From Superhuman to Posthuman: The Gothic Technological Imaginary in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis

Theodora Goss, John Paul Riquelme

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 53, Number 3, Fall 2007, pp. 434-459 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2007.0068

FROM SUPERHUMAN TO POSTHUMAN: THE GOTHIC TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGINARY IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AND OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *XENOGENESIS*

Theodora Goss and John Paul Riquelme

Dystopian or Utopian? Superhuman or Posthuman?

Although no two works can exhibit definitively the diverse character and directions of science fiction during the past 190 years, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* (comprised of *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rights*, and *Imago*)[1] provide revealing related moments at the genre's origin and at a recent stage of its development.[2] In both its early and late manifestations and throughout its history, science fiction emerges from the overlapping perspectives of a Gothic imaginary and a technological imaginary.[3] Mary Shelley modifies and redirects the conventions of eighteenth-century Gothic narratives in English by making her protagonist a scientist whose wrongheaded ambition is to create life and, in so doing, to become

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 52 number 3, Fall 2007.

godlike. Early in his narration Victor Frankenstein states clearly his desire to stand at the top of a pyramid of power and value: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (Shelley 1818, 36). Writing in the wake of the French Revolution, Shelley combines in *Frankenstein* elements of eighteenth-century Gothic with the technological ambition to dominate and manipulate nature. The science that Frankenstein practices is a dark, Gothic science, motivated by the technological imaginary's imperative to overcome death, to "renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (36). Rather than serving humanity, the denial of death contributes to the scientist's effort to control life and death. Frankenstein attempts to metamorphose from a human into a superhuman by creating a superhuman being who worships him. In its hierarchical tendencies, the technological ambition central to *Frankenstein* is related to the social hierarchies that characterize earlier Gothic writing. Like the Montonis and other aristocratic villains from eighteenth-century narratives who dominate and exploit the people around them, Frankenstein, an intellectual aristocrat, expects to exercise power over his creation and over other people, as would a ruthless monarch. Not just another kind of hierarchical thinking, the technological imaginary's imperative, imperial aspect can stand for hierarchical thinking per se as both its cause and its purest form, its imago. Gothic reaches an important moment of cultural realization in its offspring, science fiction, when the scientist replaces the ruler and the priest as wielder of power and source of wrongdoing.[4]

In her trilogy, Butler combines Gothic elements and technological ambitions differently from *Frankenstein* in a narrative that emphasizes a process of emergence as a potential antidote to destructive hierarchical attitudes and behavior.[5] Butler's combination arises from and responds to a changed literary and historical situation. She writes not only in the wake of an eighteenth-century Gothic tradition but also after science fiction narratives influenced by *Frankenstein*; she writes not in an era concerned with the spread of revolution but in an era of postcolonial nation building and the threat of nuclear holocaust. Like Shelley, Butler responds to hierarchical cultural tendencies of the kind regularly evoked in the classic Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. She does so specifically by presenting an incarcerated heroine threatened by a powerful, manipulative figure, not a monster in human form as in the case of Radcliffe's Montoni, but an alien. At the same time as Butler recasts the gender hierarchies of many Gothic narratives, she translates and transforms the prejudicial nationalistic hierarchical thinking evident in classic Gothic writing. The

differences between Protestant and English, on the one hand, and Catholic and foreign, on the other, are replaced by contrasts between species, understood as races, and with differences that contribute to the emergence of new kinds of communities, rather than ones that express the dominance of an existing community over another. Even though the technological threat to human survival in *Xenogenesis* is far greater than the threat in *Frankenstein*, Butler's narrative affirms the possibility of a qualified or "critical Utopia" (Moylan 44).[6] This is the case in part because in *Xenogenesis* the aliens' scientific, technological response to death holds out the promise of species transformation and survival through merging rather than merely hierarchical control, individual survival, and the animation of dead matter. *Xenogenesis* also proceeds against and beyond the background of a dystopic past, in which the technological imperative has revealed its delusory character by an act of mass destruction, in effect the attempted suicide of the human species. As with Frankenstein's success, the threat of destruction, as well as actual destruction, results unexpectedly from technological achievements.

The resemblance and the difference between the two narratives are evident in the effects produced by Frankenstein as scientist and by the aliens in *Xenogenesis*, who practice genetic engineering. The opening words of *Xenogenesis* announce an act of joint "reanimation":

> Alive!
> Still alive.
> Alive . . . again. (*Dawn* 3)

While the words express surprise, their implication differs from Frankenstein's feeling when he generates life in his creature. In James Whale's 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*, the scientist triumphantly and repeatedly exclaims "It's alive!" In Shelley's original, however, he feels the opposite of triumph, calling the event a "catastrophe" because the result is not a beautiful creature but a deformed, mismatched combination of elements (Shelley 1818, 39). In this moment of animation in *Frankenstein*, we hear only the voice of the scientist, who narrates the event. In *Dawn*, however, the perspective is more complicated and layered in ways that become clearer retrospectively once we know that the aliens can sense the thoughts and feelings of other beings. Without explanation we are inside Lilith Iyapo's head, thrust into the midst of her slightly tangled thoughts during her "awakening" from suspended animation (*Dawn* 3). As observers who are inside the character, we share unknowingly the place of the aliens who observe and cause Lilith's recovery of consciousness. Like the aliens, who are called the Oankali, we know the events from the

perspectives of both a participant and an observer. Because "awake" is both transitive and intransitive, when we encounter the word "awakening," we are not sure whether the character is waking up on her own or whether someone is causing her to wake up; she is presented simultaneously as subject and object. The observers and the character mingle conclusions and perceptions experienced as Lilith both continues to live and returns from a death-like state in the process of being reborn into a new form. In *Frankenstein*, the narrator-scientist and the animated creature he observes never appear in such intimate relation in the narrative, and the reader is not invited to stand so frequently and so fully in two places at once. Butler has also effected a reversal since the being who comes alive is human, while the scientist causing her reanimation is alien, as terrifying in its appearance as the creature in *Frankenstein*. Human and creature never bridge their differences in Shelley's narrative, but in Butler's they do when, over time, Lilith accepts with reservations the Oankali, and the Oankali allow her limited autonomy. Human and alien cohabit in *Xenogenesis*, first in an enforced way, but later through human acts of choice. A more thorough bridging occurs in the posthuman generations that stem from Lilith. In *Frankenstein* the process ends in a single generation; the chasm is too wide to bridge.

Both narratives resonate with the political and cultural conflicts of their times, and both make literal the prejudicial imputation by one person or group that its antagonist is not human. In Shelley, the monstrous behavior of both Frankenstein and the creature in their struggle for domination and revenge prevents adequate resolution of the conflict between human and nonhuman. The impasse arises when the creature recognizes and punishes the monstrosity of Frankenstein's rejection of him for being a monster. In Butler, by contrast, the struggle for emergence of the posthuman, a term she does not use, proceeds structurally as if it were the risky but potentially successful coming into being of a postcolonial national identity in which mutuality displaces the antagonism that accompanies ostensible monstrosity.[7] The entrenched implication of monstrosity that informs the narrative of *Frankenstein* is dispersed and transformed by the end of Butler's narrative; as with the Erinyes, who become Eumenides in the *Oresteia*, manifestations of the Gothic imaginary become domesticated. This is by no means the kind of domesticating of the Gothic that occurs at times in the works of Shelley's older contemporary, Jane Austen. Instead, a normalizing of what had been considered perverse takes place when the ostensibly perverse is accepted. In *Frankenstein*, a reversal occurs for the human scientist as soon as he recognizes his creature's ugliness: "I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the

dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley 1818, 39). The result of his enterprise reveals a dark truth undermining what the scientist had understood about himself and his goals. A similar recognition becomes available in *Xenogenesis*, when nuclear holocaust reveals technology's destructive effect and exposes a delusion typical of the technological imaginary. Butler's narrative goes further, however, in its transvaluation of values through the undoing of binary oppositional structures.[8]

Combined with the changed, globalized character of technology's destructive potential in Butler, this further step provides a basis for distinguishing between her narrative as postmodern science fiction and Shelley's as an initial phase of science fiction that responds to the French Revolution and its aftermath. But the distinction does not erase the continuity of the technological imaginary as a technological cultural imperative that both writers face, though an imperative differently incarnated because of historical shifts. The drive toward mastery of nature and other creatures plays a central role in both narratives, and the intensity and dangerous character of the imperative has not diminished since Shelley's time. The character of technology, however, has changed because the mechanistic science that Shelley knew has been displaced for Butler by atomic physics and genetic engineering.

Literal and figurative grotesque beings populate both narratives: the monster and its creator in *Frankenstein*; the aliens, humans themselves, and the "constructs," who are the posthuman results of the mating between aliens and humans, in *Xenogenesis*. As Chris Baldick has argued, Shelley's narrative draws on the attribution of monstrosity by both sides in the political and social disagreements surrounding the French Revolution, in which both conservative and revolutionary factions described each other as monsters.[9] In *Xenogenesis*, by contrast, the monstrosity of different species carries racial and sexual overtones, and the binary imputation of monstrosity has been deflected or avoided through the constructs' shifting movement between the antagonistic groups to enable communication and blending of various sorts. Butler's consistent addition of a third term into apparently binary situations, either a mixed figure or a wholly different third element, deflects potential and actual struggles for dominance into self-adjusting relationships. Although the success of the mediation is frequently challenged and seems continually in need of renewal in *Xenogensis*, it tends toward becoming the defining context, especially at the trilogy's conclusion.

In both narratives, a technologically sophisticated culture gives rise, by an act of will, to an unprecedented new being, but the scale of the narratives and their structures suggest important differences.

Terrified by the results of his work and afraid to allow their spread, Frankenstein prevents his creature from reproducing when he abandons his effort to generate a female. The limits he attempts to place on the situation find one counterpart in the narration's framing, in which each narrator and his tale are located coherently in a determinate situation. One effect of this structure is to bring the reader gradually into contact with the creature, whose discourse lends him a human linguistic face, like the personae of the other narrators. In *Xenogenesis*, the situation is reversed since the aliens prevent human reproduction through sterilization and insist on the production of posthumans. Because the events of the second and third volumes of the trilogy centrally involve the proliferation of the posthuman, they stand in contrast to the creature's enforced celibacy. Unlike the creature's narration in *Frankenstein*, the first-person retrospective narration of the third volume, *Imago*, by Jodahs, one of the posthumans, is unframed. We encounter it without the determinate situating that a frame provides but rather as a surprising development. The surprise for the reader in the narration is one counterpart for unexpected aleatory developments within the narrative. The potential for unexpected change has expanded considerably in Butler's unframed narrative. Jodahs's posthuman identity does not color our initial reaction to his narration since we learn only later who and what he is. The framing in *Frankenstein* provides a sense of limits and potential closure while it situates the book's dynamic largely in the past. The retrospective narration in *Xenogenesis*, though concerned with past events, has a distinctly open quality oriented toward the future. At the end, the narrative of the posthuman as a composite, self-transforming cluster of species includes different but compatible figures for itself in something human—Lilith's tangled hair—and in something alien—the seed planted to grow and become a sentient ship whose design enables an eventual departure from the past and the present of Earth. The figuration and its conceptual and social implications have no equivalents in the dystopic destruction that occurs in *Frankenstein* when the scientist and the creature go to their separate ends.

Binary Divisions, Hybrids, and the Enabling Third

In *Frankenstein*, there is a great deal of boundary crossing, as is the case in Gothic narratives generally. One of Victor Frankenstein's explicit goals is to do away with existing, apparently unalterable boundaries. As he says early in his narration: "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (Shelley 1818, 36). While

Frankenstein would cross the boundary between the human and the divine, the creature he animates crosses a number of other boundaries. It is living but formed from parts of dead bodies; it emerges as an adult physically but initially its knowledge of language and the world is that of a child; its features are essentially human, but it possesses the strength of a wild animal. Although the scientist in *Frankenstein* believes himself to be well-intentioned, the boundaries he has in view violate accepted norms. Those norms define coherence and stability for the narrative's world, however fragile and delusory they may be. The breaching of limits involves disruptive acts of violence, implicit in the scientist's rhetoric with "break through" and "torrent" and explicit in the creature's later actions. Frequently in Gothic narratives, the threatened or disrupted stability is reestablished and confirmed at the end, which may or may not be ironic. The lack of stability in *Frankenstein*'s closing makes it the harbinger of a long sequence of later science fiction narratives that are dystopic in character; the future arising from the technological imperative is damaged and threatening. The emphasis in *Xenogenesis* on the blurring of boundaries and on the overcoming of binary structures is, by contrast, utopian, though critically so. The values and behavior of the past have already resulted in a dystopic situation, the near destruction of the earth, which creates an unexpected opportunity for transforming the tendencies that gave rise to the destruction. Boundary crossings are still presented at times in *Xenogenesis* as violations of norms, but only from the human perspective, not from either the alien or posthuman points of view. Human insistence on absolutes persists like a small Euclidean or Newtonian area within a larger non-Euclidean, relativistic space whose properties counter the notion of absolutes. The pervasive challenge to absolutes in *Xenogenesis* arises from alternatives to the hierarchical implications of binary structures. The imaginative texture of *Xenogenesis*, one of its most memorable achievements, is largely triadic and polyvalent. By displacing dualisms, structures of multiplicity make possible a transvaluation that avoids the torrential breaking through imagined by Victor Frankenstein.

The creature in *Frankenstein* is a frightening "hybrid" (Baldick 14), an animated construct of a monstrous kind, that resembles "monsters in classical mythology . . . composed of ill-assorted parts, sometimes combined from different creatures" and "sometimes merely multiplied to excess" (Baldick 13). Its hybridity differs, however, from the mixtures we encounter in *Xenogenesis*, except for the ill-assorted mixture that characterizes the human species. *Xenogenesis* turns the tables by presenting humans as a monstrous mixture and monstrous-appearing posthumans as intelligent and attractive. The monstrous

mixture makes humans inflexible, while cross-species mixtures result in a chameleonic, adaptable hybrid whose plasticity contrasts with rigid hierarchical attitudes. According to the Oankali, the root problem within the human is the destructive and self-destructive combination of intelligence with hierarchical tendencies (*Dawn* 38). This combination makes Victor Frankenstein as monstrous as his creature, but in *Xenogenesis* it characterizes the entire human species, not simply one exceptional individual. The goal of the Oankali, as gene traders and genetic engineers, is to take advantage of genetic material available from other species in order to generate new forms of life. Their success depends on their desire to find different species and on their ability to incorporate the differences selectively in their offspring. Frankenstein is repelled by the differences from himself and his expectations that he perceives in the creature he has created. The Oankali do not reject unexpected differences out of hand, and they work to turn their own offspring into hybrids. They expect their children to differ from themselves.

In *Adulthood Rites*, we encounter Lilith's comparison of human and Oankali attitudes toward difference, addressed to one of her children, Akin, the first male human-born construct, a genetic mixture of Oankali and human:

> "Human beings fear difference," Lilith had told him once. "Oankali crave difference. Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status. Oankali seek difference and collect it. They need it to keep themselves from stagnation and overspecialization. . . . You'll probably find both tendencies surfacing in your own behavior. . . . When you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference." (*Adulthood* 80)

Responding to Donna Haraway's claim that Butler's fiction resists the fetishizing of sameness, Walter Benn Michaels cites this passage as evidence of a contrast in Butler's work between purity and hybridity that in his view does not generate a genuine alternative to identity politics (Michaels 657).[10] But Michaels cites only part of the passage, and he does so without taking its context into consideration. Having just been abducted by resisting humans who want to sell him, Akin remembers his mother's advice, then asks himself how he can "embrace Humans who, in their difference, not only rejected him but made him wish he were strong enough to hurt them" (*Adulthood* 81). Frankenstein's creature could ask a similar question whenever humans reject him. He may not do so precisely because he is strong enough to hurt them, and after repeated rejections, he exercises his strength ruthlessly. By contrast, even when Akin is older and more powerful,

he responds to humans with restraint and compassion. Rather than replicating the violence of hierarchical relations in *Frankenstein*, *Xenogenesis* accepts the value of perpetuating and protecting differences rather than rejecting or eliminating them.

Michaels suggests that "in a thoroughly miscegenated world," of the sort he apparently sees implied in *Xenogenesis*, "everybody would be the same" and that "miscegenation is . . . a technology for the elimination of difference" (659). But in Butler's narrative, species differences are not reduced to homogeneity of body types or of thinking. Both physically and mentally, the posthumans and their world are variegated. Akin works on behalf of the humans, contrary to the intentions of the Oankali, to devise a plan to provide humans the option to maintain their species integrity, just as the Oankali have reserved a portion of their own kind, referred to as "akjai," who will not mingle their genes with those of the humans (*Dawn* 133). The same word is applied to the humans who choose to remain separate. The term "difference," which Michaels uses in the singular, as does Lilith in the passage he cites, frequently requires pluralizing in order to do justice to the implications of Butler's narrative. The process of cross-breeding gives rise not to a world in which "everybody would be the same," but to one in which new, unexpected combinations result in surprising differences, that is, in changes. Aleatory transformations are part of the process, including developments that enable the Oankali, in response to initiatives by the constructs, to change their minds about options for constructs and humans. A new element continually makes realignments possible, not realignments that are meant to be permanent, but dynamic shifts on their way to becoming something else in a continual process of emergence.

The encounters, divergences, and mergings of *Xenogenesis* do not occur between a pair of antagonists during a comparatively brief period of time, as in *Frankenstein*, but between humans, aliens, and the offspring of the two over generations. The posthuman offspring provide a third element, but third factors abound, giving the arrangement of elements within the narrative a fractal quality. Even before the posthumans come into being, in *Dawn* the distinctions between male and female and between animal, plant, and machine are challenged on the way to enabling the posthuman by removing the barriers between alien and human. The goal is not the elevating of the human to superhuman status at the top of a hierarchy, as in *Frankenstein*, but rather the survival of the human and the alien, primarily in mixed forms. It is important in this regard that the death of the individual does not disappear in the posthuman world. It does not because there is no attempt to create life, only to preserve it in forms that are not self-destroying. Rather than trying to stop time,

the aliens and the posthumans take advantage of it as a necessary element in making change possible.

The ship's quality as a living being that produces food, takes various organic shapes, and lives in symbiotic relation with its inhabitants provides an ongoing alternative in *Dawn* to the distinction between living creatures, vegetation, and machines. In doing so, it anticipates the trilogy's ending, in which a group of formerly resisting humans on Earth will inhabit a new ship whose seed Jodahs plants on their behalf and on his own. Jodahs can, like the ship, take on various shapes in response to the needs and desires of others; although not instruments of those around them, both ship and construct are responsive and attentive. Butler's attributions of growth and construction to the ship and the posthumans involve a reversal; the ship grows, while the posthumans are constructed. All the constructs, who are blends of human and alien in different proportions and in unpredictable shapes, are presented as children, usually in relation to their parents and a home. But, as the term *construct* suggests, like machines, they have been constructed through acts of engineering initiated by the Oankali, then furthered by the constructs themselves. Even the Oankali are unable to predict the ultimate forms the posthuman constructs will take. They are as surprised as anyone else when Lilith's child Jodahs develops into an ooloi, a genetic engineer who is neither male nor female nor a blending of the two; he is the first human-born construct ooloi, engineered but wholly organic. Unlike the creature in *Frankenstein*, constructs actualize their potential to protect rather than harm humans, and they contribute knowingly to the proliferation of their self-transforming species. The potential to protect humans emerges in *Adulthood Rites* in a way that surprises the Oankali when Akin helps establish a colony for fertile humans on Mars to give the human species the option of procreating and establishing a continuing civilization without mixing with the Oankali. In *Frankenstein*, the creature and his harmful actions result from a combination of scientific skill, mistakes, and his creator's unexpressed motives and desires, which the creature embodies. The same is true of Jodahs and his beneficial actions. Jodahs matures into the first posthuman genetic engineer through a possibly intentional mistake one of his alien parents makes that turns out to be a portal of discovery.

Because nothing Lilith sees when she first encounters the Oankali fits into the oppositional categories human beings use to understand the world, she has reasons, as does the reader, to begin thinking in new ways about binaries. The first Oankali she encounters, Jdayah, resembles both a human and an animal with multiple snake-like tentacles. When he takes Lilith out of the room where she has been awakened and into other parts of the ship, she asks if the vegeta-

tion she sees is "plant or animal." Jdayah tells her it is part of the ship, which itself is plant, animal, "and more" (*Dawn* 33). Like the Oankali themselves, the ship is a living entity created through genetic trade. She learns that gene trading allows the Oankali sometimes to acquire even what is deadly and then to render it beneficial. The plants in which the humans are kept in suspended animation were once carnivorous but have been modified to maintain and heal life. Particularly surprising to Lilith as an individual is the change the Oankali have made in her body by correcting her inherited tendency toward cancer. As is regularly the case with the Oankali, the procedure involves not removal of an unwanted element but reintegration of it in another form. Jdayah tells her that the ooloi who healed her "induced your body to reabsorb the cancer" (*Dawn* 21). Later, we learn that the Oankali's desire to acquire human genetic material arises in part from the potential that cancer holds for healing. They consider it to be a beautiful "treasure" (*Imago* 30). Like Lewis Carroll's Alice, Lilith has passed into a looking-glass world in which the valences have been reversed.

Escaping the Limits of Gender and the Nuclear Family

Lilith's experiences invite her repeatedly to reconsider dualistic categories concerning gender that affect both sexuality and the structure of families. In *Xenogenesis*, reproduction provides one model for escaping dualism and its attendant hierarchy. When Lilith asks Jdayah whether he is "male or female," the alien answers, "It's wrong to assume that I must be a sex you're familiar with" (*Dawn* 11). Although Jdayah is male, he wants to prepare Lilith to understand that the Oankali have three sexes, including the sex of the ooloi. By giving us three sexes, Butler moves beyond human dichotomy. Victor Frankenstein also attempts to move beyond the limitations of being male, but he does so by eliminating the female role. The result for the creature is sterility when Frankenstein refuses to create a female partner for him. Frankenstein's fears are the same as those motivating the humans who reject Lilith in *Dawn*. In both *Frankenstein* and *Dawn*, the future integrity and safety of the human species is threatened in the eyes of some because a new kind of female may mate with human males or with the frightening creature.

By contrast with *Frankenstein*, Butler's narrative expands the number of sexes. The Oankali drive toward hybridity expresses itself as this type of insertion of a third term into a duality. Faced with something alien, the Oankali tend to merge with it and produce a

new entity, a third kind of being. From a human perspective, Lilith herself becomes androgynous when the Oankali strengthen her for her attempt to awaken and lead other humans. In doing so, they may be inspired by the character of Oankali females, who are larger and stronger than males. Because of engineered changes, she is no longer quite what she was, still arguably human but also transformed in anticipation of a posthuman future. The modification of her gender identity and her acquisition of new abilities give rise to a hierarchical struggle for power based on a binary opposition other than gender since some of the humans she awakens characterize her as nonhuman and as a traitor to her species. The ultimate embodiment of the tendency to move beyond the limits of both dual gender categories and the distinction between alien and human is Jodahs, Lilith's ooloi child, the character with whom Butler invites us to identify in *Imago*. Jodahs is able to go further than Lilith in successfully bridging the gap between the humans and the Oankali; as an ooloi rather than a human androgyne, he stands further outside the dualistic categories of gender and species.

The relations between the genders in *Frankenstein* and in *Xenogenesis* determine both the structure of families and the success or failure of marriage. In Butler's narrative, the multiplying of genders creates new possibilities for domestic partnership. In Shelley's, by contrast, as in many Gothic narratives, the gender dichotomy is accompanied by distance and inequality between men and women. In *Frankenstein*, the differences become absolute when neither Frankenstein nor the creature is able to establish domestic relations with a female partner. Frankenstein's antagonistic struggle with the creature destroys his family. The females who could be wives are eliminated, and the one act of reproduction that occurs is accomplished by a male without female participation. As Lilith has told Akin about the human fear of difference, "Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status" (*Adulthood* 80). This applies to gender differences in *Frankenstein* and in many other Gothic narratives.[11] The male characters who dominate the events achieve self-definition specifically by taking advantage of women, frequently to the point of persecution. That is not true in *Xenogenesis*, in particular with regard to Lilith. She goes beyond merely surviving by retaining her agency as voice and will.

Although Lilith is not in control of her situation at the beginning of *Dawn*, the ship, which has replaced the Gothic castle as the place of incarceration, turns out to be restrictive but not a prison. Soon she is able to find her way and obtain what she needs from the ship, and eventually she goes to Earth where she is free to wander from the village, which is also a growing ship. Although Lilith suffers from the

actions of other humans, who kill her first partner, Joseph, and from the actions of the Oankali, who give her no choice about starting to produce posthumans, Lilith never concedes. The disruption of a marriage, typical in Gothic narratives, occurs for Lilith with the death of her partner, as it does for Frankenstein with the death of Elizabeth, but the Oankali family structure compensates partially for Lilith's loss. Marriages and families are not prevented but enabled and encouraged in a posthuman form in *Xenogenesis*. While the reproductive function is assigned to the male in *Frankenstein*, in *Xenogenesis* it is expanded from a bi-sexual to a tri-sexual process in which dead partners can continue playing a role.

The resilient, self-correcting family structure is based not on the human dyadic model but on the Oankali triadic arrangement, which Nikanj, who is to be Lilith's ooloi mate, describes in *Dawn*, in a passage that mixes the anonymous narrator's language with knowledge that Lilith has acquired. The language of narration is as blended as the relations among Ahajas, who is an Oankali female, Dichaan, who is an Oankali male, and Nikanj:

> Ahajas . . . was big like most Oankali females. . . . She and Dichaan were brother and sister as usual in Oankali matings. Males and females were closely related and ooloi were outsiders. One translation of the word *ooloi* was "treasured strangers." According to Nikanj, this combination of relatives and strangers served best when people were bred for specific work—like opening a trade with an alien species. The male and female concentrated desirable characteristics and the ooloi prevented the wrong kind of concentrations. (*Dawn* 104)

The triadic marital arrangement is self-correcting, with a third element, the ooloi, who maintains equilibrium within the group through monitoring and adjustments. Though an outsider, the ooloi is inside the family. The odd number of partners prevents in advance the possibility of an irresolvable disagreement based on evenly divided contrary views. The rules of endogamy and exogamy operate differently in Oankali mating. In human societies, such rules define the group of eligible partners who are neither too close to their future partner's kinship group nor too far removed from it. From the human perspective, the Oankali arrangement looks like incest and miscegenation at once. It combines and confounds both since partners have to come from both very close and very far instead of coming from not too close and not too far.

This triadic arrangement is the basis for the pentadic one that allows for mating and domestic partnerships between the Oankali

and humans. When a human couple of different sexes mates with the Oankali, as do Joseph and Lilith, the enlarged group becomes internally differentiated and internally double. There are two females and two males, as well as two pairs of partners of different sexes, one Oankali pair and one human pair. Every member of the pentadic family except the ooloi has a same-species partner of a different sex and a same-sex partner of a different species. The ooloi remains the singular element that prevents deadlocks and accomplishes self-monitoring for the group. In addition, the ooloi stores genetic material as a memory that can be made corporeal. Joseph literally dies, but genetically he does not since Nikanj is able to help Joseph's female partners produce his offspring. The effect of Joseph's death at the hands of the resisting humans is terrible, but it is less final than the creature's murder of Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*. In *Adulthood Rites*, Lilith finds a new human partner on Earth, Tino, who is also murderously attacked by resisters but survives with the help of the Oankali. The survival of marriages and families despite damaging violence stands in strong contrast to the events of *Frankenstein*.

A significant unexpected attribution across boundaries occurs in the passage about the Oankali mating triad when the word "people" is used to refer to the Oankali (104). Here, and elsewhere with regularity in the trilogy, we are asked silently to accept this word, which normally refers to human beings. Its source is ambiguous, whether in the narrator, in Nikanj, or in Lilith, whose knowledge is being rendered. All three perspectives may be implied. It appears that Lilith has accepted the term since she provides no caveat. As a consequence, there is encouragement for the reader to accept it as well. By contrast, human resisters refer regularly to the Oankali, in a derogatory way that mimics racial prejudice, as "worms," because they have snake-like tentacles (*Adulthood* 79). Some of them even want to amputate the tentacles from construct children whom they abduct. The different implications of *people* and *worms* with regard to hierarchical attitudes is evident. *People* can refer equally to aliens, humans (of whatever race), and posthumans, who are differentiated but also granted the same standing as beings; they have achieved ontological equality.[12] Lilith may have come to accept the shared term and its implications because she recognizes herself, in another instance of reversed attribution, to be "the alien, the uncomprehending outsider." When the human recognizes itself as "alien" and ignorant, it becomes possible to admit the similarity to the knowing aliens who have become "people," including the ooloi, who "were outsiders" (*Dawn* 104).[13]

Both P. B. Shelley's "Preface" for the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley's "Author's Introduction" to the 1831 edition mention

the scientist Erasmus Darwin. The former associates his work with Frankenstein's, and the latter mentions his reputed experimenting with "a piece of vermicelli in a glass case" in an effort to generate life (Shelley 1831, 23). The hierarchical relation of humans to the natural world, which is often an element of scientific, technological thinking, transfers easily to social relations, whether they involve race, gender, class, or other differentiating factors. That type of transfer is at work when resisters call aliens and posthumans "worms," implying that they are expendable subhuman creatures, suitable for scientific experiments. Another type of transference becomes possible when antagonistic oppositions are transformed by triadic and polyvalent arrangements. When that kind of transference occurs, as it does in the world of the Oankali and the posthumans, the "vermicelli" turn out, in a surprising reversal and transvaluation, to be the scientists and also people.

"A strange gift": Postcolonial Tendencies of the Posthuman

One of the third terms Butler uses in *Xenogenesis* to create an alternative to binary oppositions is the third world. Lilith, a black woman from Los Angeles, happened to be traveling in Peru, and most of the other survivors came from "Africa, Australia, and South America" (*Imago* 93). Ironically, it was a survival advantage to be far from the technologically sophisticated, richer countries of Europe and North America. Advanced technology brought death rather than protection. Lilith's looks suggest her ancestral roots in Africa, and the orthography of Oankali names frequently has an African appearance. The fact that the word *Oankali* means "traders" (*Dawn* 22) suggests the projection into an interstellar future of the trading that accompanied the European establishment of empires, which was pursued by ships like the one that plays a central role in *Frankenstein*. Lilith questions, as readers are also likely to do, the character and goals of Oankali trading, especially with respect to gaining consent from the species with whom they breed. But trading can also suggest exchanges that are neither mercantile nor self-serving, including the kind of gift exchanges on which the economies and social structures of many African societies were traditionally based. By the close of *Xenogenesis*, the non-hierarchical character of the Oankali and their commitment to trading as gift exchange become evident.

The business and dynamics of empire overlap at times with scientific work in the narrative of *Frankenstein*. Walton's voyage is a geographical version of Frankenstein's search for scientific knowl-

edge since he hopes to learn "the secret of the magnet," which will enable him to explain current inconsistencies in "celestial observations." His voyage is also associated with conquest and colonialism. Walton hopes not only to "tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man" but also to discover "a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite" (Shelley 1818, 6). Reaching China, India, and parts of the Middle East normally required a tedious passage around Africa. Walton hopes to open trade routes to countries in which Europe already had a colonizing interest. Shelley makes this colonizing impulse explicit through Clerval's choice of profession.[14] He joins Frankenstein at the University to make himself "complete master of the Oriental languages," having "turned his eyes toward the East, as affording scope for his spirit of enterprise" (Shelley 1831, 70). "Enterprise" suggests mercantile intentions as well as energetic ambitions, and the reference to complete mastery of something Oriental indicates that, like Walton, Clerval is interested in more than exploration. He plans to visit India to put his linguistic skills in the service of "assisting the progress of European colonisation and trade" (Shelley 1831, 139). This colonial enterprise depends on the difference between Europeans and people of other races, a difference at work at the narrative's beginning. With yellow skin and black hair, the creature looks markedly different from Frankenstein. Walton thinks the creature resembles "a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island" in contrast to the European Frankenstein (Shelley 1818, 13). The reference to a savage on an island evokes Caliban from *The Tempest*, a native forced to work for his powerful European master. Unlike the exotic, attractive Christian woman, Safie, who is Arabian but accepted by Europeans, the creature is too different to be integrated into European culture. Like the Oankali for the resisters, his difference makes him an object to be rejected and destroyed. Gayatri Spivak identifies Frankenstein's monster as a colonial subject, educated on the history of imperialism, shunned by the civilization that has created him, and filled with rage against his creator (254–55). The political implications of monstrosity involving revolutions within European societies take on related but new meanings for a wider, imperial domain when the monster is presented in situations that evoke Europe's colonizing ambitions and racist attitudes. Shelley's narrative realizes those new meanings at the inception of science fiction as a genre.[15]

One tendency, as well as an apparent goal, of the proliferating third positions in *Xenogenesis* is to create an inescapable network of mutuality. Such a network provides an alternative to the rejection and destruction that follow from the sort of hierarchical attempts to dominate that are presented or evoked in *Frankenstein*, including

attempts that are part of colonizing ventures. The options faced by the humans and shaped by them, the Oankali, and the constructs resemble the stages that Frantz Fanon outlined in "On National Culture" for the growth of a colonial society out of imperial domination into postcolonial national identity. This is not to say that *Xenogenesis* is a postcolonial narrative. But it does present a situation that mimics on a global, species-wide scale the predicament of individual colonies emerging from European imperial control during the past century. In the age of the posthuman, the entire surviving human species must face what only portions of it encountered during the difficult transition out of colonialism. Focusing on the position of the native intellectual, Fanon sketches two preliminary stages in the emergence of a national culture in response to domination from outside. There is an initial "period of unqualified assimilation" to the values and customs of the dominant culture, followed by an aggressive, sometimes violent rejection of that culture through nativism, the advocating of indigenous practices (222). As the first human with whom the Oankali can work successfully to produce posthuman offspring, Lilith chooses assimilation in order to survive out of a mixture of fear, cunning, and attraction. In this regard, her behavior resembles that of a colonial subject responding to the colonizing culture. Her goal, expressed at the end of *Dawn*, is to survive in order to teach other humans to "*Learn and run*," that is, to take what they need to know from the Oankali in order to escape their dominance (248). Resisters, who actively, often violently, reject relations with the Oankali, consider Lilith a traitor. Like those citizens of colonial and postcolonial societies who attempt to separate themselves from the influence of the dominant culture, the resisters insist on uncritical, absolute return to traditions and patterns of behavior established before the dominant culture intervened. Their complete rejection of the outside influence is self-defeating, because their fertility depends on consorting with the Oankali. Even the resisters in the mountains who accidentally retain their fertility, apparently because of an error made by the Oankali, produce offspring deformed by breeding within too limited a gene pool.

The third stage in Fanon's scheme of the native intellectual and the postcolonial nation's emergence involves a "zone of occult instability" and "fluctuating movement" (227). Although Fanon does not provide a detailed description of this unstable, risky, but potentially fruitful stage, it is clearly one in which the dominant culture is neither accepted through assimilation nor rejected through attempts at nativist separation. He does suggest that this stage involves a process in which "the people's intelligences" have been "dialectically reorganized" by the combined effect of traditional "forms of thought"

and "modern techniques of information, language, and dress" (Fanon 224). Arguably, the indigenous and the foreign merge in various ways to produce mixtures physically and culturally. The new social world presumably becomes variegated through literal and figurative intermarriage and the mixing of diverse cultural traditions. Epifanio San Juan Jr. has called this aspect of Fanon's thinking "encountering the third" (226). Because it is a creolized or hybrid stage, mimicry, amalgamation, and transformation develop as ways to occupy multiple perspectives virtually simultaneously.[16] Assimilation and resistance in their extreme forms do not generate the fluctuating movements of instability that may give rise to new forms of dynamic equilibrium. There are no guarantees that the desired but unpredictable forms of identity will actually develop, but transvaluations do become possible. The boundary crossings involved in these transvaluations are not violations of norms but the reconfiguring of the normative into something more plastic. Identity and meanings become multiple rather than singular.[17]

Readers of *Adulthood Rites* experience a version of the odd occupying of two places at once that the narrative of *Xenogenesis* projects when we encounter Akin's name. His name, introduced without guidance about pronunciation, suggests kinship, if we pronounce it "a kin," as speakers of English are likely to do. For us, he is a kin, one of us, akin, not an alien, not a stranger. But eventually the narration reveals that his name should be pronounced "Ah-keen" (*Adulthood* 101) since the name has African origins, among the Yoruba of Nigeria (*Adulthood* 104). The new pronunciation in relation to the old one, which we are unlikely to be able to suppress entirely, creates a heteronymous situation in which the same group of letters carry different meanings. In this case, the meanings merge. This posthuman male with an African name is also a kin, however alien he may seem. The double implication of the heteronymy realizes the anamorphic situation of the third stage in the forming of postcolonial identity. The effect is like calling the Oankali "people." We are invited implicitly to accept the term but also to recognize it as a dual attribution. We know that they are aliens but also that they are people. Our own flexibility in seeing double, but not dualistically, mimics the plasticity that the posthumans exhibit. By registering the blurred character of apparent opposites, such as *akin* and *alien*, this kind of double vision undercuts hierarchical thinking, which depends on binaries.

Looking at issues in an oscillating, fluctuating, merged way is crucial for achieving plasticity as a basis for making political decisions without pretending that all the answers are known in advance. In this regard, the Switzerland of *Frankenstein* provides a telling contrast to posthuman society. However egalitarian and fair Switzerland may

consider itself by comparison with other European societies, the judicial process that sends Justine to her death abets the creature's destructive work. There appears to be no possibility of changing the course of the institutions that condemn to death an innocent woman who lacks the protection of higher birth that is one of Frankenstein's advantages. At the end of *Imago*, by contrast, the Oankali reach consensus, despite the risks, about allowing the human-born construct ooloi, who have developed prematurely, to establish families and a village on Earth. The principles at work in this consensus include protecting the autonomy of the small group and giving it power to make decisions. Unlike a hierarchical political process, this one resembles Karl Mannheim's democratization (*Democratisierung*).[18] Writing just after Hitler came to power, Mannheim argues for the permanently revolutionary character of democracy, whose defining and sustaining element is the democratizing process. In his view, social machinery that is maximally emancipatory, both over time and at any given historical moment, comes into being in a sustainable way only in a permanently revolutionary situation. In such a situation groups negotiate for power in a manner that continuously brings new leadership into positions for influencing or making choices for the community. The process of democratization institutionalizes perpetual instability and uncertainty in order to make freedom possible; without uncertainty there is no freedom.

Ruthless monarchs, other Gothic villains, and the resisters in *Xenogenesis* act on the basis of certainty, the certainty that they are right, that they possess positive knowledge, or that they are superior to others. Jodahs, whose thinking and actions close Butler's trilogy, does not suffer from delusions of certainty and overweening self-confidence. Near the end of *Imago*, Lilith attributes to him "a strange gift," suggesting that he possesses an unusual talent but also that he has both received something unusual and that he will pass it on (215). Part of that gift is his lucid uncertainty about what will emerge from his actions. Unlike Victor Frankenstein, who thinks he knows what he has done and what will happen, Jodahs admits his lack of certainty: "What I wasn't sure I could handle was the result. The whole business was like Lilith's rounded black cloud of hair. Every strand seemed to go its own different way, bending, twisting, spiraling, angling. Yet together they formed a symmetrical, recognizable shape, and all were attached to the same head" (217). With the comparison, he takes us back to the opening of *Dawn*, when we are in Lilith's head as she starts perceiving the objects around her, including a figure with snake-like tentacles. His language provides us with a multiple figure: for the book, the specific situation, his own thoughts, the tentacles of the Oankali, and the roots that the ship he

soon plants will eventually develop. By planting the ship Jodahs both reproduces and reanimates it. Unlike the birth Frankenstein desires, this awakening does not violently break boundaries, though it moves beyond them. Walton's ship in *Frankenstein*, which is mechanical rather than living, becomes trapped in ice, unable to move forward. Walton's enterprise, like Frankenstein's, reaches an impasse, a final, uncrossable boundary. The cold wastes of ice suggest the lonely sterility that results from the scientist's attempt to become godlike. Finally, Walton must turn back toward a home he already knows. Jodahs's ship and its future inhabitants are in a different situation. They have no home to return to in the way that Walton does. Home for them is the name of a question and of an opportunity. The only certainty about Jodahs's ship is that its voyage toward home, wherever that may be, will be as unpredictably various as the tangle of "Lilith's rounded black cloud of hair."

Notes

Octavia E. Butler (1947–2006) died unexpectedly while this essay was awaiting publication. In 1995 Butler was named a MacArthur Fellow, the first science fiction writer to receive that recognition. She also received: Hugo Awards (from the World Science Fiction Society), Nebula Awards (from the Science Fiction Writers of America), a lifetime achievement award from PEN Center West, and the Langston Hughes Medal from City College of New York. We mourn the loss and dedicate our essay to her memory.

We wish to thank several generous colleagues for advice about Frantz Fanon and binarism, a topic that plays an important role in the essay's closing section: Lawrence Breiner, Gregory Castle, Nico Israel, and Anita Patterson.

1. *Frankenstein* exists in two editions, 1818 and 1831. Our commentary on Frankenstein draws primarily on the 1818 text. We do, however, cite the "Author's Introduction" for 1831 as relevant and, in the concluding section, we include details in 1831 concerning Clerval's colonial ambitions. Marilyn Butler compares the two texts in Appendix B, "The Third Edition (1831): Substantive Changes" in her edition of the 1818 version (Shelley 1818, 198–228). The three books composing *Xenogenesis* have been variously referred to by the publisher as *The Xenogenesis Series* on the cover of the individual novels and as *The Xenogenesis Trilogy* on the copyright page of the one-volume reprinting of all three novels under the title *Lilith's Brood* (2000).

2. Various commentators have suggested that *Frankenstein* is the first science-fiction novel, including the science-fiction writer Brian Aldiss in his *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* and the

literary critic Anne K. Mellor in *Mary Shelley* (107). In his sketch of the genre's origins, Patrick Parrinder recognizes the importance of *Frankenstein* as an immediate precursor but calls it a "scientific romance" (4). Judith Wilt takes a similar position, pushing the starting point of the genre to the end of the nineteenth century with the publication of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (618). Whether we understand *Frankenstein* to be a science-fiction novel or an immediate, influential precursor, it stands at the origins of the genre.

3. Salient aspects of both Shelley's narrative and Butler's link them to the Gothic tradition as David Punter has described it in his synoptic *The Literature of Terror*, a tradition of "self-conscious unrealism" (4) and anti-realism (75), "the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly glowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves" (1), a tradition that explores cultural anxieties through the transgressing of boundaries. See in particular Punter's first chapter, "Introductory: Dimensions of Gothic," and third chapter, "The Classic Gothic Novels," by which he means the works of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Various critics have suggested the resemblance of science fiction to Gothic narratives, including Patrick Brantlinger. But in so doing, he does not distinguish between earlier Gothic narratives and *Frankenstein*, a work that transforms and redirects the Gothic for the nineteenth century. Judith Wilt goes further in acknowledging the close connection between the Gothic and science fiction. Her term, "science fiction gothic," however, begs the question of the degree to which science fiction is always already Gothic in character in ways that our discussion brings to the fore (625). As is well known, *Frankenstein* arises from a situation involving Byron, his physician John Polidori, and the Shelleys at the Villa Diodati in which the group held scientific discussions and told ghost stories; that is, the narrative's inception involves science and the Gothic. Although he does not use the term *technological imaginary*, George Levine has that aspect of *Frankenstein* and its heritage in view when he asserts that "true monstrousness is . . . the attempt of consciousness to impose itself on the world" (Levine 29).

4. Roberts in *A New Species* and Donawerth in *Frankenstein's Daughters* explore the place of *Frankenstein* at the beginning not just of science fiction but of women's science fiction.

5. Donawerth's discussion of *Xenogenesis* focuses on the undermining of racial and gender categories in Butler's trilogy, including by means of the multiple narrators.

6. Suvin discusses the relation of utopian writing to science fiction (see esp. 37–62). Moylan develops the term "critical utopia" in *Demand the Impossible* to describe utopian narratives that present the "faults" of the new society, including continuing "exploitation and domination," along with the virtues (44). Loss of choice concerning reproductive rights by both Lilith and the human resisters in *Xenogenesis* signals clearly the flawed character of social relations under the Oankali. In our reading, however, the positive direction of development in the

trilogy's narrative makes it more utopian than *Frankenstein*. Judgments about the trilogy's dystopian or utopian character depend on which volume a particular critic emphasizes. Focusing on *Dawn*, Haraway asserts that the narrative "is not utopian, but remains deeply furrowed by the contradictions and questions of power within all communication" (227). Michelle Green, by contrast, reads the trilogy's closing in unalloyed utopian terms, as "truly utopian, a society in which all have an equal chance to work together on the construction of a new world" (189).

7. Cultural critics have used the term *posthuman* in various ways to suggest the transformation of the human into its own replacement, sometimes from a difference that already exists within the human. R. L. Rutsky, in *High Techné*, asserts that a "posthuman subject position would . . . acknowledge the otherness that is part of us" (21). Neil Badmington adopts this view in his *Alien Chic*. N. Katherine Hayles provides a series of commentaries on the posthuman in relation to cybernetics in *How We Became Posthuman*. As a narrative that concerns the transformation of the human into something unanticipated, Butler's trilogy clearly concerns the posthuman, though in ways that are not limited to these critics' use of the term. For another discussion of monstrosity in contemporary fiction with a postcolonial cast that takes *Frankenstein* as a touchstone, see chapter seven, "Shame and Blindness, Meat and Monsters" in David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings* (110–27). Punter includes a commentary on a work of cyberfiction, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). Jay Clayton provides a commentary relevant to the concerns of this essay by linking the creature as monster in *Frankenstein* to the cultural criticism of Haraway and of Hélène Cixous, to *Blade Runner* (1982), and to Shelley Jackson's hypertext *Patchwork Girl* (1995) (124–45).

8. A number of the longer commentaries on *Xenogenesis* address the ways in which the narrative includes centrally the merging of opposites to create hybrid forms. Often these commentaries respond to Haraway's extended notion of the cyborg as encompassing not simply the merging of human and machine but various kinds of mergings (149–81). See also in this regard Boulter, Peppers, and Holden.

9. Baldick discusses the history of the term *monster* in British political discourse from the French Revolution to *Frankenstein* (10–62). Suvin also explores the connection of Shelley's narrative to the French Revolution (131–32).

10. Michaels is responding specifically to Haraway's assertion that "Butler's fiction is about resistance to the imperative to recreate the sacred image of the same" (Haraway 226).

11. The statement also applies to racial and cultural differences evident in captivity narratives. There has been recent critical recognition (evident in a session at the 2003 MLA Annual Convention, "Close Encounters: The Captivity Narratives of Octavia E. Butler") that Butler's writings deserve to be understood in relation to captivity narratives, especially Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave*

Girl (1861) and Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682). Part of the merged character of Butler's work stems from the convergences she effects among science fiction concerning aliens, Gothic narratives involving women victims, and captivity narratives that have a strong racial component. See note 13.

12. Ontological equality is the first of three principles that Mannheim, influential as a theorist of utopia, articulated as a basis for "democratization" (274–88). See the concluding section of our essay and note 18 below.

13. As Rieder points out, *Frankenstein* is the origin of a long sequence of science-fiction narratives concerning aliens (Rieder 27). But as Barr cogently argues, in *Xenogensis* Akin, whom she describes as a "'mulatto' child," effaces the very concept of the alien (Barr 100).

14. Ann Mellor points out that the implications of Shelley's narrative for aspects of empire were recognized almost as soon as the book appeared, even before Shelley added details concerning Clerval's colonizing intentions in the 1831 edition. In 1824, expressing in Parliament his opposition to freeing black slaves in the West Indies, George Canning, the foreign secretary and leader of the House of Commons, "explicitly identified the slaves with Frankenstein's monster" (Mellor 113).

15. See in this regard Judith Wilt's argument that the encounter with the alien, which embodies anxieties surrounding the colonial enterprise, is fundamental to science fiction (621).

16. Edward Kamau Brathwaite uses the term "creolization" in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*. Homi Bhabha uses and discusses the terms "hybridity" and "mimicry" in the essays collected as *The Location of Culture*.

17. The place of Fanon in our reading of Butler's narrative deserves additional comment and justification since Fanon's writings have been interpreted in divergent ways. The criticism of Fanon as a binary-ridden cultural nationalist has mostly come from scholars in African studies. See, for example, Ranuga and Julien. In African American Studies and in postcolonial studies in the US, poststructuralist interpretations are more prevalent. These poststructuralist readings of Fanon are often far removed from the historical materialist aspects of Fanon's writings, in which he describes a Manichean situation involving colonizer and colonized. For his response to Fanon's phrase "occult instability," see Homi Bhabha (139–70, especially 152–57.) In our argument we interpret Fanon's third phase as a dialectical one involving transvaluation and suggest its relevance to the postcolonial dimension of Butler's narrative without relying on the poststructuralist approach in a narrow, exclusive way. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry are relevant to understanding the postcolonial implications of Butler's narrative, but so is creolization as used by Braithwaite, who, like Fanon, writes prior to the rise of poststructuralism.

E. San Juan, Jr. (187–214) has been particularly critical of the post-structural approach for ignoring Fanon's commitment to the realities and the needs of political revolutionary struggle, including violence, in the wake of colonialism. See also his remarks about Bhabha (San Juan 191). At the conceptual hinge of *Working through the Contradictions*, however, San Juan cogently argues that "Fanon's Manichean vision" (224) is not at odds with the "metamorphosis and radical transformation" that San Juan associates with "encountering the third" (226). Fanon's place in our argument about Butler is largely compatible with San Juan's understanding of his work's implications. Fanon does not write explicitly about becoming posthuman. Instead, he writes about the emergence of a "new humanism" (246), a kind of posthumanism, which he clearly does not conceive as an extension of a Eurocentric humanism that is racist and exploitative.

Butler's narrative is, of course, not directly and historically about culturally and economically dominated peoples in Africa or in other parts of the third world who are faced with establishing themselves as nations. But her narrative about metamorphosis and radical transformation does project the process of encountering and becoming the third as the history of the future of the human species.

18. Mannheim discusses the term in "The Democratization of Culture," in *From Karl Mannheim.*

Works Cited

Aldiss, Brian. *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction*. London: Weidenfeld, 1973.

Badmington, Neil. *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Baldick, Chris. *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.

Barr, Marleen S. *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Locations of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Boulter, Amanda. "Polymorphous Futures: Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis Trilogy*." *American Bodies*. Ed. Tim Armstrong. New York: New York UP, 1996. 170–85.

Brantlinger, Patrick. "The Gothic Origins of Science Fiction." *Novel* 14 (1980): 30–43.

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *The Development of Creole Culture in Jamaica 1770–1820*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971.

Butler, Octavia. *Adulthood Rites.* 1988. New York: Warner, 1997.

———. *Dawn*. 1987. New York: Warner, 1997.

———. *Imago*. 1989. New York: Warner, 1997.

———. *Lilith's Brood.* New York: Warner, 2000.

Clayton, Jay. *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture.* New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
Donawerth, Jane. *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1997.
Fanon, Frantz. "On National Culture." *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove, 1965.
Gibson, Nigel C., ed. *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*. Amherst, NY: Humanity, 1999.
Green, Michelle Erica. "'There Goes the Neighborhood': Octavia Butler's Demand for Diversity in Utopias." *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*. Ed. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1994.
Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.
Holden, Rebecca J. "The High Costs of Cyborg Survival." *Foundation* 72.1 (1998): 49–57.
Julien, Eileen. "Terrains de Rencontre: Cesaire, Fanon, and Wright on Culture and Decolonization." *Yale French Studies* 98 (2000): 149–66.
Levine, George. "The Ambiguous Heritage of *Frankenstein*." *The Endurance of Frankenstein.* Ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979. 3–30.
Mannheim, Karl. "The Democratization of Culture." 1956. *From Karl Mannheim*. Ed. Kurt H. Wolff. New York: Oxford UP, 1971. 271–346.
Mellor, Anne K. *Mary Shelley*. New York: Methuen, 1988.
Michaels, Walter Benn. "Political Science Fictions." *New Literary History* 31 (2000): 649–64.
Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1986.
Parrinder, Patrick. *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*. London: Methuen, 1980.
Peppers, Cathy. "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Bulter's *Xenogenesis*." *Science Fiction Studies* 22 (1995): 47–62.
Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day*. Vol. 1. London: Longman, 1996.
———. *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.
Ranuga, Thomas "Frantz Fanon and Black Consciousness in Azania (South Africa)" *Phylon* 47.3 (1983): 182–91
Rieder, John. "Embracing the Alien: Science Fiction in Mass Culture." *Science Fiction Studies* 9 (1982): 26–37.
Roberts, Robin. *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993.
Rutsky, R. L. *High Techné: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999.

San Juan, Epifanio, Jr. *Working through the Contradictions: From Cultural Theory to Critical Practice*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2004.
Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. 1818. Ed. Marilyn Butler. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.
———. *Frankenstein*. 1831. Ed. Johanna M. Smith. Boston: Bedford, 2000.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Frankenstein*. New Casebooks. Ed. Fred Botting. New York: St. Martin's, 1995. 235–60.
Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
Whale, James, dir. *Frankenstein.* 1931. DVD*. Universal Studios, 2006.*
Wilt, Judith. "The Imperial Mouth: Imperialism, the Gothic and Science Fiction." *Journal of Popular Culture* 14 (1981): 618–28.