

HIERARCHY OF HUMANS AND SYMBIOSIS OF THE 'OTHER' IN OCTAVIA E. BUTLER'S TRILOGY *LILITH'S BROOD*

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between humans and the 'Other' in Octavia Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood*. Humans consider aliens and hybrids as 'Other' in the trilogy. Human beings are hierarchical in nature and they categorize life forms on the basis of appearance and moral values. This paper argues that Octavia Butler has introduced hybrid characters to minimize human non-human differences. Humans feel doubtful to accept the 'Other' as a partner because of different appearances. I use posthumanism as a critical theory to show that how human beings have excluded different life forms on the basis of categorization, whereas different life forms exist due to a symbiotic relationship. The first part of the paper discusses importance of 'body' and the second part analyses the relationship between humans and non-humans in *Lilith's Brood*. The conclusion part supports the idea that life develops in symbiosis not in isolation.

Keywords: Octavia Butler, Posthumanism, Hybrid, Symbiosis, 'Other', Enhancement

Introduction

Existence of binary system, classification of life forms on the basis of appearance, and drawing boundaries between humans and non human livings has drawn attention of posthumanists. Posthumanism questions the superior status of humans in an interconnected world. Anything that does not fulfill the criteria of being human is considered as 'Other'. As humans we believe in hierarchy system and species superiority. A posthuman world advocates kinship and interdependence among different life forms. Octavia E. Butler analyses in her trilogy *Lilith's Brood* about different types of life forms and their interconnectedness. This discussion allows a posthumanist reading of Butler. *Lilith's Brood* consists of three novels: *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rights* and *Imago*. *Dawn* opens with a dystopian note that in future our mother earth is destroyed due to nuclear war and invaded by aliens named Oankali who are trying to restore humans as well as

the earth. Humanity has destroyed earth and made it unlivable. Lilith Iyapo the central woman character of the trilogy finds herself entangled with the aliens in a spaceship. She meets the first alien named Kaalteeiinjdahya lel Kahguyaht aj Dinso and asks for the price humanity has to pay for the help from aliens. Oankali, and Ooloi are known as the trader and the healer. For them human beings carry a great potential but incapable of using their potentiality. Lilith got physical enhancement due to genetic modification. Lilith realizes that now human beings are an endangered species and they need protection. We fear to lose our own species identity. Lilith awakes her fellow humans from *suspend animation* but she finds that most of them turned against her. They curse her and call her a traitor who betrayed her own kind.

Fear for unknown

Humans fear to see unnatural changes in their physical form because these changes can lead them to dehumanization. At the beginning of the novel *Dawn* a little boy named Sharad is introduced to Lilith and she finds it difficult to convince him that she is not dangerous to him. This shows that human beings fear unknown humans and it takes time to overcome the fear. Lilith also fears the Oankali Kahguyaht. She fears the unknown, difference, and unearthliness of the Oankali. Throughout the trilogy *Lilith's Brood* most of the humans ask the question, "Can you sting with your tentacles?" to the Oankali. This shows the xenophobia of humans and it comes to us when we feel vulnerable in front of others. Humans fear Oankali because they find themselves vulnerable and powerless in the hands of Oankali. Human beings see Oankali and the humans who join them as a threat to humanity. Register humans treat Lilith as a symbol of deceive and Satan. Lilith doubts her own actions, whether she has done morally right or wrong. Tino initially a register who joins Oankali for children doubts the concept of trade of Oankali, because humans see subjugation in joining the Oankali. This shows humans demand autonomy and power to exercise upon.

Jurgen Habermas in his essay entitled "Future of Human Nature" (2001) acknowledges the prevention of genetic engineering to maintain species autonomy. In Octavia Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood* registers believe in species autonomy, thus fears the genetic engineering of Oankali. Habermas believes that genetic engineering will never produce a real human rather it will produce a new species (may be posthumans/superhumans). Registers want to restrict inclusion of different life forms to maintain species superiority. Nayar says about genetic engineering that a posthuman biology prepares "different species-vampire, animal, human, Oankali-for a new way of life itself" (127). Octavia Butler proposes human-Oankali hybrid subjects capable of unique qualities and better judgment than humans in *Lilith's Brood*. Braidotti says a posthuman subjectivity is "multidirectional and cross species relationally" (136). Hybrids proposed Butlers are results of crossing species boundaries and they also acquire the quality to remain in a process of becoming.

Humans fear to lose their form and becoming 'Other'. In order to minimize the fear of humans Oankali make constructs more human like. Humans fear difference but their existence is impossible without symbiotic relationship with other life forms. Humans consider Oankali as predator but not symbionts. Humans can't see humanity changing and growing into a different form. Lilith herself trembles with fear when finds that she is going to give birth to a child that is not human. Nikanj knows the fear of humans so he creates Akin the construct born out of Oankali-human combination. Nikanj makes him more human to think about humans. Braidotti

believes that, “humanities will survive and prosper and will show willingness to transform to move towards posthuman identity” (184). A posthuman world welcomes all life forms by eliminating xenophobia.

Hierarchy system of humans and symbiosis of the ‘Other’

Butler believes that human beings are intelligent and hierarchical in nature whereas, the other species acquire a symbiotic attitude towards origin and life. Jdahya tells to Lilith about the trade, “Your people will change. Your young will be more like us and ours more like you. Your hierarchical tendencies will be modified... This is part of the trade” (42). Change is inevitable in this world. In Butler’s literary world each of the characters either human or alien changes/modifies the other and also gets changed/modified by the other. Butler visualizes a world free of racial and gender discrimination by merging ‘Other’ and humans into an entity. Oankalis stand for eliminating boundaries between human and animals. Snake like tentacle and elephant trunk like hands of Oankali resemblance them with animals. We fear Oankali but they hold the key to change and eliminate our hierarchal tendency. Braidotti says, “The vitality of human-nonhuman bond is based on sharing this earth not to create hierarchy” (71). A hope is bloomed for both species by destabilizing the hierarchal tendencies of humans.

Posthumanism as a discourse systematically investigates and unfolds the factors responsible for human dominance over other life forms. Humanity has marginalized animals, other life forms and deformed human bodies by putting humans in a unique position. Nayar’s posthuman understanding states that human beings are symbiotically connected with other life forms and technology for eternity. Life forms never remain fixed they live in plurality. Octavia Butler’s trilogy *Lilith’s Brood* offers a world crowded with multi species life forms to investigate their relationship and attitude towards each other. Human males generally believe in hierarchy system. Humans as a species has evolved socially i.e. in relation to the environment. Humans maintain their species uniqueness by binding them in a fixed category and keeping animals, machines, and aliens at a safe distance to identify them easily. We love our autonomy and deny accepting change which carries the seeds of posthuman identity. N. Katherine. Hayles states that posthumans are preferred to humans as posthumans represent an improbably idealized combination of identity. Hayles also states, “One way to think about the transformation of the human into the posthuman then is as a series of exchange between evolving/devolving inscriptions and incorporations” (280). Hierarchy system of humans is also rooted in morality. Humans believe that they possess higher level of morality in comparison to others and this higher morality cannot be achieved by non-humans.

To become a human means to own ‘self’ and have free will to do anything. Humans desire to get autonomy and Oankalis attempt to reject the same, develops the conflict in the trilogy. Genetically tampered by Oankali make humans realize that they no longer hold the ownership of their body. Tino the resister from Phoenix opposed the trade of Oankalis and said, “Trade is when two people agree to an exchange” (289). But Nikanj replied that no one has forced for the trade, we need something what you got and we grant you what you desired for. Humans have been longed for a long healthy life and Oankali granted them it at the cost of merging with humans genetically. We want everything offered by the Oankali including pleasure, healing and long healthy life but we fear to fulfill their demands. We doubt that

gradually we will lose the humanity within us and we will become something unknown. John Harris believes that enhancement of humans is good if we don't harm other life forms.

Hierarchy system of humans is responsible for mass killings of humans, animals and plant life. In Butler's trilogy we see that humanity has destroyed mother earth due to their hierarchical nature. Hierarchy stands in opposition to posthumanism by excluding other life forms. Posthumanism extends sympathy and acknowledges responsibility towards all life forms. Lilith tells Tino that Oankali and Ooloi hate pain as humans do. They find pleasure in healing humans and the most amazing fact is that they know what we are capable of and they learn from us how to grow limbs and regenerate tissues. As humans we know a lot of things but we use less of our brain. Oankali know how to use human's brain to a maximum extent. In the Hollywood film *Lucy* (2014) we find the character using her brain up to 100 percent by accidentally taking a specific kind of drug. As humans we want to use our brain to a great extent and Oankali did it with the help from us. As human beings we show our empathy towards others. Posthumanism states that human being is a result of co-evolution where many merged into one. The relationship between our environment, machines and humanity is not hierarchical but interdependent or symbiotic. Posthumanism rejects "absolute separations or divisions between any things" (Pepperell, 48). Life forms exist on earth in interdependence but not in isolation.

Nayar agrees with biologist Margulis and states that it is symbiosis that has produced higher forms of life, including the humans. Hierarchy system of humans stands as a barrier to accept and include every species in an organic bond. Butler's hybrids/constructs deny subjugation by others and they never dominate other life forms. This new subjectivity of the hybrid is capable of empathy and eliminating the hierarchy system. Butler denies the humans to trace back their origins as it will encourage hierarchical behavior. The hybrid doesn't want to trace the origin. History, religion, unique culture, myth all are denied to humans in a posthuman world as all these elements foster hierarchy system. We discriminate on the basis of race, caste, cultural background and social status. We fear to grant intelligence to people from lower category or human qualities to animals. Nayar said we love animals as long as they don't invade our authority once they do; we hate them or curse them as evil or inhuman. Any changes in a human's body make it difficult for the other humans to recognize the body as human. Lilith advises Akin to embrace the Oankali way, embrace difference. Pepperell suggests the end of a man centered world but not humans.

Akin wants to offer Mars to humans because it would be a difficult world that would require collaboration and intelligence. Without collaborations and intelligence life will be impossible on Mars. Octavia Butler believes that with a long term positive purpose humans can work together to achieve the impossible. Oankali know that humans are both hierarchical and intelligence and these two qualities are responsible for the destruction of earth. Humans are intelligent species on earth in comparison to others but they use their intelligence only to satisfy their hierarchical demands. If human beings are not capable of working together then they will extinct very soon. Oankali reject to offer humans a chance to lead their life as human species but Akin offered them a chance to stay human. Akin did this only because his part human made him to think about humans. Butler said that human beings as a species believe in killing and controlling other life forms whereas, Oankali as a species evolve from symbiotic and acquisitive life by combining with other life forms. As a human-Oankali combination Akin is born out of killing and saving, fearing and accepting. The hierarchy system will never allow humans to go

for a harmony with all life forms on earth. Life is a process of becoming so in a posthuman world it is unnecessary to distinguish between humans and nonhumans.

Importance of 'body' in a posthuman world

P.K. Nayar in his book *Posthumanism* acknowledges that discrimination and boundary marking happens on the basis of two things i.e. appearance and character. Butler presents hybrid bodies with human morals in her novels. Humans consider hybrids as impure and incomplete. *Lilith's Brood* offers a human-Oankali hybrid body that demands or persuades humans to join it and accept it as a respected life form. In Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* the science fiction monster/hybrid wants human consideration. Human beings fear to embrace difference. We fear the inhuman appearance of the aliens. Otherness is culturally constructed. We treat different racial background people as 'Other'. In the trilogy xenophobia of humans allow them to identify Oankali as worms, devil and 'other'. The group of peoples who reject the companionship of Oankali has turned into Resisters. This group of people resists association with Oankali and led a diseased life.

In the novel *Dawn* Jdahya said to Lilith about the changed earth that humans are going to cope with, "Your Earth is still your Earth, but between the efforts of your people to destroy it and ours to restore it, it has changed" (34). A changed environment demands changed bodies and also a fresh outlook to cope with the new world. Akin the first interspecies human alien hybrid creates conflict for the humans to accept it. This conflict arouses due to Akin's appearance and character. His appearance makes humans fear and his character makes humans go closer to him. Human beings fear Akin because Akin is not born the way humans should reproduce. As Nayar puts it, "Unnatural births' signify the monstrous, and creatures such as Victor Frankenstein's invention, born inside a laboratory, would readily classify as monstrous due to the process of his birth" (86). Akin is the child of Lilith and dead Joseph accompanied by Nikanj who born out of an alien reproduction system. Butler wants her characters to lose species specificity for this reason she allowed more than two life forms to produce a new life. To accept Change is essential in a posthuman world.

We feel perfect for our human body and for this reason we subvert animals and humans with deformity as inferior and 'Other'. Rosi Braidottie says, "Advanced technologies make us superior and we forget tolerance and peaceful co-existence with different life forms" (40). Humanity has used hierarchy as a discourse to retain its dominance over other life forms. Nayar has rightly observes this attitude of human's and says, "Humanity survives by constructing modes of exclusion, and the monster's ontological liminality enables domination, persecution, incarceration/containment, exhibition/display, genocide, displacement and elimination of certain forms of life" (84). Humanity is considered as structured and hybrids as unstructured. Thus a hybrid is impure and grotesque that stands out of the structure of humanity. In science fiction and movies hybrid characters show morals values by saving humans life or by standing for justice. Nayar suggests that monsters can be humanized. Humans turn into monsters when they forget morality and behave like animals. This shows humans can become monsters or 'Other' by choice or circumstances. In this context it would be wrong to deny animals/Others/hybrids a chance to become morally upgraded. Akin possesses characteristics of humans as well as higher moral values. A changed world also demands changed life forms. Akin is the beginning life form of a changed world and humans need to accept it. Butler visualizes a posthuman world with

interspecies, hybrid and flexible subjectivity. Haraway promotes hybrids to rethink human-animal interaction. We can't ignore body as it indicates the existence of life forms. But body is not fixed and autonomous. We need to see a body as acquiring all human, nonhuman and the earth.

Conclusion

At present it is necessary for us to rethink human non-human relation as humans, machines and non-humans resemble each other in a posthuman world. We need to understand that human body is a result of continuous interaction with other life forms and the environment. Haraway believes that a life form has multiple origins so it is unethical to categorize. The fear of humans for Oankali or the 'Other' is not viable as they are only different in terms of form. Comparison makes us feel suspicious and fear for the other. Butler tries to strip humans from every thing that make them feel superior from others. Lilith realizes that by rejecting a symbiotic relationship with Oankali humanity will lose its existence.

As humans we adore others if they possess moral values. Nayar states in his essay "Trust a few Fear the rest-Anxiety and fantasy in human revolution" those superheroes are accepted by humans only because of their moral values that we identify as human. In comparison to other characters Akin acquires a higher moral value that cares for all living and nonliving things. During his captivity the registers treat him without sympathy but he wished to help them. Akin possesses a posthuman bio value that allows him to include everything in an environment. Only with highest form of moral value we can think to help our enemies. In a society, integration of every life form is needed. Science fiction and movies are working together to grant the 'Other' human consideration. As humans, most of us show patience, tolerance and sympathy towards others and this enhancement of our moral values marks the beginning to become posthumans. In the trilogy Oankali/Oloi work as genetic engineers to eliminate hierarchical system of humans by giving them symbiotic features. A posthumanist vision is highly ethical that can eliminate the human-animal boundaries by offering agency to every life form. Change is inevitable and in a posthuman world we need to accept it.

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