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Bearing the Burden of Posthuman Reproduction in Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild" and *Wild Seed*

MARQUITA R. SMITH 

“And what good is all this to Black people?”¹ Octavia E. Butler’s question at the conclusion of her essay “Positive Obsession” offers a provocation toward thinking about the role of literature as repair, especially considering the harm of punitive state action suffered by Black people in the United States. For Butler, speculative fiction enabled meaningful explorations of the worrisome aspects of social and political life. This article explores her multi-valent approach to questions of futurity and the bodily reproduction it is reliant upon in *Wild Seed* (1980) and “Bloodchild” (1984), works that look critically at the past while remaining grounded in the present. In these stories, reproduction is multi-sexed, gendered, and posthuman, vividly rendering the yet imagined possibility of male impregnation and more capacious relations between human and nonhuman animals. Here, the importance of the question about what good this is for Black people frames an exploration of Butler’s incisive speculation about the possibilities of Black reproductive power as a resistant mode of being that dares to exceed boundaries erected by narrowly defined structures of identity rooted in sexist and racist ideas. Butler presents a socially

fraught representation of biological reproduction in all its bodily grotesqueness, marked by an insistence on attending to the lateral and hierarchical relations complicated by procreation. She reminds us that to reproduce is to bear a visceral burden, and that this burden holds immense implications for the ethical making and sustaining of lives, especially in oppressive conditions.

Reproduction lies at the heart of *Wild Seed*, a novel that depicts a centuries-long relationship between two immortal Africans, Doro, a mindforce who destructively occupies people’s bodies, and Anyanwu, an Igbo woman born with shapeshifting and healing abilities. Doro desires to breed super humans and is thus taken with Anyanwu’s abilities. Upon convincing her to join him in his endeavor, Doro takes Anyanwu to his “seed village” in North America where she breeds children with Doro’s son, Isaac. Over the course of the novel, Anyanwu seeks to escape Doro’s control while also protecting her children and community. After Anyanwu resolves to kill herself as the only means of escape, Doro revises his actions to be less careless and violent and Anyanwu takes on a role as partner in Doro’s quest to find new seeds. “Bloodchild” continues Butler’s interest in reproduction. Narrated by a young boy named Gan, it tells the story of an interspecies bond between humans and the Tlic, a species of insect-like lifeforms. The humans (Terrans) in the story have escaped Earth and now live on the Tlic planet. The humans and the Tlic coexist interdependently as the Tlic use the humans as hosts for their eggs, leading to the establishment of the Preserve, a colony

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to protect the humans in exchange for them regularly providing human hosts. Once a human is implanted with eggs, they are called N'Tlic. Gan has been selected to carry the eggs of the female Tlic T'Gatoi. After witnessing a terrifying N'Tlic birth experience, Gan becomes reticent to fulfill his role but, by story's end, he and T'Gatoi find a compromise as he consents to bear her eggs. Both "Bloodchild" and *Wild Seed* conclude with their protagonists finding resolution through compromise and re-visioned ways of living.

Butler's work is often read as prescient because of its continuing social significance and her exploration of reproductivity is no different. In the current climate, conservative political powers have explicitly targeted gender and sexual agency both socially and legislatively. In June 2022, the US Supreme Court decision issued in the case of *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization* asserted that the US Constitution does not confer the right to abortion, thus returning the matter to individual states. In the wake of the overturning of *Rowe vs. Wade*, which allowed a general protection of abortion access via a right to privacy but did not codify a right to abortion as law, a growing number of states have restricted abortion access.² This reality has encouraged many to (re)turn to fictional representations of reproductive slavery³ such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Butler's oeuvre, which Alys Eve Weinbaum understands as a "philosophy of history" that seizes hold of the "memory (or residue) of reproductive slavery."⁴ Indeed, Butler's worlds read as familiar, even when the elements of chattel slavery do not map

directly onto future conditions. However, in my readings of "Bloodchild" and *Wild Seed*, I depart from Weinbaum's distillation of Butler's stories of "reproductive unfreedom" as tales in which "a slave... chooses love for his master over revolt"⁵ to consider what else these stories might tell us about how to live ethically with difference.

Butler's Posthuman Bodies

Unlike "Bloodchild," *Wild Seed* is a story about slavery.⁶ The emphasis on the creation of a superior, gifted "seed" people in *Wild Seed* provides an opportunity to reconsider matters of reproduction in the antebellum US. Doro and Anyanwu are a "Black Adam and Eve"⁷ intending to give birth to a new and improved form of humanity. This creation story fantastically revisits what has historically been a site of violation and violence, particularly for Black women. In an interview Butler cites her mother's and grandmother's life as critical to her conceptualization of the novel: "My mother's life and my grandmother's life and the little bit I know of her ancestors' lives were very hard and very terrible. These were not lives that I would have wanted to live."⁸ Butler's choice to draw from her immediate ancestral history to imagine even farther back in her fiction is partly driven by a need to honor the decisions and sacrifices made by those ancestors. Her work importantly highlights how the technologies of survival derived by generations of enslaved Black people made Black futures under conditions in which such a belief was fantastical to envision.

In this light, I draw from Butler's own knowledge and experience as a Black

woman to read her work in speculative fiction as a projection of the possibilities of what Terrion Williamson calls “Black feminist practice” in an imagined future without oppressive hierarchies of difference. Williamson defines “Black feminist practice” as distinct from Black feminism, a mode of sociality with “radical commitment to the significance of black female life and the humanity of all black peoples.”⁹ Though race is not the primary lens through which Butler’s stories view difference, the futures they imagine address a range of differences as boundaries that are not fixed or necessary. Instead, the transgression of these boundaries is essential to an ethical way of living in a posthuman era. In his analysis of “Bloodchild” Joe Heidenescher posits that “if post-humanism is characterized by human dependence on other species and technologies in order to live and thrive then we have always lived under a myth about our own existence.”¹⁰ This is also borne out in *Wild Seed* as even an immortal power like Doro must rely on others, a dynamic Adwoa Afful rightly describes as a codependence that reverses the slave/master relationship and thus “opens the epistemological space needed in which to theorise alternative futures from the position of an abject subjectivity.”¹¹ Butler’s Afrofuturist speculative fiction embraces the position of the abject (in these stories, the animal) to demonstrate how a posthumanist hybridity that reaches toward the so-called abject can form the foundation upon which a more equitable and inclusive society can be built. In Butler’s posthuman futures, the past continues to haunt and inform. This Afrofuturism offers an entry point into understanding how

Black women tend to the body as a place of Black futurity and a site of knowledge of an ethical way forward.

In *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu declares, “A woman should have something of her own,”¹² a meaningful example of a woman’s insistence on self-governance and her refusal to be subsumed by a patriarchal system of dominance in which men rename women brought closer to them through intimate relation. In holding on to her name, Anyanwu retains a corporeal power of self. However, this “self” is not primarily concerned with a sovereignty that separates but one that enables community through her gifts of healing and protection. Here, I find myself in agreement with Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s reading of “Bloodchild” in which she argues, “Butler challenges readers to confront the fact that the sovereign ‘I’ and the human body’s integrity are already breached and violable.”¹³ As Jackson poignantly continues, “For Butler, self-determination is ultimately self-defeating, particularly when it becomes synonymous with self-ownership, a concept in and of itself indebted to slavery.”¹⁴ Jackson’s rigorous interrogation of the property relation provides a critical point of connection to my consideration of how Butler imagines a Black woman’s ultimate power over her ability to reproduce and maintain life in ways that are ethical and honor the integrity of being in intraspecies community rather than in hierarchy.

Wild Seed’s Afrofuturism calls upon a Black feminist interpretation of relation that diverges from more masculinist modes of domination and being. Doro and Anyanwu’s contrasting ways of exerting power highlight issues of reproduction, power and relation,

and race. As Susana Morris argues, the Afro-futurist feminism of Butler's work "underscore[s] the importance of transgressive manifestations of family and intimacy, epistemologies that ultimately present possibilities for our own decidedly unenchanted world."¹⁵ This holds particularly true in both *Wild Seed* and "Bloodchild," stories that exceed typical notions of the familial, daring readers to imagine beyond such limits on intimacy. As both stories illustrate, these are not easy encounters, but they must nonetheless be faced. Indeed, *Wild Seed* develops its narrative with a focus on Anyanwu's Black feminist practice within her communities of residence, be they human or animal centered.

Historically, enslavers recognized and ruthlessly exploited enslaved girls' and women's reproductive capacity. In an essay on sexual violence and the marketplace of slavery Stephanie Jones-Rogers notes how important young Black women's and girls' reproductive ability was for slaveowners. Recounting information shared by a formerly enslaved woman, Jones-Rogers notes that this young girl was valuable precisely because she was a "little breeder": "Before she had even reached childbearing age, her female owner already declared her priceless simply because of the *future* promise of her womb."¹⁶ Butler's representation of this particular element of slavery through the story of Anyanwu attempts to revise this history by exploring the possibility of a Black woman, though ostensibly bound by Doro's power, to choose her conditions of reproduction and its outcomes via what Butler calls "body knowledge," which entails "reimagining and re-assembling [the flesh] within an ethics of survival."¹⁷ This refusal to renounce

the flesh is one that counters the depoliticizing of embodied knowledge as Butler insists that the body is "all we really know that we have"—"all we really know that we have is the flesh."¹⁸ Through Anyanwu, Butler offers readers a gifted being who derives her power not from some otherworldly source but from a deep knowledge of her own physicality developed over her "long life learning the diseases, disorders, and injuries that she could suffer," ultimately curating a knowledge in which she "knew more about surviving" than her enemies did about killing.¹⁹ Anyanwu learns that defensive methods of survival are more effective than offensive ones, meaning that when men with weapons and violence at their disposal come for her, she understands both human and animal bodies on a level they cannot overcome.

Feminine epistemologies are central to *Wild Seed*'s articulation of the possibilities of ethical enactments of biopower and hybridity in contrast to forced reproductive breeding. While Anyanwu's role as a biopolitical collaborator in Doro's plan is an example of her "tainted agency" and "complicity in Doro's slave-breeding enterprise,"²⁰ her ethical choices within this power relation offer the most powerful and effective counter to the instrumentalizing and paternalistic desires of powerful and always male Doro. A desire to protect her community from the specific harm posed by Doro motivates Anyanwu's agreement to the terms of her covenant with him. Though she describes this motive in relation to her role as a mother, she provides protection for those within her community who may also fear her. Indeed, as Kristen Lillvis notes of Black maternal

power, “Butler’s mothers work to improve the circumstances of their people by destroying hierarchical power structures and developing more egalitarian societies.”²¹ Anyanwu does this even while exploiting the optics of hierarchical power as a white male enslaver for the sake of communal safety, thus complicating the forms Black maternal power may take. Another way Anyanwu challenges understandings of the maternal is through the transgression of gender and species boundaries. Hortense Spillers identifies Black maternal power as a praxis and theory for alternate ways of living and dying that can potentially topple patriarchy. Spillers argues that because Black women and men were treated as “ungendered”²² flesh under slavery and children followed the condition of the mother, Black women and men have been excluded from the system of gender and the family, and this androgynous zone is a space from which they can upend patriarchy. As discussed later, Anyanwu indeed resignifies this ungendering as she modifies and disables her body in both human and nonhuman animal forms.

Anyanwu and Doro’s characters are deeply imbricated as their respective feminine and masculine epistemologies develop in tandem, as evidenced in how each treat land and bodies.²³ To Doro, land—like bodies—is something to be conquered, mastered. At the novel’s outset Doro is in opposition to both the “harsh land” and “hostile people”²⁴ that threaten his ability to live in a single body. The bodies Doro inhabits are merely tools used to serve his ends, discarded after they have been exhausted of their purpose, and demonstrating how “man is the universal parasite ... Always taking,

never giving.”²⁵ Neither land nor people pose a true challenge to his power and mission to find beings for his seed village, Anyanwu being an important one. Unlike his disconnected relation to the body and land, Anyanwu sees both relations as necessary for balanced, healthy living. She knows how to survive on the land—which foods to eat and those to avoid, as well as how to heal wounds with natural medicines. She understands herself to be a part of the land, and the land of her. As a healer, Anyanwu serves a critical role in her community to help those most in need. While her power causes some uneasiness in those who deem her a witch, it is a gift that she feels compelled to share. A duty to living beings, both human and nonhuman, motivates her actions rather than just an instrumentalist pursuit of perfection. Her ethics seem informed not by the expulsion of particular forms of life from the sphere of care but by an embracing of hybridity across categories of race, continent, and species.

Published four years after *Wild Seed*, “Bloodchild” offers a deeper exploration of how humans might live more ethically with difference. The symbiotic arrangement between the Tlic and humans requires humans “paying the rent,”²⁶ as Butler put it, by fulfilling the reproductive needs of the Tlic, receiving the benefit of prolonged life on “a world not our own”²⁷ in exchange for their accommodation. The Tlic have a history of treating humans as “convenient, warm-blooded animals”²⁸ used for the continued proliferation of the Tlic. Within the Preserve of “Bloodchild,” T’Gatoi, a Tlic, and her political faction stand as outliers for their belief in allowing

some measure of reproductive agency for the Terrans:

Only she and her political faction stood between us and the hordes who did not understand why there was a Preserve—why any Terran could not be courted, paid, drafted, in some way made available to them. Or they did understand, but in their desperation, they did not care.²⁹

The Terrans and Tlic are dependent on each other for their survival. Though the Tlic hold more power, the viscera of the Terran mitigates it as the vulnerability of humans the Tlic exploits is what gives humans some agential power. As Qui, Gan's brother, pessimistically points out, it is in the interest of the Tlic to leave females to their project of human reproductivity to ensure the replenishment of humans that can then bear Tlic offspring in the future. However, Gan wants to believe there is more to the relationship between Tlic and humans than this transaction, but he is not secure in this belief. Thinking of his father's N'Tlic past, Gan wonders, "How had he done it? How did anyone do it?"³⁰ Indeed, knowing and experiencing the gruesomeness of birth and choosing to do it again is a decision motivated by more than purely transactional exchange. Heather Osborne argues that the "anxiety at the heart of the story is an anxiety borne both of the toll of pregnancy and birth on the body, but also an anxiety that arises from a fear of emotional vulnerability with a partner."³¹ Qui especially voices this bodily anxiety and Gan's affection for T'Gatoi helps him overcome his fears in hopes for a mutual future. In the end, T'Gatoi's act of asking

him to bear her grubs reassures Gan enough to feel that his choice is a meaningful one.

Scholars have mulled over the issue of consent in relation to "Bloodchild," questioning the extent to which a vulnerable subject can enter into a relationship on fair terms.³² However, my posthumanist reading of both "Bloodchild" and *Wild Seed* circumvents consent as the primary question because the grounds of exchange are inherently unequal and, despite the fictional renderings of powerful nonhumans, the stories' terms of engagement are derived from a humanist perspective. Amanda Thibodeau's observation of the "risk" that "lies in the pursuit of the unknown, born in the Terrans' choice to seek another world"³³ emphasizes the empathy such narratives impel. As readers, we are positioned to identify and sympathize with Gan and Anyanwu as vulnerable subjects, yet the distinctions of vulnerability and power are not absolute. Symbiosis seems to take consent for granted in the sense that shared reliance between beings is understood. Both parties need their counterparts for mutual survival and it is in this space that the potentiality of other modes of relation can emerge.³⁴ For example, Jerry Jenkins and Katie Scieurba argue that Gan and T'Gatoi allow each other

a space that acknowledges that symbiosis without love, which has defined the Terran–Tlic trade up to this point, makes symbiosis a precarious arrangement because neither party has an interest in the other's survival or well-being outside the context of need.³⁵

Thus, they reach the conclusion that "if we want to avoid moving closer to one-upping

ourselves to death, then it might be helpful to think of reproduction in terms of symbiosis instead of hierarchy.”³⁶ Similarly, Ferreira understands Butler to be suggesting that “only by allowing the more powerful aliens to steer evolution—even if it means allowing them to modify human bodies at the genetic, cellular level—will humans survive and adapt to their new surroundings.”³⁷ In so many words, giving consent becomes unnecessary when the withholding of it likely amounts to death. Instead, Butler’s stories invite us to entertain the “when” rather than “if” of symbiotic relation and reproductivity.³⁸

Embracing the Animal, Pursuing Hybridity

Philosophical considerations of animals have long defined the human against the animal as a category that allows identifying what is unique or essential about humans. This tradition has also used blackness as a foil against which the human is defined in opposition. Such definitions of human and nonhuman often rely on racist hierarchies of being that excluded Black life from humanity.³⁹ Given this philosophical context, Anyanwu’s closeness to the animal world is potentially perilous yet Butler’s choice to engage the history of American plantation slavery while insisting on the importance of animal life poses a challenge to the typical hierarchical ranking of life. Whereas “Bloodchild” offers a strong critique of domestication as it is practiced on Earth—of humankind’s altogether violent, repressive, and deadening treatment of livestock, pets, and other domesticated creatures,”⁴⁰ *Wild Seed* allows for a reading that is appreciative of animal life.

Thinking across boundaries of race and species means considering relations of power in the afterlife of slavery. Anyanwu’s ethical enactments of power over both human and animal lives offer a way of thinking through what it means to truly be cohabitant with others on Earth. As an extension of her body knowledge, her relation to animal life forms offers a means of protection and enables a better understanding of her own physicality. And yet, Butler does not choose to use vegetarian or vegan practices as a political standpoint from which Anyanwu develops such an ethic. Instead, Anyanwu’s closeness to animals comes by way of her consumption of their flesh, which tells her “all she needed to know about the creature’s physical structure.”⁴¹ Eating animals provides more than sustenance for Anyanwu as she ingests their “stories,” gaining new insights into other life forms’ ways of being and ways of “relating to others in a way that is respectful instead of destructive of difference.”⁴² Anyanwu is drawn closer to animals in ways that do not enable her to see them as mere food. She begins to understand them more fully as living beings, noting them as “creatures she was finding it harder to think of as animals.”⁴³ In effacing the boundary between human and nonhuman animals, an appreciation of likeness grows in Anyanwu. She likens swimming with dolphins to “being with another people. A friendly people.”⁴⁴ Sherryl Vint argues that the boundary between “human” and “animal” in philosophical discourse “marks a persistence of its exclusionary and hierarchical logic”⁴⁵ in human cultures. However, Anyanwu’s relation to animals, though described in

terms of “people,” demonstrates the employment of a logic that upsets the human hierarchy, allowing for an acknowledgment and appreciation of an animal way of being not predicated on exclusion.

As Vint notes, Butler’s language in *Wild Seed* and other works “invokes the parallels between slavery and animal domestication”⁴⁶ represented in her depictions of slavery. While Madhu Dubey understands Anyanwu’s ability to assume animal forms an “extraordinary gift that makes her so valuable to Doro’s reproductive colony,”⁴⁷ I argue that her ability to shapeshift into animal forms is what makes her most resistant to his enslaving power. Anyanwu recognizes a new kind of freedom from the bonds of life under Doro’s power when she is undetectable in dolphin form. As she notes, “No slavers with brands and chains here. No Doro with gentle, terrible threats to our children, to her.”⁴⁸ Doro’s inability to detect Anyanwu when taking on animal life forms is due in part to his exclusionary epistemology as his refusal to see the world from other points of view renders him incapable of truly understanding other life forms, despite his body-swapping capacity. The freedom that Anyanwu experiences when in dolphin and other animal forms gives reason to believe that shedding a belief in a fixed boundary between human and nonhuman may just be a way towards a positively transformed society. Breaking through this divide is one part of Anyanwu’s greater resistance to Doro’s breeding imperative. Doro’s power over life aligns most closely with that of white slaveholders who saw their exploitation of the enslaved as a brutal means to self-enrichment. Just as enslaved Black women

lacked control over their own bodies, those subject to Doro’s power have almost no means of countering it.

This capitalistic, instrumentalizing activity fits more closely to those of white slaveholders who operated from racist and sexist beliefs to profit from the bodies of enslaved people of African descent. Thomas, one of Doro’s offspring, gives voice to these beliefs when he yells at Anyanwu, “You’re a black bitch brought here for breeding and nothing more.”⁴⁹ Despite Anyanwu’s covenant with Doro and her relatively higher status granted as his concubine, Thomas is undeterred from attacking her based on her racial and gender identity. Thomas’s racism is especially ironic, given Anyanwu’s recognition of his own mixed heritage. Her assertion that he was “not as white as he seemed to think”⁵⁰ makes a larger point about the absurdity of the insistence on racial purity in the American context. Indeed, Doro too makes oblique reference to this kind of hybridity in reference to another of his sons, Isaac, whom Anyanwu reads as white but Doro calls the “son of an American body,” a “mixed body, white and black and Indian.”⁵¹ This particularly American hybridity demonstrates how Doro’s selection of bodies is indicative of the power of race and masculinity. He feels wearing a Black body to be risky but at the same time characterizes the “old stock” of European descent as insufficient for breeding. Although Doro’s estimation of the status of whiteness suggests there are no distinguishing qualities that should be preserved for generations, his treatment of others as merely “good breeding stock” diminishes

rather than strengthens their position in society.

The racial paradox is further explored in Butler's representation of Anyanwu's racial shapeshifting. Anyanwu's choice to take the form of a white slaveholder in 1840s Louisiana, Edward Warrick, seems counterintuitive to her previous characterization, particularly because of her participation, however limited, in the project of slavery. A desire for safety from Doro may have driven her to the South, and perhaps even into this form but living as a white male slaveholder allows her to rest comfortably in an unbothered life with little concern for the impact of her participation in the slave trade. When an enslaved telepathic man being sold in New Orleans recognizes and speaks to Anyanwu in Edward form, she realizes how much being white has changed her unfavorably: "I was not seeing the slaves in front of me. I would not have thought I could be oblivious to such a thing. I had been white for too long."⁵²

Even as a white slaveowner Anyanwu maintains a distinct perspective from Doro regarding the treatment of others. After centuries, Doro has continued to treat humans like animals in need of husbandry. This act is one that Anyanwu sees as a denigration to her children, noting that others in the south share his attitude and expressing her concern that Doro will make her son, Stephen, "no more than a breeding animal."⁵³ She views breeding not just as a dehumanizing act but also one that disrupts cultural and social development. She argues that treating people inhumanely as slaves deprives them of their ability to value and care for their children and thus of their knowledge of self. Doro does not value his

children for who they are but merely as property, most comfortably when his offspring accept their subjection. Doro's model of hybridity is based on a Western colonial logic of dominance and extraction and while his interest in people is concerned with their ability to reproduce, Anyanwu's ethical hybridity is motivated by an ethic of care that also seeks to heal.

Anyanwu's caring ethic may make her feel vulnerable to Doro's desire to exploit and extract but this attentiveness to care as affection offers the only effective counter to Doro's power. Her embodied knowledge of self as a woman is a power that, despite his expansiveness, Doro simply cannot seize. As she learned centuries ago, Anyanwu's emphasis on knowing how to heal rather than destroy is her salvation. In some instances, she purposely disables her body to exert control.⁵⁴ She warns Doro that she can alter her reproductive organs to make breeding impossible: "[M]y body will give you no satisfaction ... It will not conceive a child now. It will not live much longer itself without me to keep watch on it."⁵⁵ Eventually she submits to reproducing with Isaac, knowing these children will "prolong her slavery."⁵⁶ Though Anyanwu makes this sacrificial compromise, this scene demonstrates both the value and power she holds as a gifted healer with enough body knowledge to distinguish her "self" from the physical shell. In the end, Doro is terrified of her dying and leaving him as he is, alone. The epilogue tells us she gets him to stop killing his breeders after they have served him, and he no longer attempts to control her or her children. Like T'Gatoi's pledge of care to Gan, the promise of Anyanwu living makes

this arrangement of protection from Doro work. Anyanwu is not opposed to intentional reproduction but, unlike Doro, believes in it for the greater purpose of community.

Butler's narratives explored here illustrate how a refusal to embrace difference and reject the hierarchies of power will disrupt reproduction and lead to extinction of one's kind. In "Bloodchild" consent matters in the Preserve because, as T'Gatoi tells Gan, "Because your people arrived, we are relearning what it means to be a healthy, thriving people."⁵⁷ Indeed, Butler's representation of difference in "Bloodchild" and *Wild Seed* suggests that the ability to recognize and build upon affinities with others can offer a means of creating a less inequitable society. Her work engages a rich and complex history of Black women's reproductive experiences and rebellions under slavery, offering a meaningful imagining of a way forward, especially in uncertain futures.

Notes

1. Octavia E. Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 135.

2. See Oriana González, "Where abortion has been banned now that Roe v. Wade is overturned," Axios.com, <https://www.axios.com/2022/06/25/abortion-illegal-7-states-more-bans-coming/> (accessed February 27, 2024).

3. For more on how the genre of science fiction has engaged the topic of abortion, see Palmer Rampell, "The Science Fiction of Roe v. Wade," *English Literary History* 85, no. 1 (2018): 221–52.

4. Alys Eve Weinbaum, "The Afterlife of Slavery and the Problem of Reproductive Freedom," *Social Text* 31, no. 2 (2013): 66.

5. Weinbaum, "The Afterlife," 64.

6. Butler begins her afterword for "Bloodchild": "It amazes me that some people have seen 'Bloodchild' as a story of slavery. It isn't": Butler, *Bloodchild*, 30. Nonetheless, Butler states in an interview with *The Black Scholar*, "I have the feeling now though that what people get out of my work is worth something even if it wasn't what I intended": Butler, "Black Scholar Interview with Octavia Butler: Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre," *The Black Scholar* 17, no. 2 (1986): 15.

7. Sandra Y. Govan, "Connections, Links, and Extended Networks: Patterns in Octavia Butler's Science Fiction," *Black American Literature Forum* 18, no. 2 (1984): 84.

8. Octavia E. Butler and Charles H. Rowell, "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler," *Callaloo* 20, no. 1 (1997): 50.

9. Terrion L. Williamson, *Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 8.

10. Joe Heidenescher, "Problematizing Consent in the Posthuman Era: Octavia E. Butler's 'Bloodchild' and 'Amnesty,'" in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler*, ed. Gregory J. Hampton and Kendra R. Parker (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 58.

11. Adwoa Afful, "Wild Seed: Africa and Its Many Diasporas," *Critical Arts* 30, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 104–5.

12. Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*, in *Seed to Harvest* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 105.

13. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, "'Not Our Own': Sex, Genre, and the Insect Poetics of Octavia Butler's 'Bloodchild,'" in *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 138–9.

14. Ibid., 142.

15. Susana M. Morris, "Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia

E. Butler's 'Fledgling,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, nos 3/4 (2012): 147.

16. Stephanie Jones-Rogers, "Rethinking Sexual Violence and the Marketplace of Slavery: White Women, the Slave Market, and Enslaved People's Sexualized Bodies in the Nineteenth-Century South," in *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas*, ed. Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2018), 118.

17. Octavia Butler, Marilyn Mehaffy, and Ana-Louise Keating, "'Radio Imagination': Octavia Butler on the Poetics of Narrative Embodiment," *MELUS* 26, no. 1 (2001): 49.

18. Butler, Mehaffy, and Keating, "Radio Imagination," 48–9.

19. Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*, in *Seed to Harvest* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 52.

20. Madhu Dubey, "Octavia Butler's Novels of Enslavement," *Novel* 46, no. 3 (2013): 356.

21. Kristen Lillis, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Slavery? The Problem and Promise of Mothering in Octavia E. Butler's 'Bloodchild,'" *MELUS* 39, no. 4 (2014): 7.

22. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics, Culture and Countermemory: The "American" Connection* 17, no. 2 (1987): 68.

23. In an interview for *Callaloo*, Butler shares that the origin of Doro and Anyanwu's names, Doro meaning "the direction from which the sun comes; the east" and Anyanwu meaning "the sun." Indeed, Anyanwu comes into her fullness because of Doro's actions and as dialogical characters their relationship is not without tension: Randall Kenan, "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler," *Callaloo* 14, no. 2 (1991): 499–500.

24. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 6.

25. Maria Aline Ferreira, "Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler," *Science Fiction Studies* 37, no. 3 (2010): 403.

26. Butler, *Bloodchild*, 31.

27. *Ibid.*, 32.

28. *Ibid.*, 9.

29. *Ibid.*, 5.

30. *Ibid.*, 22.

31. Heather Osborne, "The Pregnant Man Story: Echoes of Octavia E. Butler's Themes of Reproductive Anxiety in Fan Writing," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler*, 223.

32. See Osborne, "The Pregnant Man Story," 221–38; Weinbaum, "The Afterlife of Slavery," 49–68.

33. Amanda Thibodeau, "Alien Bodies and a Queer Future: Sexual Revision in Octavia Butler's 'Bloodchild' and James Tiptree, Jr.'s 'With Delicate Mad Hands,'" *Science Fiction Studies* 39, no. 2 (2012): 273.

34. In her discussion with Stephen W. Potts, Butler emphasizes the "different kinds of love" in "Bloodchild" and how her experience of family beyond a spouse and children helps her to envision family and reproduction more expansively: Stephen W. Potts and Octavia E. Butler, "'We Keep Playing the Same Record': A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler," *Science Fiction Studies* (1996): 331–8.

35. Jerry Rafiki Jenkins and Katie Scirba, "Body Knowledge, Reproductive Anxiety, and 'Paying the Rent' in Octavia E. Butler's 'Bloodchild,'" *Science Fiction Studies* 49, no. 1 (2022): 133.

36. Jenkins and Scirba, "Body Knowledge," 124.

37. Ferreira, "Symbiotic Bodies," 403.

38. Sophia Magnone echoes Ferreira's assertion of the necessity for symbiotic survival, arguing "Butler's work often suggests that the only way for humanity to survive and thrive is in concert with other kinds of beings, even (and especially) those that appear threateningly, shockingly different": Sophia Booth Magnone, "How to Love Your Livestock: Negotiating Domestic Partnership in the Multispecies World of 'Bloodchild,'" *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 6, no. 1 (2017): 106.

39. For more on blackness and animal studies, see Joshua Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020); Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Sharon Patricia Holland, *An Other: A Black Feminist Consideration of Animal Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023).

40. Magnone, "How to Love Your Livestock," 109.

41. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 75.

42. Sherryl Vint, "Becoming Other: Animals, Kinship, and Butler's 'Clay's Ark,'" *Science Fiction Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 297.

43. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 79.

44. Ibid.

45. Vint, "Becoming Other," 282.

46. Ibid., 283.

47. Madhu Dubey, "Becoming Animal in Black Women's Science Fiction," in *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2008), 35.

48. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 79.

49. Ibid., 147.

50. Ibid., 150.

51. Ibid., 59.

52. Ibid., 191.

53. Ibid., 189.

54. While a deeper exploration of the representation of disability in *Wild Seed* and "Bloodchild" is beyond the scope of this article, there is significant work on Butler's engagement with disability in her writing. See Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Duke University Press, 2018); Schalk, "Experience, Research, and Writing: Octavia E. Butler as an Author of Disability Literature," *Palimpsest* 6, no. 2 (2017): 153–77, 226; Therí Pickens, "Octavia Butler and the Aesthetics of the Novel," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 167–80; and Therí Pickens, "'You're Supposed to Be a Tall, Handsome, Fully Grown White Man': Theorizing Race, Gender, and Disability in Octavia Butler's Fledgling," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 1 (2014): 33–48.

55. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 116.

56. Ibid., 123.

57. Butler, *Bloodchild*, 25.

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