acronym for both the illness and those who have it.

Octavia Butler's instruction to take up disease, the very etymology of which signals its negative connotation[2], suggests a radical means through which marginalized bodies can access full citizenship as they move from a characterization of disabled to differently empowered. "Evening" follows Lynn Mortimer, a young college student studying at the University of Southern California whose life appears rather conventional on a surface level as she navigates life with roommates and her very first boyfriend. The Duryea-Gode Disease complicates matters, in that every mentioned character within the short story is diagnosed with it. Emerging from a treatment for a cancer, DGD manifests in the bodies of patients' children as a dominant, hereditary gene, which phenotypically manifests around middle-age when characters "drift," into a fugue state characterized by self-mutilation. While Doctors Duryea and Gode conducted important research prior to the start of the short story, developing a diet that helped to mediate the severity of symptoms (Butler 46), Lynn's lived experience as the daughter of two DGD-positive parents demonstrates the catastrophic potential of drifting:

> Dad had killed Mom, then skinned her completely. At least that's how I hoped it happened. I mean I hoped he killed her first. He broke some of her ribs, damaged her heart. Digging. Then he began tearing at himself, through skin and bone, digging. He had managed to reach his own heart before he died. 36.

The image relayed here suggests a zombie aesthetic, where mindless violence blurs boundaries between the interiority and exteriority of the zombie and its victims. Although the cultural figure of the zombie emerged out of Haitian folklore traditions, where necromancers

[2] The Oxford English Dictionary locates the origin of "disease," in the old French words, "des," -- implying "removal, aversion, negation, reversal of action,"— and "ease,"—translated to "opportunity, means, or ability to do something."

reanimated corpses and enlisted them in a perpetual slavery[3], contemporary American renditions supplement magic with science, while maintaining the initial undead characterization. Popular television series *The Walking Dead* imagines zombification as emerging out of pathogen that activates in the human body after death, transforming the deceased into mindless monsters, consumed by an impulse to destroy. Using only their bodies, they attack human survivors, ripping apart their flesh with their mouths and drawing once concealed flesh and blood to the surface in a visually repulsive manner. The bodies of the zombies themselves are marked by similar violence, their flesh decomposing in spite of and because of their re-animation, defining the zombie through its grotesque form (Pielak and Cohen).

Like a zombie, Lynn's father lacks awareness of his actions, driven by instinct to brutally destroy the body of his loved one. He skins her body, exposing her insides, and then persists in a violent and violating digging. Had her death been inflicted with a gun or knife, some other, distancing mode of technology, it might have appeared less horrific. However, Butler's attribution of immense power to only one's hands, such that flesh can be torn apart and bones broken, suggests a far more intimate and far more monstrous means of violence. While the zombie figure is not known for purposeful destruction of the self, tending to focus its attention on surviving human beings, the father's turn upon himself allows him to take on the grotesque visual signifiers of the zombie as he graphically unravels his own body. Despite the similarities between the abject aesthetic of the zombie and the DGD patient, Butler never endorsed an interpretation of the DGD as a monster, rather than a man. Where zombies are read as inhuman through their bodily signifiers, enabling audiences to unilaterally root for their demise, Butler's

[3] Zombist Amy Wilentz notes that the particular brutality of Haitian slavery often pushed enslaved individuals to consider suicide. Slave drivers, however, used the threat of perpetual, mechanized slavery after death to deter such a behavior.

refusal to engage with this reading, despite utilizing the same aesthetic tropes, provide an opportunity to reconcile humanity with monstrosity. Her insistence on understanding the DGD as a patient, her re-reading of DGD's "digging" as a productive dissection that can be commodified into the prevailing socio-political structure, and her emphasis on "control," return to the Haitian zombie tradition and the critique of the dehumanization of slaves it emerged from.

At the start of the short story, characters understood drift and self-mutilation as inevitable, resulting either in death or institutionalization for all DGDs. In Lynn's parents, the audience observes the first option, but the second option, at least initially, is too horrific for Lynn to detail, only informing readers that she attempted suicide after witnessing a government-run ward during her adolescence (Butler 35). After taking time to deal with her parents' deaths, Lynn decided to attend college on a funded scholarship without "any particular hope," that it might lead to a different future (Butler 37). Facing two terrible options, Lynn and her boyfriend, Alan Chi, operated with no expectation of a future beyond forty, given that their biology predetermines their abbreviated lifespan. Although taking solace in one another, they ultimately were "just marking time" as they drifted through a hopeless universe (Butler 36).

However, when visiting Alan's institutionalized mother in a new private facility, the couple learns of a new medical treatment that shatters their biodeterministic understandings, both allowing and forcing them to conceive of a future for the first time. Dilg, as the facility is referred to throughout the text, is run by "controlled" DGDs[4] who manage to intervene into the obsessive focus of the drift. Once interrupted, patients can process and respond to external stimuli, and thus overcome the compulsion of destruction. While this behavior shift appears

[4] Butler described DGD patients who have yet to drift as "controlled." Alan Chi uses the phrase "out-of-control DGDs" (Butler 48) to describe those who have drifted, but no other characters take it up so I will choose to employ "uncontrolled," to allow more a fluid reading experience.

success enough alone, Dilg patients go beyond a neutral state of peace and become outright productive, creating art and technology valuable to the world beyond the facility's walls. The Dilg medical model proposes a future for Lynn and Alan where their bodies serve not as a site of oppression, but empowerment, destabilizing their seemingly fixed status as doomed to disability.

In understanding disability as a political process that can be interrupted or eroded (as opposed to a biological actuality), one must recognize the specific circumstances of the cultural world which produce disability in the first place. In the specifically American setting of "Evening," the capacity for waged labor serves as a key determining factor in deciding disability, by virtue of an alignment of citizenship with independence. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon tracked the emergences of this model of citizenship in their "Genealogy of Dependency," noting that while once dependency simply meant working on behalf of someone else (for example as a servant), dependency took on a new political register amidst democratic reform movements, reinterpreted as a sign of unfreedom that must be destroyed (315). Industrialization enabled workers to campaign for adequate compensation, which allowed them to negotiate further freedoms, as they now could financially provide for themselves and their families, leading to an idealization of financial independence (Fraser and Gordon 316). The intersection of these political and financial definitions resulted in the present image of social citizenship, wherein the inability to access waged labor "undermines a person's identity as an active citizen and his or her ability to exercise social citizenship" (MacGregor).

Under capitalism, work is not only a right but a predecessor to engaging full citizenship, leaving the body unable to work a second-class citizen at best. Former Senator Daniel P. Moynihan's goes so far as to pathologize the non-working body, subsequently rendered dependent, in his critique of welfare state: "[Dependency] is an incomplete state in life: normal

in the child, abnormal in the adult. In a world where completed men and women stand on their own feet, persons who are dependent—as the buried imagery of the word denotes—hang". The body that fails to work is pathologized, rendered alien, insufficient, and symptomatic of something wrong. Such a failure demands dissection, a need to strip apart patient testimony or perhaps the patient altogether to discern the source of such a problem. As constant political attacks on healthcare and welfare programs demonstrate, there is scant space in the United States for dependent bodies. Subsequently, the mere disruption of drifted DGD's destructive impulses is not enough to garner full citizenship and conception as part of the 'world,' that care maintains. To earn that title, they must earn financial independence as well.

Butler situated the productive contributions of controlled DGDs as a necessary predecessor to securing the most minor protections for the larger population, such they are allowed to access the social world prior to drifting as opposed to being eradicated through sterilization or euthanasia. The "digging," which characterizes the uncontrolled DGDs' self-mutilation appears in reduced form in the controlled DGD, as a kind of investigative dissection of a subject, rather than the self, that is particularly useful in solving problems. Controlled DGDs tend to specialize in science, using their intense focus to make groundbreaking discoveries for the medical field and curing other conditions but making almost no progress in mediating their own. Nonetheless, their valuable research plays a key role in "[keeping] the doors at least partly open for the rest" (Butler 37).

While the DGDs who "go good" (Butler 37) help to justify funding better care for those diagnosed, the prevailing public image and imminent reality of the destructive DGD prevents any real erosion of the stigma surrounding the condition. The inevitable decline, wherein DGDs will only be seen as valuable in terms of the bed spaces they take up (Russell), and the potential

danger to the public that they pose enables the development of "restrictive laws," as well as problems with "jobs, housing, [and] schooling" for DGDs[5] (Butler 36). The lack of a long-term economic viability justifies the denial of opportunity to DGDs in their undrifted state, making people like Alan a poor investment for medical schools that would rather "train doctors who were likely to live long enough to put their training to use" (Butler 43). These attitudes enable Lynn and Alan's sense of nihilism at the start of the narrative.

Dilg, however, provides a different means through when uncontrolled DGDs can be reconciled as citizens of their society by restoring its patients to working condition. In trying to convince Lynn to accompany him on his visit, Alan characterizes Dilg upon productive lines: "They have some kind of...sheltered workshop. They've got patients doing things," demonstrating the significance of productivity as opposed to patient happiness from the very start (Butler 44). Beatrice, the controlled DGD who runs the facility, pointedly reinforces this narrative, showcasing patient art-work at Dilg's entryway and attesting to her patients' creative capacity as well as their commodification: "'All of this was made here [...] some of it is even sold from here. Most goes to galleries in the Bay Area or down around L.A. Our only problem is turning out too much of it" (Butler 48).

The couple repeatedly express their shock, "You mean the patients do this?" Lynn asks and upon confirmation, Alan follows up, still in disbelief, "'you're telling us out-of-control DGDs create art and invent things?" (Butler 48). It is not simply the creative aspects that impress them, as Alan even notes "'I expected to find them weaving baskets or something--at

[5] While Isiah Lavender reads this discrimination explicitly as a metaphor for anti-blackness, a stipulation which Sami Schalk further nuances to read DGD as a "disability metaphor that demonstrates how ableism and anti-black racism operate in parallel and overlapping ways" (140), I end to engage the text through Rosemarie Garland-Thomas attention to disability as "an identity category that anyone can enter at any time" (20). Schalk and Lavender's contributions to the limited scholarship on this text are significant and should be regarded as such, but disability's dynamic factors trouble this text in ways which race cannot and merits further attention.

best,'" (Butler 49), but that these products are of value to someone else and offer an entry into work previously thought to be denied. Most impressive appears to be the palmprint-voiceprint lock developed by a resident of the facility that Dilg now holds the patent on. While most people, Beatrice characterizes, "tend to look at what's done at Dilg in the way they look at the efforts of idiot savants [:] interesting, incomprehensible, but not really important," technology like the p.v. locks inspired new perceptions of the Dilg ward by wealthy consumers (Butler 49). These products offer Lynn and Alan their first real imagining of what independence might taste like, leaving them skeptical but hungry for more.

As they tour the facility, they witness the truth behind Beatrice's words, observing drifted DGDs, who in any other facility would be restrained, as they masterfully wield complex and dangerous machinery. Beatrice refuses to explain the nature of this treatment that allows for such control until they finally come to Naomi Chi, Alan's mother who drifted when he was only three years old. She is blind, having gouged out her own eyes and mutilated the majority of her face, and suffers from brain damage due to neglect in a state-run facility. She speaks and interacts with Allan, and under Beatrice's instruction, hugs her son for the first time in over a decade. All appears impossibly well until Beatrice steps away for a moment and her destructive impulses resurface. When Beatrice returns and simply states "No, Naomi," the behaviors cease and the mysterious medical treatment reveals itself, embedded in Beatrice's biology.

As Beatrice explains, Dilg thrives because of a sex-linked pheromone transmitted maternally, most powerful when "'two irresponsible DGDs get together and produce girl children, like me and Lynn,'" (Butler 61). The scent resists synthetization, meaning that it can only be administered through interpersonal human interaction, a necessary component of care (Bubeck). This circumstance creates a dramatically different treatment model than a prescription

drug and reads both an immense power and responsibility onto the female double-DGD body, which will stay "controlled" forever as they lack the capacity to drift. In many ways, this mutation holds true to Butler's suggestion of working with, rather than against disease, as well as her celebration of "body knowledge," (Mehaffy and Keating 110). By attempting to fight cancer, humanity merely left a void for another disease to fill, one that almost mockingly borrows cancer's reproductive emphasis as its mechanism of transmission. Furthermore, that this mutation is only possible through what Beatrice dryly deems "irresponsibility" and Alan calls an animalistic, "mindless urge," (Butler 42) troubles curative approaches to disease and disability.

Butler's emphasis on working with disease, rather than against it, preemptively parallels foundational disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's notion of a feminist disability theory that suggests "we are better off learning to individually and collectively accommodate bodily limits and evolutions than trying to eliminate or deny them" (21). In a brief historiography, Garland-Thomson established past interpretations of "female, disabled, and dark bodies" as "dependent, incomplete, vulnerable, and incompetent bodies" (7). Marked solely by their distinction from a normative ideal of white manhood, these bodies were "subjugated," rendered "inadequate," "unrestrained," "redundant," and "expendable," and ultimately less than human, such that they were, and still are, socially acceptable targets of violent agendas (Garland-Thomson 9). An overemphasis on "cure" labels the body as problematic rather than the society that pathologized it, leaving all bodies vulnerable to similar treatment, given that change is a necessity of human existence (Garland-Thomas 14). While that is not to say individuals should avoid or reject medical treatment that they feel increases their quality of life, it suggests the value for all in building a 'world,' which cares rather than cures.

While waged labor provides the means through which DGD patients can access full citizenship, challenging Butler's audience to alter their perception of disability, the problem still remains for "Evening"'s cultural world to reconceive of care as a part of independence. Although initially excited by the possibility Dilg allows DGDs, when Alan learns the nature of this groundbreaking treatment along Lynn's desire to administer it, he quickly grows resistant:

> "It's something *you* can do. Play queen bee in a retreat full of workers. I've never had any ambition to be a drone."
>
> "A physician isn't likely to be a drone," Beatrice said.
>
> "Would you marry one of your patients?" he demanded. "That's what Lynn would be doing if she married me--whether I become a doctor or not."
>
> [...] "My husband is here, she said softly. "He's been a patient here for almost a decade. What better place for him...when his time came?"
>
> "Shit!" Alan muttered. He glanced at me. "Let's get out of here!"
>
> Butler 64

Alan is not disturbed by the potential of Dilg until Lynn appears interested in opening a similar facility, with the expectation that he join her. He realizes at this time that regardless of his consciousness at the present moment, his eventual drift will render him dependent on Lynn into perpetuity. To be dependent is to sacrifice power and to risk vulnerability, to become feminine or childlike in a social world where masculinity and manhood are constructed through action and domination. Despite the quality of life an institute like Dilg might give him, and the ability to be a physician in a way the world outside of Dilg has denied him, Alan feels that openly accepting

care would steal something sacred away from him. Although unspoken, he has fallen victim to the excessive valuation of an impossible independence, characterized by Eva Feder Kittay as "the illusion that whatever efficacy we have is the consequence of solo action" (75), to the extent that he perceives the care necessary for human existence as something shameful.

If waged labor and productivity are the means through which disabled individuals might gain access to full citizenship and valuation both in and outside of "Evening," then the prevailing social order must adapt a place for care within its framework. Valerie Aydos and Helena Fietz engaged this topic in their analysis of a case study of a young autistic man and his experience of employment after receiving government assistance. While politicians celebrated his self-sufficiency, Aydos and Fietz pointed out that he makes half as much as he once received from the government and lacks opportunities for real growth, concluding that affirmative action programs for disabled people in the workplace must be aware of and willing to meet specific needs; in short, they must provide care. Their calls encourage a reconciliation of citizenship under capitalism that accommodates appropriate care into the workplace, or, as artist Sunny Taylor proposed, moves outside the realm of market capital as a means of determining "equality and enfranchisement".

While normalizing care in the workplace provides key steps in the direction of rendering a citizenship accessible to all bodies under capitalism, the issue as to how care ought to be provisioned remains. Closely linked to independency lies autonomy and the affiliated human rights made vulnerable when one agrees to accept care. After Beatrice again advertises his productive potential within the facility—"'they're working, Alan. The disease hasn't stopped them, *won't* stop them'"—he lashes out, "'I won't be a puppet. I won't be controlled...by a goddamn smell!" (Butler 65). As activist and author Jenny Morris noted, "when someone

depends on someone else to do physical things for them, the more personal the task the greater the potential for abuse of human rights—and the greater the potential for the "caregiver" to protect and promote human rights" (13). In the case of "Evening," there appears immense potential for exploitation in that the DGD pheromone might be either coercive or disruptive, suggesting that Alan's concerns are quite well founded.

Although Beatrice claims that she acts like a guide to a blind person in instructing her patients (Butler 66), reading their obedience as a signal of their trust rather than their manipulation, the audience is unable to determine the veracity of these statements. Butler resisted revealing the interior mind of the DGD patient, simply relaying scenes where individuals obey Lynn or Beatrice's instructions. In some cases, where the individuals have drifted, it feels more reasonable to assume that the patient wishes to stop their actions, for example when Lynn screams at a woman who is biting her own body apart to stop (Butler 53) or when Beatrice helps to calm Naomi's destructive impulses. But as Alan realizes, Lynn's scent has unknowingly intervened into her relationships with other DGDs, influencing both him and their roommates. From their very first conversation, Lynn saw Alan as someone to save, "[taking] him to bed," because if "nobody did anything for him, he wouldn't last much longer" (Butler 43). Long before he drifts, Alan had already become her patient.

In this circumstance, an ethics of care is necessitated. Care philosopher Joan Tronto identified four key elements through which an ethics of care can be evaluated: awareness (ability of the provider to recognize the need for care); responsibility (willingness of the provider to begin care); adequacy (capacity to provide competence care); and responsiveness (ability to consider the position of the cared-for). Jenny Morris, an author and advocate, focused in on the

third and fourth elements to create a call for care ethics that underscores the necessity of human recognition within such work:

> We need an ethics of care which is based on the principle that to deny the human rights of our fellow human beings is to undermine our own humanity. We need an ethics of care which recognizes that anyone-whatever their level of communication or cognitive impairment-can express preferences. We need an ethics of care which aims to enable people to participate in decisions which affect them and to be involved in the life of their community. Most importantly, we need an ethics of care which, while starting from the position that everyone has the same human rights, also recognizes the additional requirements that some people have in order to access those human rights.

In Morris's call, the voice of the care recipient is critical. Regardless of the circumstances that place them in need of another's care, regardless of the ways in which their body changes, they maintain their full humanity and their full right to determine the trajectory of their own lives, emphasizing an independence that transcends any financial circumstance. Morris's call additionally disrupts the notion that all care is good care, emphasizing care that disregards a person's autonomy as a failure. Narayan rendered a powerful example by looking to colonial discourses of care, where colonizing populations read deficiency onto the subjects they wished to colonize and subsequently employed rhetoric of welfare and dependency to justify their subjugation (133). As Feder Kittay explained, "Caring intentions are necessary but not sufficient

for the actions to count as care. On this construction there can be better care or worse care, but bad care is not care at all" (80).

Although Butler presented complex relationships of care, ripe for the potential to fail in their mission, she never proposed a means to resolve the ethical concerns at play within these relationships. Neither the audience nor the narrative's controlled characters can provide insight into experience of the uncontrolled DGD and must simply provision care in accordance with the prevailing cultural standards. Although DGD's pheromone provides the text's most abstract element, DGD's construction out of three real genetic disorders serves as an important reminder to consider an ethics of care with this text. Ultimately, Butler's unresolved ethical gaps trouble a reader's understanding as to whether Beatrice "had all but won [Alan] for [Lynn]" through persuasive argument or coercive scent (68) and whether Alan's implied decision to work with, and then under, Lynn is a decision at all

Yet Lynn's choice in the matter similarly remains uncertain, driven just as much by her biology. While avoiding Social Darwinist rhetoric, Butler wrote "Evening," in order to engage with intersecting issues of medicine, biology, personal responsibility and her particular interest in the potential minor alterations in genes have to affect an entire being (69). While, Butler obviously showcased the immense power of body knowledge when one chooses to act upon it, she never explicitly clarified what the phrasing of "personal responsibility" refers to. Is personal responsibility the management of one's own illness by following a doctor's treatment plan and making sure not to reproduce when you carry a deleterious genetic condition or is it also recognizing and using the unique power of your own body? Butler appeared to suggest personal responsibility lies in both actions, through Lynn's commitment to care despite a deep desire not to, as she espouses to Alan.

> "You have a choice," I said. "I don't. If she's right...how could I not wind up running a retreat?"
>
> "Do you want to?"
>
> I swallowed. I hadn't really faced that question yet. Did I really want to spend my life in something that was basically a refined DGD ward? "No!"
>
> "But you will."
>
> "Yes". Butler 67

Critic and author Dorothy Allison previously critiqued Butler's depiction of women as self-sacrificing to a fault, deeply embedded in a notion of a patriarchal vision of motherhood. Typically, Allison's critique appears short-sighted in that Butler never envision care solely as the work of women, but the work of everyone. Her necessary commitment to representing the voices of Black women in her literature, when they previously have been excluded, intersects with her philosophy of care to create an illusion that care is only women's work. Where Allison's argument might have held the most merit, however, comes in the form of "Evening," a text unaddressed within her critique. In "Evening," Butler specifically constructed the pheromone as a biological trait passed down maternally and only truly accessible to women. Lynn's language underscores her immense aversion to such work as well as her feeling of helplessness. Butler's emphasis on biological places an immense onus onto Lynn's shoulders that disregards care's typically collective capacity, once practiced outside the womb.

In interviews, Butler warned audiences not to worry about biodeterminism but to "worry about what people make of it," suggesting that even in the face of biodeterminism, "what we have to do is learn to work with it and to work against people who see it as a good reason to let

poor people be poor " (Mehaffy and Keating 108). In Lynn's circumstance, the unique nature of her body justifies her restriction to a specific style of work. While not legally bound to provide such care, Beatrice constantly reinforces the "good," that Lynn is capable of doing, leaving her implicitly responsible for the "bad," if she chooses not to take up this specific labor. While Lynn's body might liberate others, providing a quality of care that reflects their value as citizens in the world, it might simultaneously prove a source of her own subjugation by chaining her to an obligation.

In driving away from Beatrice at the end of the text, having committed to one day open a facility just like her, Lynn is physically incapable of looking back because "For long, irrational minutes, [she] was convinced that somehow if [she] turned, [she] would see [herself] standing there, gray and old, growing small in the distance, vanishing" (Butler 68). Lynn's reading of her body onto Beatrice's speaks to the normative assumption women as caregivers (Graham 15), bound as obligatory mothers to the world, by virtue of an implicit, unbreakable umbilical cord. When wielded willingly, the power of care is revolutionary. While still powerful when assigned and obligated to a specific class, care's visible value becomes lost in the machinery of a likely oppression. Butler's only saving grace in regard to this sexed notion of care lies in the compensation afforded to caregivers in "Evening," as Beatrice promises Lynn she has a well-paying job waiting for her at a private facility (Butler 61), underscoring the societal investment into DGDs' potential.

Butler, of course, never claimed to create perfect or unproblematic worlds but instead to propose alternatives to the present system: "What I want to do is look at some of the solutions that human beings come up with when they're feeling uncertain and frightened, as they are right now. When people don't know what they're frightened of, they tend to find things" (Fry 132).

“Evening” allows the reader to recognize both the terror and the beauty of “the tiger [when] it’s got you by the arm,” and then learn to work alongside it. In understanding the possibility of disability in every bodily difference along with dynamism of the human form, immense value lies in the ability to reconcile the tiger or even the zombie into the prevailing world. Despite all the social constructions layered upon reality, “the body is all we really know that we have,” (Mehaffy and Keating 110) and it is up to humankind to rewrite the ‘world’ in order to protect it.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT WE NEED FROM EACH OTHER—

COMMUNITY, COLLABORATION AND CARE IN "SPEECH SOUNDS"

The Good Place, a popular American television show investigating human morality through a speculative imagining of the afterlife, recently drew new attention to a vision of morality as once proposed by philosopher T.L. Scanlon: "what we owe to each other," or the responsibilities one ought to have in regard to others, recognizing them as rational beings in addition to the self. Interestingly, Scanlon opted to frame his work in terms of what we owe to one another, creating a debt on the part of the individual, rather than what we need from one another. On one hand, Scanlon's rhetorical choice places the onus on the individual to act on behalf of others rather than justifying one who waits for others to serve them first before lifting a finger. On the other hand, his diction belies the reality that human beings do not simply morally 'owe,' one another but biologically *need* one another.

Within her short story "Speech Sounds," Octavia Butler explored this compulsion for community by imagining a world without it, incurred by a mysterious epidemic that devastated the human population and stole language from the survivors, "[cutting] even the living off from one another" (96). In the aftermath of the illness, society crumbled, leaving behind a world without "any large organization, governmental or private," (Butler 92) where "law and order were nothing—not even words" (Butler 94). Butler unveiled this new world through the eyes of protagonist Valerie Rye— a former professor, author, wife and mother, now stripped of these roles—on dangerous bus journey from Los Angeles to Pasadena as she seeks out surviving family members.

Living in isolation for three years before the narrative begins, Rye is a woman scarred just as much as by her solitude as she is by the specifics of her illness[6], having lost sight of her own humanity as well as the humanity of those around her. Her experience bears striking similarities to that of people held in solitary confinement within the penal system, or "the housing of an adult or juvenile with minimal to rare meaningful contact with other individuals" (National Commission on Correctional Health Care). In his survey of prison populations, psychiatrist Stuart Grassian recorded the emergence of several key symptoms in inmates held within solitary: "hyperresponsivity to external stimuli," "perceptual distortions, illusions, and hallucinations," "panic attacks," "difficulties with thinking, concentration, and memory," "intrusive obsessional thoughts," "overt paranoia," and "problems with impulse control," following their confinement (335-336). These symptoms characterize Special Housing Unit (Syndrome) and evidence a relationship between community and health. Building upon this research, political philosopher and critical prison theorist Lisa Guenther argued that

> The testimony of prisoners in solitary confinement suggests that we are much more deeply connected with and dependent upon other living beings than we tend to assume. We rely on a network of others, not just to survive or to keep ourselves entertained but also to support our capacity to make sense of the world, to distinguish between reality and illusion, to follow a train of thought or a causal sequence, and even to tell where our own bodily existence begins and ends. 146

[6] In addition to the aphasia, which manifests relatively rather than uniformly in its impact such that Rye loses literacy and maintains speech while Obsidian experiences the opposite, individuals may also suffer from cognitive impairment and paralysis.

Our meaningful contact with others allows us to understand both the world and ourselves, validating and verifying our perceptive instruments. Guenther offered the example of hearing a sound and then receiving confirmation that the sound occurred when other individuals look around to try to locate its source. In absence of that community, we lose our ability to anchor ourselves to the world, failing to reinforce our understanding of it as well as our relationship to it. In returning to Joan Tronto's understanding of care as upkeep of the social world, it is necessary to consider that such a definition extends beyond the artificial infrastructure established by human beings and extends to the material earth all around us. Furthermore, this denial of relationality extends to our understandings of one another, to the extent that we fail to recognize humanity as the emergence of "primitive aggressive fantasies of revenge, torture, and mutilation," and the occurrence of "self-mutilation" in around half of Grassian's surveyed populations revealed (335-336). As acts of violence transgress the boundaries of the body and carry the potential to destroy life, they demonstrate deep disrespect for human autonomy and imply that the victim of such violence is undeserving of such a privilege.

Butler explicitly afflicted Rye with several of SHU Syndrome's symptoms: perceptual distortions[7], difficulty with memory[8], intrusive thoughts[9], and issues with impulse control[10]. Guenther's reading helps to explain how these symptoms give way to a failure to recognize one's own humanity, to the extent that they override their biological imperative to survive and reproduce, as Rye's inclination towards suicide suggests. Her consideration of violence towards herself reveals the loss of her own recognizable humanity and operates in tandem with her

[7] "She had heard so little human speech for the past three years, she no longer was certain how well she recognized it, no longer certain of her own impairment" (Butler 94).
[8] "She had a memory that would not bring back to her much of what she had read before" (Butler 98).
[9] "She had never [before] experienced such a powerful urge to kill another person" (Butler 99).
[10] "She felt sick to her stomach with hatred, frustration, and jealousy. And only a few inches from her hand was a loaded gun. She held herself still, staring at him, almost seeing his blood" (Butler 98-99).

animalization of others. In a text devoid of metaphor, Rye characterizes her lecherous neighbor as “the animal across the street” (Butler 104) and children growing up in the apocalypse as “hairless chimps” (Butler 105). While normally, readers might understand these characterizations to infer shared similarities between a person and the animal referenced, Butler’s employment here, in the absence of other in-text analogies, suggests that Rye truly understands these people as non-human animals. Such an interpretation enables her to consider killing her neighbor and leaving toddlers to die. Rye, in turn, considers herself in the same manner: “every day had brought her closer to [...] putting her gun in her mouth and pulling the trigger" (Butler 101). She ceases to understand herself as human, allowing her to override an evolutionary imperative for survival and commit violence against herself, demonstrating an absolute disregard for her own life. Rye’s behavior, born out of isolation, exposes the utter necessity of community in constructing a sense of humanity, a sentiment needed, the text suggests, to sustain the species.

Rye only staves off her total dehumanization by striking out in search of her brother, the final remnant of her past life and community. However, the landscape of “Speech Sounds,” runs rampant with violence, revealing the universality of dehumanizing behavior within the surviving population. In the story’s single afternoon, the reader observes one threat of enslavement, one threat of rape, three fights and three homicides. Bystanders respond to these occurrences with ambivalence or at most, irritation at the inconvenience. There is no sense of responsibility or empathy across individuals, such that Rye expects no assistance from strangers. When threatened with a public gang rape, Rye weighs her options, emotionlessly noting that “People might very well stand by and watch if he tried to rape her. They would also stand and watch her shoot him” (Butler 95). The failure to recognize humanity between individuals prevents the establishment of empathy, leaving survivors unable to process that the same violence they implicitly condone

when committed against Rye could just as easily be committed against them. They simply enable, as Butler terms it, “the worst behavior” (Brown 185).

In constructing this new reality, however, Butler never explicated precisely how the loss of language decimated any sense of a unified society, a particularly curious turn of events given the survivors’ ability to communicate through body language. How could Rye develop symptoms similar to SHU Syndrome’s, a reader wonders, when living in such close proximity to her fellow human beings? The answer appears to lie in the inspiration for the text, Butler’s bitter and pessimistic wondering “whether the human species would ever grow up enough to learn to communicate without using fists of one kind or another,” (110) and her concerns about the interactions between adaptations hierarchical behavior and intelligence within the species. Within “Speech Sounds,” Butler specifically identified violence as emerging out of emotions of inferiority and jealousy. Rye, acting again as the audience’s entry point to the new world, notes the particular dangers afforded less-impaired individuals who demonstrate “an attitude of superiority,” with “Such ‘superiority’ […] frequently punished by beatings, even death (93). Butler went on to showcase the sentiments at play in such a moment, when Rye discovers Obsidian’s literacy: “He was literate and she was not. She never would be. She felt sick to her stomach with hatred, frustration, and jealousy. And only a few inches from her hand was a loaded gun” (98). Like her fellow survivors, Rye reads his ability as a direct offense and considers punishing him with death for daring to possess something that she can never borrow, barter, or steal.

In addition to exploring this issue of domination within her *Xenogenesis* series, Butler also explicated her perspective with in interviews, laying out her larger theory of human behavior as well as the assumptions that inform her construction of human characters. In

speaking with Larry McCaffery, Butler identified a specific fear about the self-destruction of the human species, incurred by the interaction of two evolved characteristics.

> Intelligence may indeed be a short-term adaptation, something that works well now but will eventually prove to be a kind of destructive overspecialization that destroys us [...] Hierarchical behavior is self-sustaining and more in charge of the intellect than it should be. Whenever we look at the degree to which our behavior is predetermined genetically--and this is where sociobiology comes into play--we get hung up on who's got the biggest or the best or the most, on who's inferior and who's superior. 19

Butler pointedly situated hierarchical behavior as a problem in terms of its intersection with intelligence in the human population, rather than pathologizing the instinct in every context. Intelligence enabled the advent of complex technologies, enabling humans to "look" at and consider the impact of one's genetic history on their behavior. A powerful ability, this consciousness serves as the key catalyst to "[getting] hung up on" concerns of superiority and inferiority in dangerous ways. These hang-ups cross spatial and temporal boundaries empowered by intellect and technology's ability to disseminate and maintain ideas across a social world. When interpretations of inferiority and superiority are based in bodily difference, the turn to Social Darwinism, the sociobiology Butler addressed, is quite easy. In viewing certain bodies as inherently lesser, it becomes easier to see these bodies as less human and justify violence against them, as Butler demonstrated in her novels *Kindred* and *Fledgling*, wherein characters use bodily difference to explain slavery and murder, respectively.

Phillip Goff significantly demonstrated the ways in which dehumanization justifies violence in his research on the historical associations between African Americans and apes. He found that individuals primed with images of an ape, as opposed to images of a large cat, prior to hearing a story about a police officer beating a black suspect were more inclined to support the beating. Ktiely, following up on Goff's research, found that study participants who openly expressed views of other groups as inferior demonstrated a higher likelihood of approving violent methodologies like torture (926). In both circumstances, dehumanization either served as a precursor or an association to a justification of violence towards fellow human beings. These issues of domination, dehumanization and violence inform the imaginary world of "Speech Sounds," but simultaneously occur in the real world without any degree of speculation needed.

Given Butler's intention to terrify or inspire the human race to change, one must imagine that she perceives the world of "Speech Sounds," as worse than the actual world at present. She appeared to create this worse world out of her belief "that the more hierarchical we become, the less likely we are to listen to our own intelligence or anyone else'" (Mehaffy 106), and subsequently presented cognitive impairment as an additional symptom to characterize the illness. In reducing the impact of intelligence, Butler cleverly laid out human behavior bare, as close readings of the opening scene of "Speech Sounds" and Butler's description of a similar event in her lifetime reveal. On board the Washington Boulevard bus, Rye observed that

> Two young men were involved in a disagreement of some kind, or, more likely, a misunderstanding. They stood in the aisle, grunting, and gesturing at each other [...] Their gestures stopped just short of contact—mock punches, hand games of intimidation to replace lost

> curses. [...]She watched the two carefully, knowing the fight would begin when someone's nerve broke or someone's hand slipped or someone came to the end of his limited ability to communicate. Butler 89-90

As the opening scene of the narrative, Butler quickly established the status quo for the new world in this passage, transforming the urban environment of the bus into an arena of primal aggression. Removing the capacity for verbal language, Butler blurred the lines between homo sapiens and other hominids as she evoked images of male apes aggressively posturing at one another within the bodies of her human combatants. On a surface level, this dichotomy between the visual and the verbal appears to suggest a divide between a primal animal instinct and a specifically human level of intelligence. But Butler's rendering of her lived experience on board the Washington Boulevard bus suggests a more nuanced interpretation of these two modes of communication. In the afterword to the text, Butler revealed her inspiration for the opening scene of "Speech Sounds," a fight between two men observed during her own bus-ride.

> One man had decided he didn't like the way the other man was looking at him. Didn't like it at all! [...] The [second] man argued that he hadn't done anything wrong—which he hadn't. He inched toward the exit as though he meant to get himself out of a potentially bad situation. Then he turned away and edged back into the argument. Maybe his own pride was involved. Why the hell should he be the one to run away? Then the other guy decided that it was girlfriend—sitting next to him—who was being looked at inappropriately. He attacked. Butler 110

Within this passage, Butler structured two dialogues, operating on different planes—one verbal, and the other visual—but each critical in the development of the fight. Butler's omission of quotation marks, which would quite clearly signal spoken language, equalize the value of both modes of communication within this context. The physical conversation is largely one-sided, relaying only the behavior of the "looking" man until the offended man, the aggressor, turned to violence. The "looking" man's verbal language revealed his aversion to violence as he strived to diffuse the situatation by denying any attempt to dominate on his part. But while Butler read the same anxiety in both his verbal language and his body language, the second man offered a different interpretation, understanding the simple act of a look as malevolent.

The multitude of interpretations raise a key question left in the wake of "Speech Sounds": in a culture dependent on body language, is it possible to be silent? Unlike reading or writing, which a speaker can stop and start, the body is always persistently present and speaking volumes, even in its stagnant state. Such a circumstance enables a simple glance to be read as a desire to dominate or as an "attitude of superiority." While the advent of verbal language typically signals intelligence and consciousness, Butler rendered the aggressor almost entirely through verbal communication, with his allegation of a look that he "didn't like […] at all" initiating the conflict. While the accused man attempts to diffuse the situation by his verbal defense as well as his visual defense, as he briefly removes his body from the equation, the aggressor refused to take up the opportunity for resolution.

Despite the variations in language capacity between the individuals in the fictional fight and the real fight, violence erupted in the same slow process in both scenes, driven by the same issues of miscommunication and ego. Both fights began as simple arguments, rather than outright violence, as the men participate in a "[boasting] and [blustering]" a social ritual

identified by sociologist Randall Collins wherein individuals imply violence rather than acting upon it (339). Because physical conflict risks the bodily security of all involved parties, the "mock punches," "hand games of intimidation," and verbal arguments enable "many would-be fights [to] peter out because an equilibrium is established in the ritual" (Collins 339). The fictional fighters and the real fighters both have the opportunity to resolve the conflict without a turn to violence but fail to do so.

Rye's fighters never have the chance to try for resolution, as while still in throws of their pantomimed social ritual, the bus hits a bump in the road, which throws the quarreling men into one another. Despite the accidental nature of the collision, they understand the contact as a purposeful violence and begin to fight physically, their movements jostling others, sparking more miscommunications, and more violence throughout a now chaotic bus. In both circumstances, fights ended due to the threat of violence of a third, more powerful party. In Butler's afterword, the recalled fight concluded because of the aggressor's fear of police intervention whereas the fictionalized fight necessitates the intervention of Obsidian, a former officer of the defunct Los Angeles Police Department, who uses a gas bomb to forcibly diffuse the situation. The only solution to violence is more violence, a realization that validates Butler's fears of self-destruction in both this imagining and actuality.

None of the violence in "Speech Sounds" is anything new, ultimately. The violence of the bus emerges from Butler's own biographic experience and Rye compares the femicide that Obsidian dies trying to prevent, the only fatalities witnessed in "Speech Sounds," to the danger of "domestic disturbance calls" answered by police officers (Butler 106). Butler's fiction magnifies the realities about human beings, showcasing the violence of the species with all the infrastructure stripped away so that it cannot be obscured or denied. The only thing lost by

Butler's bare bones approach to human behavior is the slow but expansive violence enacted by virtue of community and connectivity. James Tyner, political and population geographer, laid out the practice in his distinction between direct violence and structural violence.

> Intentionality is the fetishized pivot upon which direct violence diverges from structural violence, with the former referring to concrete acts committed by and on particular people and the latter occurring when apparently unintentional inequalities are structured into society. Examples of the latter include differences in access to gainful employment or adequate medical care. The act of letting die is not always reducible to not doing something to prevent death. Rather, to let die may be understood as a failure to act— it is intentional; it is to refrain from acting otherwise. To let die is an active inaction. 206

While commenting specifically upon direct violence within "Speech Sounds," Butler's comments in interviews establish her similar disdain for the American adoption of fiscal and political policies that directly harm their citizens. In speaking with Jerome H. Jackson, she strongly critiqued harsh labor practices enabled under capitalism, particularly in regard to the threats made by American companies to move to Mexico so that they could solicit cheaper labor, enabling corporations to "lower wages" and "spew filth into the rivers," operating under a Reagan-era attitude "that it was OK to kill people as long as you didn't kill too many and you made a profit at it" (Jackson 47). In "Speech Sounds," characters can only impact one another so far as they can reach. Some have weapons—knives, gas bombs, guns—and some weaponize unconventional objects—shards of glass and cars—but somehow the personal contact of their

violence appears so much more striking than the slow, government-sponsored deaths by attrition. Somehow the fact that "country prisons and nuclear and toxic waste dumps are the coming thing" (Cobb 60) fail to warrant the same emotional reaction as Obsidian and Rye's communication about her deceased children: "He took her hand and drew a cross in it with his index finger, then made his baby-rocking gesture again. She nodded, held up three fingers, then turned away" (Butler 101).

Rachel Maddow addresses this phenomenon when critiquing, in a vein Butler might have appreciated, President Ronald Reagan's failure to address the AIDs crisis until six years after the epidemic had begun, in which time 25,000 people died. Structural violence occurs when individuals cease to be "identified" to decision-makers, to have their "suffering or flourishing" recognizable, and to be a "specific person in need" (Maddow 278). They are instead reduced to a "statistical" life, unspecified and unknowable, and subsequently, far less emotionally significant in the eyes of the decision-maker. Maddow suggested that Reagan's ambivalence to AIDs stemmed from the illness's interpretation as a disease specific to gay men, whose marginalization deprived them of "*identifiable* lives" (281). In other words, the failure to recognize their humanity enabled their neglect to the point of death.

"Speech Sounds," devoid of structures that could enable such widespread stigmatization and discrimination, with individuals attempting to dominate every other being rather than a specific group, reminds readers of the potential identified life embodied in every single statistic. Given Butler's characterization of her work as a "cautionary tale"—a "Look what we're coming to if we're not careful," (Cobb 60) then this text offers readers a chance to adopt this perspective, an opportunity embodied in Rye's decision to seek community and create identified lives with Obsidian, and with the children she adopts at the end of the narrative.

Rye's journey begins when she can no longer find an identified life in herself or those around her and so she seeks out her brother, her final familiar face in this devastated social world. Obsidian interrupts this journey, just like he interrupts the fight on the bus, offering her human contact far closer to home. Prior to meeting him, "No one had touched her for three years" (Butler 100). They are vulnerable to one another, dangerously revealing Rye's capacity for speech and Obsidian's literacy, discoveries that inspire brief hatreds towards one another. However, they recover from their brief bloodlust and trust in one another's impairments and abilities, as they travel to Pasadena. Upon their arrival, rather than seeking out Rye's brother, they have sex. Out of exuberance at his closeness and the potential of pleasure, Rye "giggled," and then "laughed aloud," as they behave like rebellious teenagers jumping into the backseat of the car (100). Emerging out of her earlier jealousy and anger, Rye finds a joy in her human connection and its reminders of who she used to be and still can be.

Rather than seek out her brother, Rye decides to return home to Los Angeles with Obsidian, a choice that allowed her to "go on having a brother and two nephews" (Butler 103). Now that she has Obsidian, "she did not have to find out for certain whether she was alone as she feared," a discovery that likely would have led her to complete suicide. "Now she was not alone," and for the first time in three years, Rye found community (103). They may not be able to speak to one another, but they can understand one another, and in turn, themselves. Of course, this resolution proves far too easy for Octavia Butler. It is merely a happy ending for the moment in a still condemned apocalypse and so Obsidian, the protector, offers his death in service of human life, "[snatching Rye] from comfort and security and [giving her] a sudden, explicable beating" (Butler 105).

While driving back to Los Angeles, Obsidian and Rye witness a running woman, pursued by a "man who followed her a moment later, [shouting] what sounded like garbled words as he ran" (Butler 103). He wields a knife, while she tries to defend herself with a shard of glass, and when Obsidian intervenes, the man lunges at the woman, stabbing her twice before Obsidian shoots him. Although the man appears dead, Obsidian attempts to check his status but is distracted when Rye taps on his shoulder. Then "the man opened his eyes. Face contorted, he seized Obsidian's just-holstered revolver and fired" (Butler 104). He dies immediately, and out of instinct, necessity and anger, Rye immediately shoots the man, turning to violence when she resisted that outcome for so long. All seemed hopeless in this moment, where attempts to care gave way to a chain of violence that left three corpses at Rye's feet. Rye was alone again. Here, Butler's true hope reveals itself in the form of two children, "a boy and a girl perhaps three years old," "holding hands," as "they crossed the street toward Rye" (105). They go to the woman, trying to shake her awake and Rye realizes she is likely their mother, a thought that disturbs her to the point she fears she will vomit (Butler 105). Previously, Rye understood children in the apocalypse to be

> pitied. They would run through the downtown canyons with no real memory of what the buildings had been or even how they had come to be. Today's children gathered books as well as wood to be burned as fuel. They ran through the streets chasing one another and hooting like chimpanzees. They had no future. They were now all they would ever be. Butler 101

Perhaps imagining children in these ways made it easier to deal with the loss of her own, marked in her backyard by three tiny tombstones. They would have suffered, she could tell

herself, there would have been no point in their survival. But the two children in front of her somehow survived the domination destroying the rest of the world. Someone fed them through infancy, taught them to walk, made sure they knew it was safer to hold hands in crossing the street rather than going alone. Someone loved them and cared for them, but that someone now lies dead on the ground, and her children, like Rye, are alone. She initially tries to pass them off, refusing to take them on as her charge: "They were on their own, those two kids. They were old enough to scavenge. She did not need any more grief. She did not need a stranger's children who would grow up to be hairless chimps" (Butler 105). True, Rye did not need "hairless chimps," she needed human beings. But Butler interrupts the rhetorical repetition of "need," with another verb: "grow." They are not yet hairless chimps, they are fragile and malleable beings, in need of care beyond the womb from individuals other than their mother in order to retain the little humanity they have.

Rye realizes, "there had been enough dying" and that "she would have to take the children home with her [for] she would not have been able to live with any other decision" (Butler 106). Taking up another, rather human trait, Rye insists upon trying to bury the bodies of Obsidian and the children's mother. After loading Obsidian into the back of her car, she attempts to pick up the woman and her daughter, "thin, dirty, solemn, stood up and unknowingly gave Rye a gift" (Butler 106). "'No!'" the little girl screams, startling Rye, "'No!'" The boy attempts to calm his sister, telling her "'don't talk'" and to "be quiet'" (106). Just as someone taught these children to walk and cross the street safely, someone also taught them how to speak and how to protect that secret from a jealous, violent world.

The little girl offers Rye the gift of the future as she struggles to make sense of what she has just learned, theorizing an end to the anonymous illness or an immunity for children born

after it set in. “What if all they needed were teachers? Teachers and protectors” (Butler 107). She thinks of Obsidian, who avoided losing his sense of self by holding to his identity as an officer, believing himself to be protecting a public good when the world seemed nothing but bad. He stayed alive this way, far happier than Rye. She could take up his badge in the privacy of her home and protect these children from harm. “If this illness let these children alone, she could keep them alive,” she reckons and takes up the charge to care for these children who in turn will care for her. She needs them, just as much as they need her.

This turn to community and to the collective is nothing new for Butler. She often engaged collaboration across species through the phenomenon of “mutualistic symbiosis,” whereby the interaction of two species increased the reproductive fitness of both species. While present in nature, Butler complicated the practice, often imagined between non-intelligent organisms like the clownfish and the anemone, by bringing sentience into the equation. The consciousness of the involved parties tends to invite comparisons to slavery or other oppressive practices, as in the case of the relationship between the Oankali and the humans in the *Xenogenesis* series, the Tlic and the Terrans in “Bloodchild,” and the vampiric Ina and the humans in *Fledgling*. Yet in the first two instances, all involved species came together on the brink of extinction, *needing* to re-situate themselves within their hierarchical imaginings in order to survive. The situations are rich with complexity and ripe for corruption, but in *Xenogenesis* and “Bloodchild,” the human species brought their own suffering onto themselves out of a refusal to be more vulnerable. Domination failed them so they must be willing to try something new. Only in the absolute worst of circumstances do human beings find the potential for change, an occurrence Butler finds so necessary that she shaped the religion of Earthseed, from her *Parables* series, around it.

The intraspecies parallel to mutualistic symbiosis, equally as common in Butler's work although never referred to by its scientific name, is cooperation, individuals working within the same species to increase their reproductive fitness as a group. Easily identified in goals that benefit the survival of all, like a group of lions defending their hunting ground from an invading pride, cooperation also appears in less obvious socially constructed, rather than biologically-based, communities of care. In caring for a biological child, an affiliated relative helps their genes to propagate to the next generation, fulfilling the reproductive imperative of evolution. But Rye's care for children she bears no biological relation to, at least on a surface level, appears unnecessary and without benefit to her.

As philosopher Eva Feder Kittay revealed, however, care is always a project beneficial to all our participants. "Dependency," she wrote, "is also the site of our most meaningful relationships" and "it is one of the most important ethical projects we undertake" (Kittay 82-83). From our earliest fetal moments in the womb, we are immensely dependent creatures even when we would rather not admit it. It is necessary for our physical survival in our earliest and our latest years, and it is necessary for our sanity at every point in between. Kittay laid out an obligation: "Each of us who survived to adulthood has been a beneficiary of this care. We owe a debt that is paid back, but it is paid to subsequent generations" (79).

This responsibility comes to fruition throughout Butler's work through her persistent emphasis on community. She openly relayed her belief that "human being needs to live that way [in a community] and we too often don't" (Mehaffy and Keating 112). Subsequently, "[she] always automatically [creates] community" (Mehaffy and Keating 111) within her work as her characters resist the urge to "go ape or become members of gangs and go around killing people," instead "[trying] to put together a decent life, whatever their problems were" (Kenan 35-6).

Across her work, this claim holds true. No matter the extraterrestrial or apocalyptic circumstance, Butler's people are never truly alone, or never stay alone, finding community, or as Butler also deems it, "culture," tasked with "looking after its members in one way or another" (Burton-Rose 203). Her characters keep their humanity and imagine worlds that all can be a part of. They pay back their debts, slowly but surely.

Despite all her attempts to give into dehumanization throughout the text, Rye resists and holds out hope for all of humanity. It is this hope that drives her from her home to stave off suicide, that enables her to "[catch] an old woman who would have fallen" and "lifted two little children down when they were in danger of being knocked down and trampled" as they evacuate the gas-filled bus (Butler 92), and that pushes her to help the stabbed woman even in the face of danger (Butler 104). Her hope stopped her from burning her books, always believing there might be a chance to begin again, to be human once more and perhaps to be better than before. Her hope brought Butler, who began the story "feeling little hope or liking for the human species" back to humanity again (109). The change these moments of hope might inspire will be far from perfect, with no guarantee of even the slightest success. As Sarah Outterson noted, the process of change will be one of violence, a phenomenon she understood as metaphorically linked to "the idea of the violation of boundaries, transgression of the lines defining personal identity and integrity" (2). But we must embrace this violence, as Butler termed it, to "make humanity more survivable," (Balagun 227) as we try our best to render a physical and social world that we can all be a part of because that is both what we owe to each other and what we need from each other.

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