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Above Nature and Beneath Technology: A Posthumanist Reading

of Octavia Butler's *Parable* Duology

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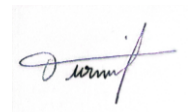|		
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I hereby declare that the doctoral thesis entitled *Above Nature and Beneath Technology: A Posthumanist Reading of Octavia Butler's Parable Duology* is the fruit of my own research and composition and that this latter contains no section that is copied in whole or in part from any other source unless explicitly identified in quotation marks and with detailed, complete, and accurate referencing.

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Dedication

To my mother

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Abstract

Since the dawn of time, humans have been involved in an everlasting struggle to assert and secure their place in the universe. This struggle is most evident in humanism and the continental philosophies it has influenced. By positioning the human as the center of the universe, humanism has triggered challenges to this anthropocentric worldview. These debates that often revolve around the quarrel between humans and nature have expanded in recent centuries to include a third element, which is technology. Technological development started to accelerate during the Industrial Revolution and has continued unrelentingly to now wields an overwhelming influence on contemporary life. The limitations of humanism in addressing existential questions, particularly in the light of unprecedented technological advancement, gave rise to the emergence of posthumanism as a philosophical trajectory. This thesis aims to explore the representation of the universal hierarchy and human survival in American speculative fiction. Specifically, the study conducts a textual analysis of Octavia Butler's duology, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), through a posthumanist lens. Set in an apocalyptic future, these novels portray a world where humanity struggles for survival, evoking, hence, discussions about human, natural, and technological interactions. The study demonstrates the application of the posthumanist theory as a framework for literary analysis, offers insights into humanity's place within the non-human world, and challenges traditional notions of superiority and inferiority.

Keywords: *Parable* duology, Nature, posthumanism, technology.

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General Introduction

As part of the humanities, the study of literature reflects aspects of human existence and generates predictions about human behavior. This makes literary forms, movements, and genres a means to bring fiction closer to facts and explain the ties between the historical background and literary productions of every era. Even the more aesthetic, formalistic, and art-for-art-sake-driven movements can be related to a historical basis in the sense that sociopolitical prosperity allows such arts to thrive while its absence forces them to be committed to a cause. Therefore, the trepidations of contemporary times that mostly stem from the depressing decline of ecology and the overwhelming growth of technology pave the way for the emergence of the speculative fiction genre.

Although English speculative fiction can be said to owe its existence to the pen of a woman since it is agreeable that it dates back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), this genre has ironically been majorly dominated by white male writers. Many female authors, though, attempt to break this pattern by producing some of the most appreciated pieces of dystopian speculative fiction. Among them is Octavia Estella Butler (1947 – 2006). Being black and female, Butler writes about worlds overwhelmed by powers beyond human control while simultaneously assuming the cause of her people by picturing such realms from the lens of the often-marginalized categories. In her fiction, dystopian worlds are visualized from the eyes of the minority, and the disillusionment of the future is felt through individuals who have been experiencing very little to no fairness for generations in a row. More importantly, the dystopia presented in Butler's works is as close to contemporary times as it "*produces a shock of familiarity rather than estrangement*" (qtd. in Phillips, 106). This makes her one of the highly appreciated authors whenever the discourse of contemporary American speculative fiction is evoked.

Among Butler's most appreciated novels are *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), better known as the *Parable* duology. The latter becomes relevant in the present time insofar as a considerable portion of its futuristic plot is set during the twenties and the thirties of the twenty-first century. Written from the first-person perspective in a journaling style, the duology follows the life of the protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina from her gated community in California toward achieving her utopian dream of setting the fate of humanity among the stars.

The first novel's plot is set in a decaying futuristic America, where human deeds cause a massive disruption in environment, politics, and values, leading to a near apocalypse. *Parable of the Sower* begins in 2024 in a fictional town in California called Robledo. It depicts the domestic living conditions of the latter's inhabitants from the protagonist's perspective. Soon thereafter, the gated community gradually falls apart, forcing Lauren to expedite her plan of moving northward. The rest of the novel follows her journey, companionship, struggle, and growing posthumanist ideologies that are inspired by nature and the universe. The novel closes in the year 2027 at the edge of a chance to establish the protagonist's long-sought-for utopian dream.

The novel's sequel begins five years after the end of the first one, with new themes centering around political views and technology. It is mostly set in Lauren's newly founded community, and it showcases the emergence of an extremist Christian political group that abuses technological advancement to revive mischievous practices such as slavery. *Parable of the Talents* blurs many lines between right and wrong as a means of promoting novice perspectives. Therefore, the two novels make an exemplary case study regarding the outgrowth and dilemma of mankind while struggling amid the timeless prominent power of nature and the increasingly dominant presence of technology. By doing so, the case study allows a literary investigation into the human's place amid the universal hierarchy.

Along this vein, and whenever the universal hierarchy discourse is evoked, a reference to the posthuman condition is due. Unlike the principles of humanism, which praises the uniqueness and superiority of the human race, the posthumanists embrace the belief that humans are merely a part of a larger system. Posthumanism, in its essence, is an attempt to nullify some of the answers that humanists provide about humans and the universe due to their inability to reason with the modern intellectual class. The latter opened its eyes to a world governed by technology, pleased by technology, yet wary of technology while the ghost of ecological threat remains in the background of it all. This generation could neither assimilate with nature like spirituals foresaw nor with technology like scientists anticipated. Nature has often been perceived as a thing of the past whereas technology as a thing of the future, and in between, resides a keen dread from both. In the literary sphere, this mosaic of ecological and technological contexts is crystalized in speculative fiction. Accordingly, the present thesis addresses the problematic of the literary representation of universal hierarchy at the peak of the posthumanist condition. It aims to investigate how nature and technology contribute to the plight of the disempowered posthuman while simultaneously being a source of survival in a futuristic dystopian setting.

To reach this endeavor, questions arise regarding multiple facets of the three main variables of this study, namely, nature, humans, and technology: How can the posthumanist philosophical trajectory be adopted into literary studies? What is the fate of nature in the Anthropocene and how does it serve human survival? What is the fictional representation of the posthuman and why is the latter more fit to survive the world depicted in Butler's *Parables*? How is technology shown in the novels and is it a factor of protection or threat? Each one of these questions is immersed in a larger query concerning human behavior regarding the above-mentioned aspects.

The study is hypothesized to draw a link between reality and fiction by interweaving trending philosophical and political perspectives with the fictional events of the duology. In more detailed terms, this thesis' hypotheses are as follows: First, Posthumanism can be applied in reading a literary text by focusing on the transition of mankind from a humanist to a posthumanist stance and all the factors that aid this transition. Second, Nature may be perceived more submissively in light of a world dominated by human actions and technology. Third, the posthuman could be a natural and inevitable step in homo sapiens' adaptation to an ever-changing reality. Finally, technology may be depicted as a double-edged sword insofar as human survival is concerned. Each of these hypotheses will be tested through the chapters concerned with answering the research questions.

The long-term goal of this research is to be a part of a larger scale of speculative fiction studies. Deconstructing this into main objectives provides the following: The first objective is to improve the understanding of the posthumanist theory. The second is to analyze survival mechanisms in the *Parable* duology to serve as a model to study human behavior in catastrophes. The third is to identify a balanced way in which human thought and behavior can be flexibly adjusted to be placed in the right spot of the universal hierarchy as a means of survival. The fourth is to review the dependability on nature and technology in the present, and possibly future times. The final one is to investigate the posthumanist inclusivity of minorities as opposed to the humanist marginalization of a considerable portion of homo sapiens.

The world has been noticeably dominated by the threat of a sudden apocalypse since the two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War, the War on Terror, the Global Financial Crisis, and countless natural disasters. Such an apocalyptic threat was realized recently at the dawn of the current decade through a pandemic that spread to every corner of the world and caused most human activities to discontinue. The only way to communicate,

trade, learn, and perform any other human activity was via technology. In recent years, the world started to resemble the realm of a science fiction work. Therefore, it was found engaging to select a topic that evokes queries about the role of technology and the place of nature in today's post-globalized world. Furthermore, as the *Parable* novels are mostly set in the near future, they provide a feasible and plausible case study for tackling the topic at hand.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. **The first one** lays the theoretical and conceptual backgrounds by introducing the philosophical lens through which the case study is read and analyzed. It gradually moves from the broad philosophical trajectory to a narrow theoretical stand, while relating the major stands of the assumed theory with the essential variables of the current study. The concepts that are elaborated in the first chapter function as a reference on which the analytical part of the thesis relies. The chapter also functions as an extended review of the crucial data and many of the preliminary sources regarding posthumanism. Based on this, the analytical part contains three chapters. **The second chapter** of the thesis focuses on the fictional representation of nature and contemporary problems related to climate change in the Anthropocene. It also takes into account the futuristic aspect of the novel in shedding light on relating present ecological problems with possible future dystopia. Afterward, **the third chapter** attempts to read the human element in the novels while focusing on the making and becoming of the posthuman. This chapter brings to the fore a clearer comparison between the humanist and posthumanist standpoints. Lastly, the thesis concludes with the most important and novice variable, which is that of technology. **The last chapter** brings the latter to the timeless quarrel between humans and nature to request the universal hierarchy from a posthumanist perspective. The thesis, then, concludes by answering the main question about the human place in the new technologized reality.

Chapter One

Posthumanism and Re-Thinking the World through Speculative Fiction

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Introduction

Discussions that intertwine philosophy and literature have been highly emphasized since the dawn of modernity. Continental philosophers like Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, Husserl, Lyotard, Foucault, and others introduced thought systems that contributed to the birth of new concepts in literary criticism. Critics such as Ihab Hassan and Linda Hutcheon fathered some of the controversial contemporary concepts that correlate philosophy with literature. The entanglement of post-Kantian philosophy with novice genres adopting themes of a rapidly changing world gave rise to an explanatory system of ideas known as the theory. Recent literary studies suggest that the subjects discussed are becoming more and more abstract, which requires an increasing necessity for the inclusion of the latter.

Among this set of contemporary philosophies immersed in the literary sphere is posthumanism. This chapter is devoted to exploring, deconstructing, and clarifying posthumanism's aspects regarding the human's place in the universe. The chapter aims at fusing the barriers between the philosophical and theoretical facets of posthumanism by answering questions regarding what posthumanism is, and on what ground it is applied to literature. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first one tackles the lenses through which the case study has often been regarded to infer the gap of this research. This is followed by a section that addresses the philosophical, historical, and theoretical background of posthumanism with a specific focus on its main doctrines. The third one contextualizes posthumanism within the Anthropocene, thus offering a broad posthumanist perspective of the main elements that will later be elaborated through the analysis, which are the human, nature, and technology, and their relations to one another. The last section finally reaches the collaboration between posthumanism and literature, particularly speculative fiction. It briefly explores some of the tendencies of relating the natural and the technological within the fictional and the ways speculative fiction has itself been theorized as a posthumanist

endeavor. The overall objective of this theoretical chapter is to pave the way for the analytical chapters that will apply the discussions at hand to the case study.

1. The Thematic Lenses of Parables: A Literature Review

The prevalence of the dystopian mode of writing has drawn literary critics and researchers alike to regard every aspect of this genre from all possible lenses. It can, then, be argued that there is an inherent desire to dig deep into the mechanisms that operate futuristic dystopian speculative fiction. This desire is traced back to the natural human curiosity to uncover, predict, and survive the unknown future. In more ways than one, nature and technology can seemingly be located at the center of this triangle since they notably link the remnants of the past to the path of the future. They also represent a considerable concern of dystopia and cover a remarkable portion of speculative fiction's subject matter. The inclination towards the various, sometimes contradictory, representations of nature and technology in fiction aids in bringing the philosophy of posthumanism closer to literature. In their endeavor to investigate the impulses, aspirations, demeanors, as well as the very being of the posthuman, numerous researchers selected Octavia E. Butler's *Parable* duology as a case study. A preliminary overview of these sets of papers brings to the fore three major ideas that revolve around the posthuman, which are community, environment, and identity.

When tackling the posthumanist ideology, it is necessary to locate the posthuman under a certain frame. From the dawn of history till the futuristic setting of *Parables*, humans have constantly sought to establish, protect, belong to, or break apart from communities. In this respect, Mathias Nilges emphasized the notion of change in crafting a new political and socioeconomic significance within the community in his essay, "'We Need the Stars': Change, Community, and the Absent Father in Octavia Butler's *Parables*." He argued that, through her dystopia, Butler showcases "*the tragic consequences of rejecting change by means of restoring paternalistic structures*" (Nilges 1334). The presence of patriarchy in the

novels was seen as an obstacle to the realization of the required change. Along a similar vein, Clara Escoda Agustí attempts to trace the core of establishing or altering a community down to the subjectivity of the main, double-marginalized protagonist in her essay, "The Relationship between Community and Subjectivity." However, her focus was more narrowed than that of Nilges, for she targeted her attention on the endeavor of the black female protagonist to break apart from a decaying community towards building a new one. While these two researchers focused, mainly, on the political, economic, and social features of the posthumanist community of the novels, Michael Brandon McCormack, in his article, "'Your God is a Racist, Sexist, Homophobic, and a Misogynist … Our God is Change': Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler and Afrofuturist Critiques of (Black) American Religion," transcended the tangible aspects and immersed in the more spiritual side. He agreed with Agustí on regarding the novels as the quest of an Afro-American woman constructing a community, but he narrowed it down even further by shedding light upon the construction of a new religion within the latter.

More deeply, Nilges extended his analysis to distinguish a postmodern and a post-Fordist reality. Based on the writings of the French Regulation School, he concluded that the *Parable* duology is not a postmodern but a post-Fordist fiction, in the sense that it describes a major transformation in the totality of the communal life, including the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects (1333). Nonetheless, Agustí applied a black feminist approach in her investigation of the embodiment as well as the function of the black female protagonist amid the patriarchal, capitalist society of the novels (Agustí 351). Similar to Nilges, she related to the notion of change by arguing that the protagonist can achieve the latter amongst the members of the community that she, singlehandedly, finds. Accordingly, the researcher concluded that "*Olamina's utopia is then an interior utopia*" (358). Moreover, Agustí highlighted the notion of individuality by proving that change must first take place

"*within the individuals*" before having any lasting impact on the community as a whole (358). Related to the idea of individuality, McCormack concluded that Butler's *Parables* advocate for "*communal solidarity*" (24) through individualism as well as a radically diverse and new religion. He referred to the latter as the "*(black/feminist/ youth) religious movement*" (23). The researcher reached this conclusion by providing an Afrofuturist critique of the Afro-American religion and its dominance over the community in the two novels as a way of tackling the notion of community. Lastly, he argued that, in the ever-changing world that Butler creates, the chance that the black communities have to survive relies, not upon the leadership of the elder or most decent, but upon those who accept, articulate, and drive change (25).

Over and above that, Nilges' essay was targeted upon the permissiveness, or lack thereof, of the occurrence of change in the community represented in the novels. However, even though one of the major thematic aspects of the duology is finding a new religion in which "*God is Change*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 5), he failed to address religion as a major point in the duology and the idea of community in general. Agustí and McCormack covered that gap –the latter to a larger extent than the former. However, neither of the above-mentioned papers managed to construct a relation between the posthumanist community – with its socioeconomics, politics, belief system, and individuals– and the threat of a declining ecology. This is one of the points that this research is aiming to fulfill.

The aforementioned analysis of the theme of change within the community leads to environmental change and ecological disturbance in the futuristic world of *Parables*. In more ways than one, climate change is admittedly believed to be one of the direct causalities of technology or, more particularly, of industrial wastes. For this reason, the novels' treatment of the theme of the environment –and the related economic troubles– is highly relevant to this thesis. Naturally, this area caught the attention of many researchers. To begin, Janet

Fiskio published an essay entitled "Apocalypse and Ecotopia: Narratives in Global Climate Change Discourse" to analyze what she termed as global climate change discourse, or GCC. She also shed light on the unconventionality of the narrative by questioning the role of the disabled body, intending to reconsider the issue of climate change. Moreover, Elham Mohammadi Achachelooei diagnosed the relationship between humans and nature to find ways for a sustainable environment in her article, "Butler's *Parables*: A Posthumanist Call to Address Ecological Irresponsibility." Similarly, in her article, "Troubling Ecology: Wangechi Mutu, Octavia Butler, and Black Feminist Interventions in Environmentalism," Chelsea M. Frazier aimed to explore the black female subjectivity and its position within, as well as its relation to, the environmental world through, first, evoking an understanding of her place in the sociopolitics of the posthumanist world.

Through her analysis, Janet Fiskio divided the climate change discourse into two dominant narratives, which she labeled as "*the lifeboat*" (Fiskio 18) and "*the collective*" (22). To draw a distinction between these narratives in speculative fiction, Fiskio interweaved the aesthetic and narrative modes of the work with the intersectionality of race, gender, class, ability, and nation. This draw of such a relationship was more obvious in the works of Achachelooei and Frazier. They both attempted to investigate, respectively, the connection between humans and nature, and among all elements of nature (including humans, animals, and vital materialism). To elaborate, Achachelooei argued that "*Lauren embodies this female environmentalist stand*" as opposed to "*a masculine Christian*" perspective (7). That is, she pointed toward a more specific deviation in the "*self-righteous discourse*" within the "*obsessively self-centered community,*" which is represented in the protagonist's "*new community and system of mutual interaction where no interaction is based on the unilateral recruiting of the rest for the benefit of self*" (5). In other words, she referred to the inclination toward a more natural community that obeys the rules of nature, transcending, hence, the

hierarchy that was imposed by institutionalized religion in the novels. On a larger scale, Frazier evoked a posthumanist comprehension of the world by investigating the ecological relationality between various sets of materials. Additionally, she used a black diasporic framework to show how Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is an implementation of incorporating environmental studies with an explicit critique of racist, sexist, classist, and any kind of hierarchal practices (Frazier 40).

Fiskio concluded that Butler's work is considered a collective narrative (Fiskio 31) and that the protagonist's hyperempathy is an evolutionary aspect "*that will enable humanity to form alliances,*" surviving, thus, the global climate change through collective means (26). However, she disregarded the fact that the same collective discourse was used later in the novels by a religious and political institution as a counter-cause to destroy Lauren's ecotopia. Achachelooei further resolved this collectiveness to include a larger scale. She evoked the notion of religion in the novels and argued that this "theological ground" relates to the establishment of "*an egalitarian society based on a non-hierarchical connection between human beings and nature*" (Mohammadi 26). Still, the posthumanist perspective that this research claims to adopt challenges its conclusion since the conviction of the aforementioned society revolves around viewing change as a God. Naturally, this divinity of change leads back to finding another system of hierarchy. More particular to Achachelooei's conclusion, Frazier's article showed that Butler's work falls more under a vital materialist stance than an environmental one; nevertheless, she concluded that either reading of the novels would lessen the productivity of Butler's work. Instead, she suggested the creation of a new political theory that would serve the ecological relationality of a black feminist political project. Although the article succeeded in addressing the issue of a hierarchal system in a supposed posthumanist world where new ecological ethics are being established at the expense of improving the existing ones, the black female protagonist aspired to establish a community

based upon her more philosophical and less theological belief and also upon a sustained source of nutrition. In simple terms, Frazier's paper focused on the hardships that the black woman faces and neglected her vital role in reviving the environmental stance, which puts her at the top of the hierarchy, if any, in Butler's world. All in all, in their attempt to evoke the hierarchy of humans and non-humans in the *Parables*, these researchers focused mostly on the relationship between humans and nature and revolved around the major point of disability but failed to shed the spotlight on its centrality in crafting the very ideology that is responsible on censoring such relationship in the novels. Thus, the research in hand will revisit those relations and go beyond them to question the development, hierarchy, and dependability of the posthuman body amid nature.

Technology, community, and the ecology of the contemporary world are subjected to human actions and intentions. For the sake of fulfilling this study, and to determine the function, necessity, and destiny of the above-mentioned, it is essential to dive into the engine that drives the dystopian condition of the novels towards more post-apocalyptic utopian dreams. In this regard, many researchers and critics sought to trace down these vast world conditions into one, hardly less complicated, endeavor: analyzing the human purpose. At the outset, Peter G. Stillman aimed, in his article, "Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's *Parables*," to offer a dystopian and utopian reading of the duology, evoking, thus, the agency of the protagonist in escaping the civilization in disarray and her troublesome quest toward establishing a utopia, which is challenged by "*increasing social divisions, economic inequality, global warming, and the political fantasies of the anti-government right (in Sower) and the religious right (in Talents)*" (Stillman 15). Likewise, Jerry Phillips investigated the role of human agency as a necessary existential value, not only in seeking modern utopian possibilities but also in anticipating future dystopias in his paper, "The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia

Butler's *Parable of the Sower.*" On a deeper level, though, Jim Miller related to the notions of utopia, dystopia, and the purpose of mankind in his article, "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision," by evoking estrangement as a literary tactic to analyze the artfulness of Butler's world. He, then, argued that estrangement, in its essence, is "*an attempt to push us toward the New*" (Miller 337), which leads to every work of defamiliarization and revival of new sets of thoughts and actions to be utopian-driven, even the seemingly dystopian overtone of some works such as *Parables.*

Similar to Michael Brandon McCormack, who interpreted the community of *Parables* through analyzing the religious standpoint in the novels, Stillman argued that Earthseed, the religion that Olamina conveys, is "*a post-humanist way of being in the world*" (Stillman 23); that is, he argued that the writer advocates for post-identity (28), which disregards the cultural and ethnic diversities and concerns solely with the being of one as human. He concluded that the duology marks a failure of both the traditional American Dream of individualism as well as the "*reliance on neighborhood or the nuclear family*" (21). Correspondingly, Phillips remarked that "*human purpose has been lost at not merely the individual level, but also at the widest social level*" (Phillips 304). Through analyzing Acorn's destiny and being, he stressed that it can be considered "*an anti-modern undertaking, not unlike a type of the utopian commune that sprang up in the nineteenth century as part of the revolt against industrialism*" (308). However, he emphasized the "*distinctive human elements*" that interweave with what could be an initial interpretation of Acorn as an anti-modern project of utopia. Additionally, Stillman believed that the novel still inclines toward the dependency on relationships, but puts a greater emphasis on the protagonist's agency and actions as essential to transcending the contemporary dystopian condition (Stillman 28). Moreover, Miller advocated that Butler's work is an "*exercise in overcoming the pessimism of the intellect with an optimism of the will*" (Miller 357). He

emphasized the role of the individual, particularly the black female, and the free will and purpose in reaching, not a state of utopia, but "*a post-apocalyptic hoping informed by the lessons of the past*" (336).

Stillman's article managed to present a thorough analysis of all aspects of transcending dystopia and inspiring a utopia. Nonetheless, despite mentioning the notion of technology, one of the prevailing notions that govern the events of the novels, the research failed to elaborate it to the deserved extent. Also, the arguments provided on the dichotomy of men and nature and men and technology (Stillman 29) require further contextualization. Moreover, by arguing that utopianism is grounded on the actions and agencies of the subjects (Phillips 309) rather than a giving realm of absolute idealism, Phillips concluded that Butler minimized utopianism to survivalism. Nevertheless, he failed to acknowledge the fact that *Parables*' dystopia was as much a result of human actions as Olamina's utopian dream. Hence, it might not be safe to relate survivalism solely to utopianism, since the act of survival in the novels includes counter-actions that add to the dystopian condition. Finally, Miller's argument went beyond utopia to cover the post-utopian hope, which is targeted by the lessons of the past and expectations of the future (Miller 357). His analysis, though, was more inclined toward the aspects of the tradition of feminist utopian writing, leaving little space to regard the intriguing notion of post-utopia from various lenses. For this reason, this thesis intends to shed more light on the way human motives and purpose are the driving wheels that determine the incorruptibility, or lack thereof, of technological weaponry as well as biotechnology in the dystopian and utopian dichotomy of Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents.*

To conclude, the mentioned set of research is a sample of the preliminary review of the literature that was approached initially for the sake of formulating a research problematic. The main overlapping gap that this literature review showcases is that of the hierarchy among

nature, mankind, and technology. Though the latter was referred to in many of the previous papers, it was not tackled thoroughly about all the variables presented in the novel. For this reason, the proposed thesis will intend to shed light on this matter as was already explained in the statement of the problem.

To fill in the detected gap, this thesis presents a qualitative approach to a literary study by applying a literary criticism method. The case study of this thesis is critically read, interpreted, and analyzed in accordance with the social, economic, environmental, religious, and political context of contemporary times. Since literature has recently been increasingly open to interdisciplinary theories, the novels are regarded from the lens of the posthumanist philosophical trajectory with a side endeavor of theorizing its principles within the literary sphere.

2. From a Philosophical Base to a Theoretical Approach

Based on the introductory explanation of the relation between philosophy and theory, it can be noted that posthumanism, in its essence, still holds a rather philosophical orientation. Although it has been under development for decades, its tendencies, which will be elaborated on henceforth, have been included in almost every field of study that revolves, albeit remotely, around humans, the environment, and technology alike. It is fair to remark that posthumanism has been theorized on a number of occasions and by numerous thinkers –some of whom did not even use the term posthumanism– but in the attempt to utilize it as an instrument to analyze a literary text, i.e. as a literary theory, it becomes rather challenging to contain, conjoin, and coordinate its various tendencies. Therefore, the first section of this chapter seeks to trace the foundation of posthumanism, starting from its philosophical ties with humanism until the emergence of critical posthumanism.

2.1.The 'Post' in Posthumanism

Notwithstanding the semantic origin of the term posthumanism, which stems from humanism, its connotation, though, goes slightly deeper than that. The term may indicate an easy connection with humanism. The prefix 'post' usually stands for 'after' or 'beyond.' Nonetheless, the recent plethora of the post-isms in literary theory resulted in a near extinguishment in the connotation of this prefix. Postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and post-nationalism are mere examples of the many post-isms that appeared, and it would be no surprise if new theories emerged to assume such terms as post-feminism, post-Marxism, and the like. Some critical approaches went so far as to double the use of the prefix in post-postmodernism and post-poststructuralism, for instance. New directions in criticism are now collectively referred to as post-theory. It would, however, still be short-sided to eliminate the meaning of the 'post' entirely. The root associated with the prefix is, if not the prior or contrary, a background and a starting point from which the approach was born. For this reason, tackling posthumanism oftentimes begins with humanism (Snaza and Karavanta 9; Badmington 12).

In an endeavor to define posthumanism, many writers saw it best to start by explaining what the 'post' refers to within this particular context. Andy Miah, for instance, situates posthumanism in parallel with humanity, focusing his explanation on the physicality of the latter:

> [T]he 'post' of posthumanism need not imply the absence of humanity or moving beyond it in some biological or evolutionary manner. Rather, the starting point should be an attempt to understand what has been omitted from an anthropocentric worldview, which includes coming to terms with how the Enlightenment centering of humanity has been revealed as inadequate. (Miah 2)

To support this definition by locating posthumanism in a given timeline, the definition of Cary Wolfe can be relevant. He claims that it "*comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world*" (xv). Humanism itself is multifaceted. Defining humanism in a historical context may be noticeably different from defining it in a religious or literary one.

Among the facets of resemblance between humanism and posthumanism is that both encompass a wide area of study. Posthumanism, as Drewitz further explains, tackles a breadth of theoretical constellations regarding human existence (62). In other contexts, posthumanism is put in parallel with humanism. It works as a means to rewrite, amend, or sometimes correct some of the conclusions that the humanists reached during the dawn of the Renaissance and after. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, for instance, travel back with the doctrines of posthumanism to revisit literary movements across the early modern and postmodern eras. In their collaboration to write *Posthumanist Shakespeares,* they view the epitome of humanism from a posthumanist perspective:

> [T]here is a new uncertainty in Shakespeare and early modern studies. The uncertainty this time, however, seems more profound—too pressing are the 'future of the humanities' and the 'role of literature' questions to allow for a simple return to business as usual in the post-theoretical English department. What returns instead is a new kind of pluralism, precisely around the notion of the human and humanism, and around the relationship between literature and life, and between mind, body and technology. (Herbrechter and Callus 1137)

The discourse of posthumanism is never stripped away from an attached reference to technology, and more often than not, to nature as well. These elements combined, as

incredibly vast as they are, are referred to as the nonhuman element, which is a key feature in any posthumanist study.

Tackling a subject with a pluralized range of theories often leads to ensuing contradictions in perspectives and even in core aspects. Therefore, to keep it contained within the relevant scope of the study, posthumanism is best tackled from a philosophical and theoretical dimension. In a broader sense, posthumanism can be defined as "*the cultural condition occasioned by twenty-first-century biopolitics, technoculture, lifescapes and all the desires and anxieties arising therein, as well as the discourse that studies all that*" (qtd. in Drewitz 62). Still, one crucial common feature among posthumanist theorists is their rejection of the notion of human exceptionalism and everything that stems from it. Humans are born to regard themselves as exceptional from every nonhuman species as well as from what might be referred to as 'tools,' for lack of a better term, which later developed into technologies that facilitate the life of humans. In the eyes of the posthumanists, though, human exceptionalism is far from taken for granted. It is rather regarded as any other hypothesis that necessitates testing through a constructed study of the divisions between nature and culture, human and animal, and human and machine, to name only a few.

In light of recent global changes that include the worldwide spread of a pandemic (COVID-19), the development of a controversial artificial intelligence (ChatGPT, as the most popular one), and various pressing events, like global warming (which began to be unofficially referred to as global boiling), civil wars (in Sudan, Yamen, and Syria, to name a few), national wars (Russian-Ukrainian War and Zionist-Palastinian War, as the most dominant ones), and the constant and immediate threat of a third World War, that draw a question mark beside the human being's existence, the doctrines of posthumanism become increasingly relevant. The place of the human being in the universal hierarchy can be observed to be no longer secure, both theoretically and practically. Whereas it was taken for

granted by scholars and philosophers to regard humans as the only rational beings amid a world of predictable mechanisms that can be categorized into the natural and the technological, this equation has recoiled. Humans started to follow specific patterns of living as a side effect of globalization and to represent nothing more than a bolt in the larger wheel of capitalism, while nature and technology are assuming diverged, unpredictable patterns. Posthumanism stands amid this chaos to answer questions about human existence and being without romanticizing mankind as the center of the universe. To this end, it is important to tackle a few of the relevant trends that are included in the posthumanist theory.

2.2. The First Posthumanist and the Death of Human

The principles and perspectives of posthumanism are not necessarily visible solely in the works of those philosophers and thinkers who identify themselves as posthumanists (Landgraf 1). Such perspectives can rather be found in a time even before the coinage of the term itself. Tracing thinkers with posthumanist views can be a long and complicated journey that may find its roots in ancient civilizations. For this reason, and to make it more relatable, posthumanism is often tackled in a relatively modern context. The first glimpse of posthumanism, accordingly, can be located in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche is seen as the first posthumanist due to his nonconventional perspective regarding humanism. On multiple occasions, he raises doubts about the doctrines of the latter, creating a tradition of questioning everything that stems from it. This provides the formula for the emergence of continental philosophy in the twentieth century: Bergson, Rousseau, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Fanon, De Beauvoir, and bell hooks questioned the core notions of transcendental categories, consciousness, metaphysics, knowledge, logocentrism, white, man, and white woman respectively. To further elaborate on Nietzsche's posthumanist views, it is crucial to tackle his definition of the human as opposed to the humanist vision of the human.

At the outset, the facets that build human exceptionalism can be narrowed to two major pillars, which are the making and the purpose of the human. Questioning these two core conceptions inevitably results in shaking the belief in human exceptionalism. On the one hand, Nietzsche raises keen doubts about the making of the human by tackling not only the physical construction, but also the social, psychological, and metaphysical escalations of mankind on multiple occasions:

> That nobody *gives* human beings their qualities, neither God, nor society, nor their parents and ancestors, nor *they themselves* […] *Nobody* is responsible for being here in the first place, for being constituted in such and such a way, for being in these circumstances, in this environment. (F. W. Nietzsche 36; emphasis in the original)

In this passage, Nietzsche refers to the death of theistic humanism (God), social constructionism (society), biological determinism (parents and ancestors), and existentialism (they themselves). All of these aspects are identified by humanists as part of human making. He is, therefore, rejecting the conventional belief of all its forms. This can be seen as a major mark in the death of the humanist human. An alternative, or rather, multiple alternatives, to the latter can be found in Western philosophy that was inspired by his argument.

On the other hand, Nietzsche evokes the notion of a goal, or the ultimate human purpose, from a negative standpoint:

> The fatality of our essence cannot be separated from the fatality of all that was and will be. We are *not* the consequence of a special intention, a will, a goal; we are *not* being used in an attempt to reach an "ideal of humanity," or an "ideal of happiness," or an "ideal of morality"—it is absurd to want to *divert* our essence towards some goal. *We* have invented the concept "goal": in reality, goals are *absent.* (36; emphasis in the original)

The rejection of human purpose, or an end to a deed, eliminates the second half of the presence of the humanist human. While these two points represent the totality of what may be referred to as 'the death of the human,' other critiques of major humanist principles can still be observed in Nietzsche's works.

Whereas humanism emphasizes responsibility, exceptionalism, and free will as part of the human purpose to reach a certain end, Nietzsche rejects them entirely. He believes that systems of responsibility and punishment starting from Judaism, and Christianity to modern liberal democracy are set in accordance with the weakest human. This limits the potentiality of mankind and imposes mediocrity on individuals worldwide:

> Wherever responsibilities are sought, what tends to be doing the seeking is the instinct of *wanting to punish and rule*. One has stripped becoming of its innocence when some state of being- such-and-such is traced back to will, to intentions, to acts: the doctrine of the will was essentially invented for purposes of punishment, that is, for purposes of *wanting to find people guilty*. (35; emphasis in the original)

Responsibilities, in the eyes of Nietzsche, are part of a larger mechanism of rule that lessens humans' wild, hence natural, abilities. Creativity, vitality, art, music, writing, and even violence stem from within the human, whilst rules, rights, duties, and responsibilities are imposed from without. Humans are agents by nature, and the principles that were imposed by the humanists –in their attempt to rationalize human existence– ensue in a passivity related to the desire to fit in. This idea plants the initial seed of the posthuman, which can, in this regard, be seen as a reaction against the picture of the human that was drawn by humanism.

To this end, the genre of speculative fiction comes with the primitive notion of survival-of-the-fittest to show that merely the ideal human being can survive when the world

is assumed back by wild and dominating powers, be it natural or technological. This, in turn, presents a challenge to the mediocre standards of the responsibility/punishment dichotomy that Nietzsche refers to. That is, by criticizing the making and purpose of the human, Nietzsche transcends the humanist perception of the human, giving rise to the posthuman. While he did not explicitly apply the term posthuman, Nietzsche coined the concept of the Overman or Übermensch (72). The latter is a human being who succeeds in rising above the herd and achieving liberty from ordinary, mediocre rules. The Overman is sometimes mistakenly regarded as a superhuman; nevertheless, super qualities are not necessarily associated with this description. An artist, for example, can be seen as an Overman insofar as one reimagines the world from one's internal perspective. While Nietzsche can accordingly be seen as the first posthumanist advocate, the aspects of posthumanism circulated under the pens of various other thinkers as will be explained next.

2.3. Grounding Posthumanist Perspectives

Nietzsche's philosophy inspired many thinkers to question what had once been taken for granted. While it was essential to briefly tackle his view to understand the drive that triggered the posthumanist quest at hand, it is equally important to explore some of the posthumanist perspectives that later helped set the groundstones for this theory. In light of moving beyond the prevailing humanist trends of the nineteenth century and before, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson asks the question, "*What and crucially whose conception of humanism are we moving beyond?*" (215). To answer this question, it is important to trace the transition in thought processes that accompanied thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

A more contemporary figure of posthumanism is the influential and prolific French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. He was a vitalist philosopher who introduced novice ways of thinking about the environment, nature, ecology, and animals and was influenced by the

philosophy of Henry Bergson, Hume, and Nietzsche. His works on the plane of immanence contributed to some of the core attitudes of posthumanism. Immanence , in this context, refers to the inclusion rather than the exclusion, and the joining rather than the transcendence, of universal elements. This idea opposes the humanists' image of the human as superior to the rest of the creatures for possession of consciousness. Whilst the essence of humanism resides in the unquestionable belief in the centrality of the human in the universe, posthumanism adopts Deleuze's concept of immanence to reject the presence of any universal hierarchy and advocate for an intermingling link between parts of existence.

Deleuze believes that mankind is an expression or a constituent of a larger whole that can be understood holistically and dynamically as a kind of complex system, where things are interconnected in complex ways. This whole can be perceived in many ways as nature. However, he still argues for the simultaneous existence of enormous differentiation and individuation. The coexistence of individuation, on the one hand, and a kind of complex whole, on the other, present multiplex ties between humans and nature, which interferes with redefining the human as the subject and amending the one-dimensional view of nature as the object. To explain the functions in duality, hence, the dynamics in between are seen to be in constant transformation. This formulates the posthuman's intricate view regarding nature.

Moving from without to within, and inspired by the findings of twentieth-century psychoanalysis, Deleuze, along with Guattari, introduced the notion of the Body without Organs (BwO). The latter is a philosophical attempt to comprehend the making of the human and, by extension, the making of everything that exists. Put differently, it refers to a mechanism driving an underlying essence beneath an operating whole:

> A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass […] we treat

the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the

organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata. (Deleuze and

Guattari 153)

This perspective rejects any essence of the human, be it the mind, consciousness, or body.

The concept of the human itself came to be intermingled with ongoing processes of ecology,

history, desire, and technology to name a few. These processes became part of shaping

humans as much as the human is part of shaping them. The making of the human is not

subjected to rites, rituals, or reason. It is rather the human's expression of will and potential,

than the means at one's disposal that crafts one's humanness. According to Deleuze and

Guattari, this integration resembles an egg in the sense that the human is able, and urged, to

continually carve oneself out of the world in one's process of becoming part of it. It is a

complicated process, but if fulfilled, it will create an essence under a signifier (153).

Deleuzian philosophy is built on a complex metaphysical, almost baroque, structure

that calls for impression and interest but is simultaneously hard to debate. This facet of his

work is among the aspects that called for criticism. However, when it is put in parallel with

other posthumanist perspectives that tackle the same view while replacing the natural

discourse with the technological one, the plane of imminence begins to provide a more

tangible image of human existence.

On this notice, Donna Harraway comes to the fore as one of the leading figures in the

technological posthumanist debate. Her thoughts in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) can be

argued to represent some of the leading theories in the posthumanist discourse. Among her

groundbreaking notions is her definition of the cyborg. She claims that humans have always

been cyborgs, emphasizing that there has never been a human fully detached from the

nonhuman other (Harraway 292), which builds up on Deleuze and Guattari's BwO. If this is

contrasted to the humanist perspective, it would reveal that the latter often romanticized the

human as superior to, thus detached from, the nonhuman world. For example, Da Vinci's highly celebrated *Vitruvian Man* (1490) depicts his view of the measurements of the ideal male body. It is a drawing that has long been perceived as human-centered and one that eliminates, even from the background, any sight of the nonhuman. His piece of art claims that the perfection of the human being can be self-contained and measured with numbers, detaching the human not only from the outside world but from the inside world as well, which is represented in consciousness. The fact that the painting remains hugely celebrated has much to do with the celebration of the humanist ideas that fueled its theme, to begin with. Projecting Harraway's posthumanist perspective on this drawing, though, exposes a different angle: Da Vinci's image of the perfect body could not have been possible without the utilization of such nonhuman elements as paper, pen, writing, and other 'tools,' the overuse of which may have rendered them insignificant, but the absence of which would paralyze most human activity. Such hypotheses are difficult to test in the real world, making speculative fiction a better option to test the lives of humans in the absence of certain non-human elements.

A major posthumanist perspective about humans is that the latter's relationship with the outside world is that of interdependency rather than independence. Humans rely on non-human elements in every life aspect included in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. So far, the term non-human has been used vaguely to refer to an unidentified set of elements. These elements are extremely broad inasmuch as they include every living or nonliving object in the universe except for humans. However, for the sake of this study, they can be divided into the natural and the technological. The former is simply anything that was not created by the human, whereas the latter is anything that has. Both of them, though, affect and are affected by the human.

The fusibility of the human amid parts of the universe continues to be reflected in the works of contemporary theorists and philosophers. Whereas nature has been there from the start, technology, in its narrower sense, is sometimes viewed as something that has been accompanying mankind for no more than several centuries. Nevertheless, technological posthumanism appears to offer an alternate perspective by broadening the definition of technology to include any manufactured instrument and to regard progress itself as technic rather than spiritual. To this end, Bernard Stiegler argues that the cause of humans' seeming exceptionalism as opposed to animals, for instance, is not a special essence or divine investment, but rather their ability to adjust with the universe and productively recruit its component (133). In other words, humans incorporated the world within their bodies. This process begins with tools, which are the primitive representation of technology prior to the emergence of the electric or even the industrial. As a result, tools (and by extension, any form of technology) started to use humans as much as humans use them, almost as parasites depend on a host:

> The invention *of* the human: without our needing to become complacent with the double genitive, its ambiguity signals a question that breaks down into two: "Who" or "what" does the inventing? "Who" or "what" is invented? The ambiguity of the subject, and in the same move the ambiguity of the object of the verb "invent," translates nothing else but the very sense of the verb. (Stiegler 134)

Stiegler's intriguing remark begs the question of what or who constructs the human being. In answering this dilemma, he addresses memory and thought as one of the basic elements in the making of the human. He remarks that humans have been keeping their memories outside their bodies by recording them in forms of writing and art (drawing, painting, sculpturing, etc.) (135). Countless examples of this process can be found in modern times as

much as in ancient ones. This may provide one of the many alternatives to Nietzsche's rejection of the humanist perspective of human making, which is that the construction of the humans is done by humans themselves with the inevitable aid of tools.

Writing and art outsource human memory and thought. The capacity of the human brain, as opposed to these external media of the material world, is relatively short-term and unreliable:

> One must then ask what the closure of the cortical evolution [brain] of the human implies from the vantage of a general history of life, the closure of the cortical evolution of the human, and therefore *the pursuit of the evolution of the living by other means than life*—which is what the history of technics consists in, from the first flaked pebbles to today, a history that is also the history of humanity. (135; emphasis in the original)

Stiegler's observation regarding the evolution of the human can be seen from a different perspective. The fact that humans keep their memory, thus history, outside of their brains means that the more the outside tools grow in complexity, the more human memory, thus consciousness and, if stretched, being, gets complicated. This technologizing of humans may indicate that their historical, social, political, economic, and moralistic progress is preserved. However, the threat of an apocalypse, and the realization thereof throughout the epochs, prove otherwise. An apocalypse resets the often upward line of progress and brings civilizations down their feet. The most cited example of a real-life apocalypse is the fall of the Roman Empire, which proves the stated theory regarding progress and the demise thereof. The knowledge that was lost at this event was not recovered until almost a millennial. This opens room for questioning the utility of technology and tools in preserving human advancement or even its use in human survival.

What has hitherto been addressed is but a small portion of the making, becoming, and standing of posthumanism. A few of the relevant concepts and notions have been elaborated to provide a convenient starting point and an informative background to the upcoming discussions. The most notable conclusion from this is that the notions of nature and technology repeatedly appear to be the two core notions that posthumanism is concentrated on.

2.4. Toward Critical Posthumanism

To reach a unanimous perspective out of the several that are stated (and much more that is unstated), critical posthumanism was introduced. It is a theoretical framework and approach that takes into account the various responses against humanism and the centrality of the human. Put differently, it is the process of deconstructing the image of the human offered by the humanists as a means of reaching a posthumanist human. This approach differentiates among some specific terminologies such as the posthuman, posthumanism, and posthumanist. The elaboration of these terms was conducted by Stefan Herbrechter, who can be seen as one of the founders of the critical posthumanist approach. First, the posthuman has initially been regarded as a figure with specific qualities that render it a being other than the human. Examples of this are monsters, angels, ghosts, cyborgs (of the pre-Harrawayian conception), and zombies. However, such descriptions later acquired the name 'transhumans,' marking a difference between them and the posthuman who is simply a human living in, and most importantly adapting to, posthumanist situations. Second, posthumanism is perceived as a Foucauldian social discourse that addresses the question of investigating the meaning of the human in the Anthropocene (including the conditions of globalization, technoscience, late capitalism, and climate change). This discourse is applied through the process of reading the science facts within science fiction (Herbrechter, *Posthumanism* 3). Another notion that is often referred to along this vein is the notion of the

nonhuman other, which consists of the environment, nature, animals, machines, and sometimes a divine figure. Moreover, Herbrechter explains the term 'critical' in 'critical posthumanism' as a reference to a non-dialectical relation among humans, posthumans, and nonhumans. He elaborates further by claiming that critical posthumanism functions to rewrite humanity just as postmodernism "*rewrite[s] modernity*" (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 24). In this explanation, a clear rapprochement is made between philosophy and literature. Therefore, and due to the aforementioned vagueness and plurality of posthumanism, critical posthumanism is a more targeted approach toward the investigation of the Anthropocene.

Critical posthumanism can be understood as an umbrella term for theories of inclusion. In others, it is a combination of critical perspectives concerned with the divergence and division of power among beings. Whereas posthumanism in the broader sense, which Herbrechter called "*more or less uncritical or popular (e.g. in many science fiction movies or popular science magazines)*" (Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism" 15) is more concerned with opposing anthropocentrism in all contexts while barely offering alternatives, critical posthumanism is more systematic in its rejection of humanism. From a critical posthumanist standpoint, rational humanism is a basic, essential way of thinking about the world. It regards the latter in binary oppositions of human/nonhuman, civilized/barbarian, nature/machine, Self/Other, and the like. The key reference in these binaries is the human individual, but the issue here is the definition of the human itself. The latter, in humanism, equals all the common dominant identities such as white, male, Christian, hetero, and so forth. These essentialized beliefs of humanism can easily be traced back to its historical background. Humanism is rooted in a Western, Imperialist, patriarchal, white-supremacist culture. Despite revolutionizing Western philosophy, some seventeenth Century perspectives, such as Descartes' cogito theory, restrict the perception of the entire being in

the mind of the human (more precisely, the intellectual human, whom, at that period, meant the Western man with the characteristics mentioned herein).

Some of the agreed-upon flaws of this humanist system among posthumanist critics state that it is transcendent, objective, and essential (Mazzotta 184; Manne 389). To explain, it is situated above the rest –or at least the majority– of beings, which allows it to possess a look from high down at the world. This supremacist look makes the system neutral in the sense that it excludes any possible relations with the outer world, or even with the same homo sapiens species, and creates a bubble from which others are excluded. Moreover, it is decontextualized from reality; it is perceived as a self-contained, ever-stable, never-changing piece. This provides it with a universalized and essentialized color that defies the flexible nature of humanity, and, by definition, renders anything and anyone that fails to meet the sameness of these criteria nonexistent.

Deleuze and Guattari provide a name for such a system of thinking. They coined the poststructural concept of 'arborescent thinking,' which is a system that resembles a tree with one trunk and numerous branches (Deleuze and Guattari 16). All branches are nonlinearly connected to the trunk, but they split into other branches as well. This reproductive network of branches, according to them, is what constructs the essence of the trunk. On this accord, the shift toward critical posthumanism is moving from an essentialized perspective of 'either/or' to connection, proliferation, and relationality. Critical posthumanism takes the light off of the individual and sheds it on assemblages and entanglements. Furthermore, this collectiveness transcends the human and opens the door for human *and* nature, human *and* machine, etc., rather than human *vs.* nature, human *vs.* machine, and so on. Not only nature and machine, but this perspective also allows the composition of the human with land, tribe, ideology, history, and the like in the formation of an inclusive mechanism.

More importantly, this assemblage is constructed upon a shared agency. Power relations are rejected in the eyes of critical posthumanism, and the all-controlling agentic of the human is seen as an unrealistic myth. The relationship among and between humans and nonhumans, thus, becomes that of togetherness and mutual productivity. This supports a jump from the above-mentioned transcendent, objective, and neutral position to a more local, contextualized, and involved one. It moves the human from the outside to the inside of the universe.

In a nutshell, critical posthumanism discusses two main points. The first entails a jump from being to becoming. The state of humanness is a journey rather than a postulate, and so is the state of nonhumanness. It is also an ongoing journey without a unified and specific destination. Humans remain humans as long as they are constantly changing, which is a point demonstrated more tangibly through fiction. This belief is related in some contexts to vital materialism, which describes an attached livelihood to matter itself. The second important point that critical posthumanism covers is changing the concept of sameness and lack thereof. Whereas the latter used to be seen as a criterion to assess the value of things in comparison to humans, it started to be rejected in favor of difference. The universe is built on, and characterized by, the productive force of difference. The act of honoring all living and nonliving beings regardless of their sameness from the lack of it opens the door for a new perspective of the pluriverse instead of the universe. This inclusive view challenges some of the stagnant lenses through which the world is seen, among which are the theories related to the Anthropocene.

3. Decentralizing the Human

The preliminary encounter with the term posthumanism reveals its main interest in the study. As the word 'human' is situated in the middle of the term, surrounded by the 'post' and the 'ism,' it may be an indication that this system of thought surrounds the human only.

However, what is interesting about posthumanism from what has hitherto been elaborated is that it does not pretend that mankind exists in a vacuum. It rather manifests a rational realization that the human is part of a larger whole. Posthumanism addresses the entire mechanism of existence with all its molecules and refrains from disregarding any aspects of the basis of its insignificance. Thus, forming an inclusive comprehension of posthumanism to address a literary text remains incomplete without itemizing the overall image of human existence, particularly in parallel with nature and technology.

3.1. New Epoch, New Concerns: Posthumanism and/in the Anthropocene

As a systematic study of the production of knowledge, posthumanism can be reflected in the recorded narratives of any given epoch; however, it is often associated with the Anthropocene (Bergthaller and Horn 2). The latter is an unofficial term suggested to describe the current geological epoch that demonstrates the notion of anthropocentrism in retrospect to the human influence upon the globe:

> Each of the authors offers their own definition and orientation for the idea, and we find the juxtaposition informative. For some of the authors the Anthropocene is a complex time period of accelerated, human-dominated global change, for others it is a specific narrative framing of contemporary life and futures. For some it is a lens through which to view multispecies worlds in formation, for others it is a spatial and material manifestation of specific economic, scientific, and political practices. For all the authors, the term represents another way to have a conversation about the breakdown of the division between Nature and Culture that has historically shaped the Western worldview, though each author approaches the possibilities this breakdown inspires in a different fashion with different stakes in mind. (Moore 1)

Despite the non-ratification of the term by geologists, its overuse regarding the current epoch and the absence of an agreed-upon alternative makes it the most suitable term for this context. Whereas it is less likely to determine a specific, prearranged date for the beginning of the Anthropocene, the year 1610 is hypothesized by Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin to be a starting point of the latter as part of further studies. Their suggestion is based on observing a global "*decline in atmospheric CO$_2$*" (Lewis and Maslin 175). It is overall believed that stretching from the Industrial Revolution and continuing until an unspecified future, human actions regarding industry, economy, technology, waste, and, on top of it all, politics have been governing the planet. Technological advancement has been enormous, and the world has been in an ongoing rapid change. The quickest way to realize the pace of this rapid development is to observe the life of humans themselves. The standards of living for an average middle-class person from the contemporary era can easily be noticed to be superseding the luxuries that kings enjoyed no more than a few centuries ago. Constant light, running water, air-conditioned shelter, numerous garments, and the list goes on, are but mere examples of elements that became part of the lives of most average people.

However, the human influence on the planet and other humans as well during this highlighted era is immense. The late nineteenth century, for example, witnessed an increase in the production and demolition rate of weapons associated with colonial waves that covered almost every non-European region. This was followed by the massive ruin that befell humanity during the twentieth century, which was associated with the invention of weapons of mass destruction. The total casualties of World War I and World War II in addition to the Spanish Flu that ensued from the former were unfathomable and unprecedented in all the known human history. The threat of a nuclear holocaust spread immediately throughout and after the Cold War. On the agricultural level, a novice wave of industrialization revolutionized food production, which resulted in newly developed crops

including strains of wheat and rice. This helped areas such as South Asia which was still occasionally hit by waves of famine during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the Doji Bara famine, the Great Famine of 1876–1878, and the Bengal famine of 1943, to name a few examples). The global population exploded due to better and more technologically advanced healthcare, which gave rise to other urban issues such as housing, overcrowding, and more dangerously, pollution. Furthermore, new threats to the well-being of the planet accompanied by harnessing the power of atomic fusion, global warming, and the possibility of an asteroid impact, urged scientists such as Stephen Hawking to suggest the alternative of colonizing space ("Stephen Hawking: 'Why We Should Go Into Space'"). This suggestion is yet again tackled in literature, utilizing the fictional characteristics of the latter to explore the possibilities of extraterrestrial travel. Naturally, and due to the retrogression that has been befalling the environment and the natural world, human agency, or in certain contexts, lack thereof, is perceived negatively. It is crucial to note, though, that the perspective elaborated herein has become increasingly controversial due to the traits that essentialize the definition of the human itself.

Before diving into the facets of the Anthropocene, the initial step is to formulate a comprehension regarding the Anthropos. While it may seem axiomatic, the latter, which is a Greek word for human, holds a variety of meanings within ("Anthropomorphism," para.1). The study of theory has been promoting the abstention from taking defining words for granted: man, woman, white, black, intellectual, subaltern, capitalist, worker, landowner, peasant, and so forth, have all been put under a telescope before digesting their meaning (which is, in many ways, still an ongoing process). Why, then, should the Anthropos –a combination of all the above and much more– be taken for granted?

In diagnosing the signified beneath the signifier of the Anthropos, Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg observe that, in the posthumanist discourse, what is understood as a human is

"*a clique of white British men;*" to be more precise, it is the "*Capitalists in a small corner of the Western world*" (Malm and Hornborg 64). This tiny category of people possessed enough economic, social, and political power in the world for most of what is approximated as the epoch of the Anthropocene. Their acts of exploitation and pollution during the Age of Imperialism held unfathomable influence on the following chain of events that charged humans with the responsibility for the planet's current hardships. This view, however, excludes the element of nonwhite people who are equally victims of the deeds of typical white, capitalist, imperialist men.

The increasing popularity of the African-American narrative, diasporic literature, feminist writing, Marxist critique, and the like in the twenty-first century gave rise to a more inclusive vision of the Anthropos. History has been revised and discussions about the inequalities and prevailing oppressions were brought to the spotlight. This end meets the previously mentioned critical posthumanist stand of rejecting sameness and embracing scarcity and difference. Despite (or because) of the increasing awareness and acceptance of the other, the discourse of the Anthropocene started to be attached with harsh criticisms.

Kathryn Yusoff, for example, addresses the issue of exposing people of color to harmful activities. She proposes the term, 'Black Anthropocenes', as an indication of

> an inhuman proximity organized by historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism. It is predicated on the presumed absorbent qualities of black and brown bodies to take up the body burdens of exposure to toxicities and to buffer the violence of the earth. Literally stretching black and brown bodies across the seismic fault lines of the earth, Black Anthropocenes subtend White Geology as a material stratum. (Yusoff 11)

As a legacy of colonialism, native people from non-European continents have been perceived as almost part of the natural, nonhuman world. The history of black people in America and the brutal past of slavery is a close example of this. A large number of black people were forced to work in plantations under excruciating conditions, believing that their bodies were meant for hard work. Following the American Civil War, the job that was unwillingly done by the slaves was mostly replaced by machines, which supported a huge jump in technologizing the agricultural face of the United States. However, it also proved that the two sides of seeing the blacks were either as part of nature, in the sense that they cannot be harmed by it, or as a machine, in the sense that they were believed to be able to work as hard as a machine. This remains merely one of the countless examples of limiting the concept of the Anthropos by excluding non-Europeans. To put it in Yusoff's words, this "*racial blindness of the Anthropocene [is] a willful blindness that permeates its comfortable suppositions and its imaginaries of the planetary*" (12).

Posthumanism appears in this context to revise the ill-understood conceptions wrought by colonialism. Among the chief tenets of posthumanism, according to Herbrechter, is to explore "*how did we come to think of ourselves as human? Or, what exactly does it mean to be human (especially at a time when some humans have decided that they are becoming or have already become posthuman)?*" (qtd. in Koegler 9). The answer to this question may partially be found in the works of science fiction that are centered on the issue of the human. An example of this is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which is believed to have set a tradition for the works of science fiction and the making of the human (although this novel may well be read as a landmark in transhumanism, it can also be seen as a posthumanist work in the sense that it addresses the relationalities among beings (Paul 26)). Nevertheless, Caroline Koegler argues that nineteenth-century European literature, including non-traditional narratives about nature and the machine, function, intentionally or

not, to "*reinforce colonialism's narcissistic politics of non-relation*" (Koegler 1). Therefore, a more inclusive prism with regard to an image of the Anthropocene strips from colonial burdens that entail a racist and sexist attitude is the prism of Afrofuturism.

Due to the accumulated racist attitude that denies the perspectives of people of color generally, and blacks specifically, from cultural productions, a new artistic and intellectual movement was born in the United States, known as Afrofuturism (Eshun 288). Its main concern is to contextualize contemporary perspectives regarding the present and the future within the circle of African Americans. Simultaneously, it situates black people amid the sociopolitical sphere as opposed to the conventional narratives that are built on marginalizing and often dehumanizing blacks. It also asserts their position, function, and importance (289). As the term indicates, Afrofuturism is concerned with futuristic settings within which it tackles two main axes in addition to the position of the blacks in society; those axes are mostly the natural realm, with which the black has long been associated as mentioned previously, and the technological realm. To this end, it is important to address the views that replace Anthropocentrism with Ecocentrism and technocentrism.

3.2. The Posthuman in a Post-Globalized World

Based on the inferences of the previous section, it may seem that one of the aspects capable of posing a disruption to the texture of the posthumanist theory is that of culture and cultural differences among humans from different backgrounds. Cultural alteration and the making of identity may have as deep of an impact as to affect the definition of the human itself, which, in turn, affects the conceptualization of the posthuman. The fact that the case study presents a protagonist that can be located within the three marginalized categories, which are those of race, gender, and class, makes the matter more relevant. For this reason, the idea of globalization comes to the fore here to justify the unanimous consideration of the human, then the posthuman, in the current and possibly future world. To see the ways in

which globalization aided the growth of the posthumanist system of thought, it is essential to, first, formulate a comprehension of what globalization is.

Globalization is commonly known today as a cultural phenomenon, but at its core, it can more accurately be defined as an economic one. If its purpose is to be summarized in a few words, it can be said that it aims at transcending the cultural differences among peoples for the sole purpose of reaching a unified global market. The latter's importance lies in the idea that it can assure a smooth flow of goods without the restrictions of the consumer culture. This is one of the reasons why Thatcher's and Reagon's neoliberalism is seen in many ways to have provided the ideal circumstances for globalization to reach its peak (Steger and Roy 21). While restricting the latter to a mere trade issue can be an oversimplification, it remains one of the major engines that led to its emergence.

Although globalization is constantly perceived as a phenomenon that is solely restricted to defining the contemporary era, a simple glance at history shows that interdependent trade is nothing new to human civilization. It is a common fact that empires such as the Mesopotamians, the Romans, the Ottomans, and others established an institutionalized system of trade that allowed them to exchange products and goods both within and with neighboring groups. This trading process was supported by and supporting of other processes of learning foreign tongues, taking inspiration from foreign art, and the like. Such an ongoing interchangeable circle has evolved throughout the ages until its dramatic outburst with the birth of the Free Market as stated earlier. By the nineties, the time when Octavia Butler was most prolific, it can be said that a failure of globalization would have been a non-processable idea. In that decade, Butler predicted a world that shut down. She foresaw what may be labeled a 'post-globalized' world, when the endeavors of globalization fail, leaving room, therefore, to locked communities. Aside from fiction,

Butler's speculation was realized in 2020, when the pandemic shifted the world in a matter of days into this locked post-globalization.

To relate the notion of globalization to that of posthumanism, it may prove useful to deconstruct one aspect of the former, which is trade, and then reflect it upon the latter. To begin, a glance at the production of almost every product on the market reveals that several pieces made in various countries are assembled to construct a single manufactured product. Likewise, most of the 'grand' systems of thought that shape today's intellectual sphere are a combination of various schools of thought and philosophies from many cultural and even religious backgrounds. It may be claimed that it is becoming increasingly difficult to study one school of thought in a vacuum, and with such an interdisciplinary field as literature, it is even more complicated. To provide an instance, a simple lecture on the postcolonial concept of the subaltern often requires tackling at least three deconstructed areas of thought systems. It possibly includes the Western definition of the intellectual. This immediately raises some existential inquiries along with a crucial discussion of the brown race. Ultimately, it provokes the question of racial discrimination, not to mention the pressing issue of gender. All of this leads, then, to mentioning some feminist perspectives. Some of these areas might as well bring into discussion the thought of the working class rebelling against the upper one, for the subaltern are, after all, an oppressed category, which allows the inclusion of Marxist thought. This is a mere example of the way schools of thought can easily be deconstructed into the pieces out of which they have been 'manufactured.' A great deal of this transgression is owed to the widespread humanism and was aided by the phenomenon of globalization. This end brings about a more unified perception of philosophies and theories around the globe.

However, recent global developments covered this globalized perception with a skeptical layer. The first quarter of the current century's twenties has been defined by a

rejection of many of the previously dominated aspects of globalization. COVID-19, the Ukraine War, the genocides in Gaza, and the increasing global tension that accompany each of these and more, proved what may be argued to be a failure of globalization. For this reason, the world seems to be entering a new phase of the 'posts' that may be labeled as post-globalization (Bagrova and Kruchinin 3).

The relevance of this discussion of the current theoretical foundation of the study lies in two areas. The first is that the posthuman finds its cradle in a previously globalized world, which allows it to be more inclusive of races, genders, classes, and other factors that can be thought of as discriminatory. The second is that posthumanism is currently being developed in a post-globalized reality, giving it a sense of flexibility that was majorly denied to humanism. This flexibility appears more thoroughly in the following discussion of the ways it regards the place of nature and technology in the universal hierarchy.

3.3. From the Natural to the Technological

The ongoing debate about the Anthropocene has had a tremendous influence on the development of posthumanist theory. Among the pillars that hold most of the discussions regarding the Anthropocene is that of technology and science. It is not uncommon that mankind harnessed the power of science and technology to the benefit of its species (albeit the harm that befell the planet thereafter). Notwithstanding the seeming clarity of this perspective, novice debates about technology and science, in addition to the place of the human in this mix, have recently adopted more philosophical tendencies.

The debate about technology is rooted back in the definition of posthumanism. Andi Miah (5) argues that posthumanism is sometimes seen as a technological culture. That is, the posthuman is only perceived within the scope of technology and the relationship of causality and influence between the posthuman and the machine. From this, he speaks of two different, almost contradicted, views about the human and the machine among posthumanist theorists

(Miah 5). Both perspectives seem to recognize the inevitable and massive influence of technology on the lives of humans. However, they defer in their attitudes toward such influence.

On the one hand, technology can be perceived with possible hopes of enhancing the human self and body. Before reaching this stage, though, it is crucial to recognize the threat that it may impose if left untamed:

> Humans have imagined for a long time that the ability to develop and control technology was one of the defining characteristics of our condition, something that assured us of our superiority over other animals and our unique status in the world. Ironically, this sense of superiority and uniqueness is being challenged by the very technologies we are now seeking to create, and it seems the balance of dominance between human and machine is slowly shifting. (Pepperell 2)

This discourse reopens the subject of hierarchy by addressing the human (or, in this context, the posthuman) and technology as paralleled entities, each with unique abilities strong enough to pose a threat to the rest of the beings. It also suggests that the elaborated abilities of the human necessitate its superiority, which, in retrospect, means that the ongoing development of the machine would one day be decisive in placing the human underneath it. Such a result can only be challenged if the human evolves to be part of the machine and accepts the machine as part of the human, which would allow the continuity (and, more importantly here, superiority) of the human in the shape of the posthuman. In addition to disregarding the natural world almost completely, this perspective that was initially adopted in most posthumanist contexts declares that the presence of the posthuman requires the end of the human and shifts the tendencies of posthumanism to a rather anti-human attitude.

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On the other hand, another traditional predominant perspective in posthumanism holds a negative stance toward human enhancement on the basis of technology. This perspective is best found in the arguments of one of the key contributors to the posthumanist discourse and definition, Francis Fukuyama. He regards posthumanism more as a political science than as a philosophy. His discourse in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002) carries the fear of a possible end of humanity at the hand of biotechnology and human enhancement that may result from altering humanity beyond recognition. More deeply, he tackles the issue of technology by illustrating two literary works that are considered landmarks in speculative fiction: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World.* In comparing the two dystopias, the author clarifies that, whilst the former indicates various aspects of totalitarianism and tyranny, the latter presents a perfect world where everyone is satisfied. He goes on to assert that this satisfaction stems from a loss of the key features of humanity and humanness itself (Fukuyama 6). To this end, he concludes that the biggest threat of current science and technology, particularly biotechnology, is its possible ability to eliminate the essence of humans and to create a posthuman image that does not relate to what previously existed (7).

This opens the door to a philosophical paradox between the rights of the human to meet every need and want and the nature of the human that necessitates human emotions. In this context, Fukuyama defines human nature as "*the sum of the behavior and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors*" (130). He argues that there was a time when human rights used to meet human nature, but the current availabilities elevated human desire to a point beyond natural needs. Fukuyama believes that "*without understanding how natural desires, purposes, traits, and behaviors fit together into a human whole, we cannot understand human ends or make judgments about right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust*" (12). The transcendence

of rights over nature, though, may result in a reality where human rights and nature are nearly contradicted, and the presence of the former almost, or absolutely, eliminates the latter. Additionally, Fukuyama refers to the totality of the unique factors that contribute to the making of the human, such as the capacity for moral choice, reason, language, emotions, sociability, consciousness, and sentience, as Factor X (149).

Fukuyama's argument is especially targeted against unregulated genetic modification. To reach a plausible ground, he compares the understanding of human nature and human rights. Initially, he criticizes the naturalistic fallacy, which "*argues that nature cannot provide a philosophically justifiable basis for rights, morality, or ethics*" on the basis that it is falsely used to claim "*that human nature gives us absolutely no guidance as to what human values should be*" (112). Moreover, he explains the concept of human rights in the post-Kantian philosophy:

> The simplest way to locate the source of rights is to look around and see what society itself declares to be a right, through its basic laws and declarations. William F. Schultz [...] argues that contemporary human rights advocates have long since dropped any notion that human rights can or should be based on nature or natural law. [...] Human rights are, in other words, whatever human beings say they are. (112)

Fukuyama argues for a theory of rights that is based on human nature. He believes that assessing values has always been subjected to natural human emotions. The innate fear of death, for example, generates the basic human right to live. Additionally, such rights that stem from nature turn into "*[v]alues are not arbitrary constructs but serve an important purpose in making collective action possible*" (125). After explaining this, he asserts that contemporary technological advancement made it easier to ignore human nature in favor of

human enhancement, which, in retrospect, resulted in the rewriting of human rights in a way that threatened the human essence (125).

Inserting a technological discussion in such a context exposes it to the possibility of slipping into transhumanism. The latter can be claimed to be one of many portions of the larger scope of posthumanism. It simply refers to a being that is part human and part something else, such as cyborgs (the pre-Harrawayian conception of the term), zombies, and sometimes aliens. In any case, these traditional views of technology regarding posthumanism can undergo a refinement that does not necessarily deal with technology as a threat to, or complement of, humans. In literature, the representation of technology varies in accordance with the setting, but, regardless of the central thematic statement of the literary work concerning technology, the center of the work itself remains the human. Hence, it can be claimed that, at least within the boundaries of science fiction, technology is oftentimes in service of human development, whether this service comes with morally accepted standards or mere survival-oriented ones is another issue. However, the same cannot be said about nature since the latter is not always portrayed to be in the service of humans, and the numerous literary works centered solely on nature rather than humans prove this (romanticism comes to mind here).

Since the Anthropocene and the posthumanist theory are closely related, and while the former is consistently linked with the rapid development of technology and science, it is often concluded that posthumanism and technology go hand in hand. Although this statement is not entirely false, the relationship between the two is not as simple as that. It can be argued that posthumanism is much more inclusive to fit it entirely under the scope of technology, it can also be concluded that technology itself has a marginalized philosophical dimension that explains a great deal of human contributions as well as natural contributions that befall the human. An endeavor to reach a comprehension of the technological aspect of posthumanism

in literature would lead to works of dystopia. The latter, as opposed to the depiction of the apocalypse, demonstrates a seemingly functioning society rankling on the edge of collapse often due to a prevailing corrupt regime or a disturbance in ecology. Such a place would inevitably answer to some sort of technological or technical system, be it predictable or uncanny, depending on the problem itself. It is, hence, important to tackle the philosophical understanding of technology to formulate an accurate interpretation of such technological systems in a given dystopia.

3.4. The Philosophy of Technology

Diving into the philosophy of technology within this context necessitates the establishment of a link between the history of the latter and the development of some of the defining posthumanist principles. It is integral to note, at the outset, that the philosophical inquiries into technology developed separately from the posthumanist theory. While the former is considered relatively more ancient due to its urging presence in parallel with human existence, it reached a point of collaboration with posthumanism, making it, eventually, a part contained within a larger whole. To this end, while the machine is often thought of as a contemporary innovation, its history can be traced so far back as ancient mythology. In Greek myth, for example, Icarus' wings (O'Connor 60) can be seen as a mechanical tool utilized for the purpose of body enhancement. In this regard, the depiction of technology in fiction has long been presenting a convenient medium for posthumanist theory to access the influence of the machine on the life and existence of humans.

It is intriguing to think of technology beyond its tangible influence. A philosophical view of the machine has been offered within various discourses dating from Aristotle. The latter addresses the notion of 'form' as an everlasting contributor to another form (Lesher 173). This argument allows the interpretation of technology as a service to humanity and an instrument that ceases to exist independently from its creator. His philosophy opens the door

for such thinkers as Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger to tackle similar views regarding nonhuman objects and instruments. Although none of them explicitly referred to the term posthumanism –for the term was yet to be coined–, these thinkers, among many, sought to provide a philosophical approach to perceiving technology, and on the other end of the continuum, nature.

To elaborate further, Heidegger introduced the term 'Enframing' in an attempt to explain the place of technology opposite the human being. Enframing signifies a way of looking at nature and reality by placing it within a frame constructed by modern technology (Godzinski 118). In its essence, though, Enframing surrounds the being and existence of the human, and its attitude toward technology is critical; in the sense that, it "*treats it as a process rather than an artifact*" (Miah 16). That is, technology is blamed for stripping nature away of its vastness, and in retrospect, for stripping reality away from the innocence accompanied by the sense of ignorance towards it. This stripping is done by explaining and mechanizing the lens through which nature and reality are regarded. Heidegger's often-quoted statement in this regard is that the "*essence of technology is by no means anything technological*" (Heidegger 4). He goes on to explain the issue of the essence by writing:

> Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology. When we are seeking the essence of "tree," we have to become aware that That which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees. […] Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something

neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology. (4)

Heidegger holds a negative attitude toward technology through seeing it as almost a form of repressing nature and reality, which means reshaping, or rather de-formulating the being of the human since the latter has long been tied with the natural world. This perspective that technology corrupts 'Being' is adopted as one facet of posthumanism (it is important to remind that the latter, as previously mentioned, carries various, sometimes contradicted, views regarding technology). Despite the negative stances that this view holds toward technology, Heidegger's concept of Enframing was crucial in identifying the posthumanist perception of technology. Accordingly, tackling the latter in the context of posthumanism does not necessarily mean addressing "*artefact that merely enables new kinds of functionality*" but rather dealing with technology as "*an ideology that enframes our utilisation of it*" (Miah 16).

It is relevant here to refer back to Nietzsche and his vision of the Übermensch. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger address technology in terms of its influence over Being. However, while Heidegger's consideration is more inclusive, Nietzsche focuses mostly on the human being. In theorizing the Übermensch, he tackles the state of 'becoming' rather than the state of transforming. That is, the influence of technology on humans is not necessarily achieved through physically inserting technological instruments; it can rather be achieved through mere contact with, utilization of, or even coexistence with technology. Another point of departure between Nietzsche and Heidegger in regards to this is that the latter, on the one hand, believes the influence of technology to be eternal, for he addresses the 'essence' of it. The former, on the other, attempts to predict its future impact on human becoming. Ansell-Pearson remarks that "*Nietzsche informs us that he writes for a species that does not yet*

exist" (17). This leads back to the theory of becoming. Humans have either reached or are on their way to reaching a point where their essence becomes technologized.

Ansell-Pearson takes Nietzsche's argument a step further by claiming that humans have always been technologized in terms of their biological making (17). More deeply, he relies on Deleuze and Guattari's arguments in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) to demonstrate a view about admitting the rule of biology as essentially technical. It is significant here to highlight the slight difference between a technological and a technical essence of things. Whereas the term technological possesses a direct and sole relation to the tool and the machine, the term technical is more inclusive. It may refer to processes that take place in a coherent, organized, productive, and repetitive scheme but without the interference of an outer tool, such as biological or, sometimes, environmental processes. In simple terms, it can be observed that the technological is one portion of the larger technical. These convoluted observations allow Miah to criticize superficial questions about technology such as that of Lewis who inquires "*How much time in your day are you not on the telephone, at the computer, watching T.V., listening to the radio, in the car, on the train, in a climate controlled environment?*" (qtd. in Miah 86). Miah elaborates on his view by indicating that "*The point it aims to make about the newness of technological culture neglects the fact that a human is always a technological-being-in-the-world*" (86). This claim presents a third dimension in the convoluted question of the human's place in the world. Two dimensions have already been there, which are that the human is part of nature, or the human is superior to nature. Now, the human might well be thought of as part of technology, presenting yet another dilemma in classifying beings in the universal hierarchy.

The proposed collaboration of views entails that technology has always been there in one shape or the other. Accepting the eternal and probably everlasting presence of technology would change the attitude toward it to one that resembles the human attitude

toward nature. Although the human attitude toward nature itself varies from utter embracement to keen wariness, and everything that lies in between, humans never blamed themselves for the presence of nature. Hence, if the human-machine relationship absorbs this particular aspect of the human-nature relationship, it will open more ways to tackle technology in various fruitful senses other than that of blame. After clarifying the historical, theoretical, and philosophical backgrounds of posthumanism in addition to its relationship with the Anthropos, the Anthropocene, and the technologized view associated with their discourse, it is important to contextualize it within a literary sphere.

4. A Fictional Window to Posthumanism

Because of the concern of posthumanism with issues related to human existence and behavior in regard to the planet and the universe and vice versa, the literary genre that is closely associated with posthumanism is speculative fiction. Although the term science fiction is more commonly used, speculative fiction is found to be more inclusive in the context of what is to come. The word 'speculative' is an indication that the events presented in the text are foreseen by the author to possibly occur in one form or another (Klein 437). Speculative fiction often contains the 'science' element along with other elements, which makes it a broader and more suitable term since one of the current study's objectives is to relate the fictional with the factual. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that, like any other theory to be applied in analyzing a literary text, posthumanism presents a flexibility that allows it to tackle any given genre. Notwithstanding this flexibility, posthumanism's ties to speculative fiction are similar to formalism's ties to romanticism, or Marxism's ties to committed literature. Put differently, the genre of science fiction presents a convenient area for exploring the doctrines of posthumanism.

4.1. Literature as a Projector of Posthumanist Thought

The scholarly sphere has lately been showing an increasing interest in the area of speculative fiction. A number of research papers emerged with the aim of analyzing fiction by applying plausible scientific explanations to create yet another bridge between the fictional and the factual. However, it is worth noting that the view regarding the act of analyzing fiction as an end in itself has grown to be outdated. In the context of posthumanism, fiction is not merely an object to analyze using some guidelines; it is, rather, a projector of philosophical and theoretical doctrines. Miah argues that "*a further characteristic of posthumanism appears to be an interest in the conflation of fact and fiction, as a rich aspect of these discussions rather than a confusing influence*" (15). Many scientific facts are known to the current generation through fiction, be it literature, video games, cinema, comic books, etc. Fukuyama, for example, admits that the holistic possible effect of technology and human enhancement was brought to him and to most of his generation who were born in the 1950s via literary works, namely *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) and *Brave New World* (1932) (Fukuyama 3). Works of science fiction, then, were an important part of leading his way to become one of the pioneers of posthumanist thought.

Many posthumanist convictions and conclusions are abstract insofar as they deal with futuristic possibilities and/or existential questions. To elaborate, it can be speculated that almost every person with the least education holds a certain amount of knowledge, albeit limited or perhaps superficial, of the ecological problems facing the planet. Such awareness, however, rarely ever rises to the sense of an imminent threat unless presented in some sort of fictional story with characters to relate with and visual description to imagine (or see, in the case of cinema, graphic novels, and the like). The same thing can be said about the dominance of technology and any other area of interest for posthumanism. To this end, science fiction provides the medium through which posthumanist thought is manifested.

4.2.Fictional Characters in Real Worlds

Taking speculative fiction to be the projector of posthumanism necessitates that the characters represented in such works display a certain facet of the posthuman. Sherryl Vint (226) identifies three categories of posthumans that appear in speculative fiction. The first is what she terms 'uber-human,' which is mostly a futuristic version of a human being that is biologically, physically, or mentally enhanced. It often presents an image of a powerful being who challenges the humanist human. The uber-human can also be a combination between humans and technology created via prosthetics or genetic engineering. It is important to note, though, that this image resembles more that of a transhuman. Whereas Miah emphasizes that "*the history of posthumanism should not be seen as the same as the history of transhumanism*" (7), the two notions sometimes collide, and an instance of this is the conception of the uber-human.

The second figure she introduces is the 'new human.' It is related to the often-marginalized category of humanity that was, under humanism, considered inferior to those humans who meet certain standards, labeling them superior. This includes anyone other than the male, the white, the capitalist, the imperialist, and the heterosexual. Literary works that deal with such types of characters may align with the former in terms of inserting the theme of technological enhancement, but they also may not. The posthumanist endeavor in tackling such texts lies in criticizing humanism and advocating a diverse, rather egalitarian, way of life for all humans.

Finally, she identifies a third category, which includes the 'nonhuman' element. As a continuing critique of anthropocentrism, which claims that humans are superior on the basis of their "*agency, intelligence, affect, and subjectivity*" (Vint 226), speculative fiction attributes these qualities to other beings. It creates settings in which nonhuman characters such as animals, aliens, robots, plants, etc. enjoy the characteristics that are often labeled to

humans alone. More intriguingly, such features are not always explicitly assigned to nonhumans through speech and behavior. In some cases, nature appears to be an agent character with deeds and intentions yet remains objectified. The same thing can be said about technology that may appear to be benign or neutral yet causes an enormous amount of change. These three cases remain the most inclusive elaboration of the types of characters in speculative fiction. It is noticeable that the aim behind such representations is to provide a critique of humanism and demonstrate a new way of looking at beings in a less hierarchal manner through posthumanism.

4.3. Theory through Fiction

Although speculative fiction has been a projector of posthumanist doctrines for a considerably long time, associating the two together on an academic base started with the works of Donna Harraway. Her defining arguments in "A Cyborg's Manifesto" (1985) concerning the blurred lines between such binaries as humans/animals, organisms/machines, and physical/non-physical rely much on the examples offered in fiction. Harraway's claim includes an often-forgotten side of transcending other equally significant boundaries of race, sex, and class. Her image of the cyborg, though, is mostly taken to a mere bridge between the organic and the mechanic. This gave rise to a new field combining Science and Technology Studies analysis (STS) with feminist criticism, which shed the spotlight on prominent posthumanist themes related to ecology, capitalism, artificial intelligence (AI), communities, and others to be presented free from the anthropocentric chains. This field was pioneered by authors such as Joanna Russ, John Varley, James Tiptree Jr., Monique Wittig, Vonda McIntyre, and Octavia Butler at a time when science and speculative fiction were dominated by male writers.

Harraway continues to immerse speculative fiction with her latter theories. In her book, *When Species Meet* (2008), she focuses on the areas of collision among humans, other

species, and ecologies. However, her interest in speculative fiction becomes more relevant in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), where she regards fiction writing as similar to theory-making. It is important to note that Harraway did not embrace the term posthumanism because of its association with "*transhumanist fantasies and militarized cyborgs*" (Vint 231). Still, Harraway's refusal of the term does not prevent her from tackling topics that formulate the foundation of posthumanism. Among those are environmental issues and human-animal relations. Her works inspired many writers to tackle the reflection of posthumanist ideas in speculative fiction. To illustrate, Eric C. Otto addresses the issue of ecological degradation in his book, *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism* (2012), and Chris Pak explored the ways in which science fiction promotes environmental awareness by offering a philosophical image of the former in *Terraforming* (2016). Other books continued along the same vein of extracting posthumanist themes out of speculative fiction with the endeavor of reflecting such posthumanist beliefs that are found in fiction onto the real world. Examples of this are Sherryl Vint's *Animal Alterity* (2010), Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010), Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Joan Slonczewski's *Brain Plague* (2000), *Highest Frontier* (2011), and others.

Another essential figure in the field who helped trace the facets of posthumanism in speculative fiction is N. Katherine Hayles. Aspired by the legacy of Harraway, Hayles is observed to be mostly interested in investigating the representation of human/machine integration as a form of expressing posthumanist tendencies in speculative fiction. Her book, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), is seen as a field-defining analysis and a crucial piece of posthumanist literature. Like Harraway, her area of interest is more targeted toward immersing cybernetic and information technology with fictional narratives. In her discussions, Hayles mentions the word 'posthumanism' (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 247), but her work was later labeled to hold transhumanist tendencies. Her work

remains, nonetheless, crucial in bringing the theoretical together with the fictional, as most of her conclusions are concerned ("How We Became Posthuman: Ten Years On An Interview with N. Katherine Hayles" 318).

Hayles tackles subjects such as the human's ability to coexist with and immerse within its non-human surroundings. More deeply, she "*considers how our immersion in mediated worlds and our interactions with digitized media prompts us to coevolve along with the machines, in both our ways of thinking and our ways of creating narrative*" (Vint 233). This posthumanist view that Hayles offers aids in the comprehension of speculative fiction that tackles the interaction of the human with the machine from the unconventional sociotechnical angle. Examples of this are works by Alastair Reynolds, Charles Stross, Ken MacLeod, and Greg Egan. Interestingly, plots that revolve around the fusion between the human self and technology, as remotely as this may seem, relate strongly with the current reality. To illustrate, Ken Liu's "The Perfect Match" (2012) depicts the story of a protagonist, who follows the orders of a robotic assistant, leading to a number of unfortunate events. The assistant device resembles much of present-day Alexa or Siri, on which an increasing number of people rely. Liu continues to present critical dimensions that tie humans to mechanical devices. In "The Cleaners" (2020), he tackles the possible effect that technology may have if humanity loses its memory, and in "Presence" (2014), he shows the role that telepresence may play in connecting immigrant people with their families. Other writers attempt to present a futuristic image where all the contemporary fears regarding technology and ecology are realized. Among them is the highly celebrated works of Octavia Butler. These pressing issues that find their roots in the imminent reality are addressed in speculative fiction as a means to explore various possibilities for some of their problems. Be it intentional or not, such works create the perfect setting for the growth of posthumanist theories.

Conclusion

Building on the general aim of this chapter, which is to introduce an inclusive background for posthumanism from its philosophical origin to its theoretical adaptation, it can be concluded that posthumanism is a vast area of study with various perspectives. This vastness necessitates reaching other objectives of the chapter. Among those is identifying as well as clarifying some of the major concepts in posthumanism that are essential for the forthcoming analysis. Another objective is elaborating on the various perspectives in an attempt to seek common ground among them. This theoretical chapter reaches the conclusion that the leading posthumanist perspectives that are presented are all rooted in the one eternal question regarding the place of the human amid all of existence. The chapter also leads to the ultimate conclusion of the significance of speculative fiction in comprehending the rather abstract discussions regarding posthumanism. Another essential inference that stems from the elements of this chapter is that the entirety of posthumanism, if oversimplified, can stand on three core pillars, which are nature, humans, and technology. To this end, the following chapters fulfill the endeavor of narrowing the posthumanist lens through which human is seen in the contemporary world. This is achieved through measuring the extent of the applicability of posthumanist conclusions on speculative fiction, mainly, Octavia Butler's *Parable* duology.

Chapter Two

Reaping a Utopian Hope from the Seeds of Dystopia: Nature as the Essence of the

Posthumanist Existence

Chapter Two's Table of Contents

Introduction

In literature, nature has been depicted as the friend, the enemy, the strength, the weakness, the inspiration, the devastation, the beauty, the horror, the sign of life, the touch of death, and everything in between. Nature's significance and symbolism are influenced by the writers' environment, leading to a pluralized representation of 'natures.' This pluralism is manifested in American literature due to the country's vastness. It began with early European settlers who depicted nature in Central and Southern colonies as warm and fertile, while in Northern ones as untamed, and cruel. Illustrations of this may include Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975), which addresses nature as a victim to the destructive habits of humans, and Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), which explores the temptations of nature in the later Westward expansion. With the rise of Americanness, the cannons of mainstream literature have constantly embraced nature at the center of their plots. Rivers, seas, forests, and animals are the ground on which romanticism's *Moby Dick* (1851)*,* transcendentalism's *Walden* (1854)*,* realism's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)*,* naturalism's "The Open Boat" (1897), modernism's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1951)*,* and postmodernism's *White Noise* (1985) are constructed upon. This depiction of nature, which began with a romanticized attitude and turned into a wary and then a warning, eventually became a subject of speculative fiction writing, and Butler's *Parables* are no exception.

The current chapter investigates the representation of nature in the setting of a post-apocalyptic world to answer three main questions. The first question revolves around whether nature is portrayed as an active or a passive agent in the escalation of events. The answer to this question leads to asking whether nature shapes the essence of the human or vice versa. Lastly, the chapter reaches an answer to the question of whether nature can be seen as a contributing factor in the creation of the posthumanist condition or a force that returns humans to the primitive state. It is crucial to note here that analyzing nature in the

Parable novels is not an end in itself; it is, rather, a means of reaching the ultimate question of the human place in a rapidly changing posthumanist reality. While the two novels within the duology function as a continuation of one larger plot, the defining conjunctions and major references to nature are mostly contained within the first novel, *Parable of the Sower*. Therefore, the chapter will focus on the latter, with a few mentions of the second novel.

1. Nature Outside the Box: From Indifference to Ambivalence

The relationship between Man and nature goes as far back as the beginning of creation. Myths and tales from ancient civilizations stand to prove that primitive humans used to regard nature as superior (Thommen 29). History books are loaded with examples of peoples who worshiped the moon, the sun, and the fire, and pleaded to the gods of the sea, the gods of the forest, and the gods of mountains. Earthquakes used to be interpreted as the wrath of nature and rain as its kindness. Nature was doubtlessly seen as an active and certainly superior being. Without nature, there would have been no food, shelter, nor a purpose for humans. However, as it is human nature to challenge all that is superior, human ambition increased in later centuries to question that superiority. The revolutionary discoveries of the Renaissance (1490s – 1520s) that inspired much of the later ideologies of the Age of Enlightenment (1680s – 1780s) from the works of Francis Bacon to John Locke were a major factor in shaking the conventional image of nature. It drastically shifted from a superior being that gives and takes to a mere soulless resource mine fueling the more important concerns of the late eighteenth century, which are the Industrial Revolution (1760s – 1840s) and its repercussions. This perspective has been encouraging the exhaustive activities of draining the natural world for the sake of industry. Because of humans' awareness of their misdeeds, any natural phenomenon that occurred thereafter has been interpreted by many as an act of retaliation from nature, providing an opportunity, hence, for literature to explore

the activity and passivity of the latter. To this end, the current section explores this issue in the futuristic setting of Octavia Butler's fictional world.

1.1. Reclaiming and Condemning Nostalgia: City/Nature Dichotomy

Nostalgia is a deeply rooted theme in the context of most futuristic dystopias. While the current reality provides many situations in which the past is glorified at the expense of the present, futuristic writing celebrates the present of the reader as a glorified past of the worst future. This idea is better put in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, who relates nostalgia with nihilism in the sense that "*a nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist*" (Nietzsche et al. 318). The early half of *Parable of the Sower* critically demonstrates such nihilism in regards to lamenting an urban past and presents, instead, a rather existential attachment to nature framed in the voice of the young protagonist.

In the first passage voicing Lauren Oya Olamina's words, she begins by describing a dream. Dreams are, among other things, a strong symbol of mourning the past, for they represent the only means of connection, albeit unreal, to the dreamer's version of a faded reality. In this dream, Lauren envisions herself as a part of nature, possessing one of the few features that are not attributed to humans, which is flying. Lauren is immersed in the act of flying in her dream, but despite the detailed descriptions of her feelings, she does not yet showcase any immediate attachment to her surroundings. It is not until later that she relates her dream with the childhood tragedy of her mother's death. In the dream, she "*drift[s] away from the door, away from the cool glow into another light*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 5). This results in her first described encounter with fire in the novel, which is a recurrent motif that holds immense significance throughout the narrative. Amid her narration, Lauren refers to darkness as "*brightening*" (6). This oxymoronic description suggests an early conflicting view that accompanies Lauren's relationship with the natural world throughout. She, then,

immediately points to the *"[s]tars casting their cool, pale, glinting light"* (6), connecting darkness to the sky. This is an early indication that Lauren refrains from seeing even the scariest signs of nature –in this case, darkness– in a negative way. She writes later in the verses that are to become a manuscript of her shaped belief, "*Darkness/ Gives shape to the light/ As light/ Shapes the darkness*" (*Parable of the Talents* 5). Although her memory manifests less nostalgia in favor of a more escapist attitude, Lauren's dream is an initial base reaction toward nature. Her coming-of-age experience with nature throughout the duology can be measured by, as well as summarized in, this particular reaction.

Lauren interrupts the narration of her dream in a stream-of-consciousness-like manner to record a conversation she had when she was seven years old with her stepmother, Corazon Olamina, who goes by the name Cory. This conversation redirects the spotlight from nature with its air, fire, darkness, and stars to a nostalgia for the city:

> "We couldn't see so many stars when I was little," my stepmother says to me […] She stands still and small, looking up at the broad sweep of the Milky Way […] The day has been hot, as usual, and we both like the cool darkness of early night. There's no moon, but we can see very well. The sky is full of stars […] I look up at the stars and the deep, black sky. "Why couldn't you see the stars?" I ask her. "Everyone can see them." (*Parable of the Sower* 6)

Again, Lauren binds with the start amid "*the deep, black sky.*" Having had no experience with the pre-apocalypse world, she finds it peculiar not to be able to see the stars at night. Cory romanticizes living under "*city lights*" by referring to the "*lights, progress, growth, all those things [they]'re too hot and too poor to bother with anymore*" (6). She, then, goes on to narrate a story that her mother told her about the stars being "*windows into heaven,*" and sarcastically comments, "*I believed her for almost a year*" (6). The underlying tone of longing for the Man-made city repositions nature in this context from an object of desire to

a sign of wilderness. Put differently, Lauren, the fifteen-year-old who was born after the world collapsed, fails to form a connection to the drastic change that befell America prior to the events of the novel, for she witnesses no other reality but hers. Her stepmother, on the contrary, fastens the memory of the city with the times of peace, whilst the spectacle of the stars is, for her, a cruel indication that the light of civilization is extinguished. While both women seem to possess strong feelings for nature, one possesses a sense of attachment, which manifests intensely later throughout the duology, and the other holds a sense of denial and sorrow.

Lauren's attachment to nature appears more clearly in the same flashback conversation when she attempts to rationalize what Cory mentions about city lights. Ignorant of the tremendous size of cities in the past (which is the reader's present), she remarks that the latter can still exist in correspondence with the light of the stars, to which her stepmother explains that Lauren's generation can never realize "*what a blaze of light cities used to be*" (7). Lauren, then, explicitly professes that she prefers the stars, and Cory strongly contradicts her.

From the beginning of the novel, nature is described in a way that triggers astonishment, longing, questions, and contradictions. An important thing to mention here is that the concept of nature in this context seems to extend outside the earthly world. Although space and stars might well be categorized differently, they can be included as part of nature. The reason behind this inclusion is the three pillars that this study stands upon, which are nature, humans, and technology. To put it in simple terms, this study has identified nature earlier as any non-human and non-human-made element, and due to the importance of stars to the plot, which will be revealed on multiple other occasions, they are, herein, read as an important representation of nature.

The stepmother's nostalgia is shared by other members of Lauren's community who witnessed the drastic change. This appears in Lauren's description of the few times when members of her walled community have to go outside the neighborhood for absolute necessities:

> To the adults, going outside to a real church was like stepping back into the good old days when there were churches all over the place and too many lights and gasoline were for fueling cars and trucks instead of for torching things. **They never miss a chance to relive the good old days** or to tell kids how great it's going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back. (8; emphasis added)

From a general nostalgia for the city, the community adults lament every detail of the old life. While environmentalists today warn against the harm that such things as "*gasoline, cars, and trucks*" can cause to nature, these are, in the novel, mourned as a part of a glorified past. In order to comprehend the perspective of most, if not all, the adults in the novel, it is important to note the miserable state that their reality reached after what is called the Pox, which starts in 2015 (*Parable of the Talents* 6):

> According to my father, the big city is a carcass covered with too many maggots. I think he's right, though not all the maggots are in LA. They're here, too. [… W]e passed a couple of neighborhoods so poor that their walls were made up of unmortared rocks, chunks of concrete, and trash. Then there were the pitiful, unwalled residential areas. A lot of the houses were trashed—burned, vandalized, infested with drunks or druggies or squatted-in by homeless families with their filthy, gaunt, half-naked children. (*Parable of the Sower* 9)

This image eliminates the traditional city/nature binary that necessitates the triumph of one over the other. In this reality, both nature and civilization have relinquished the humans. Notwithstanding this, the intriguing point here is Lauren's unique perspective on nature. Her young age allows her to strip away from the nostalgia and the "*defense of traditional values associated with an idealized past*" (Dubey, "Folk and Urban Communities in African-American Women's Fiction" 110) that restricts elder people. Moreover, her spirituality permits her to see a spark of hope in the natural world that is invisible to everyone else except, to a far lesser extent, her father. This unique vision is precisely what holds the posthumanist tendencies of the works. That is, Lauren regards nature as a source of energy and rebirth, which fuels her attempts to rebuild a pattern for humanity not in the already-proven-failed traditional way, but in a way that emerges from nature.

Landing from the stars to the earth, a third perspective with nostalgic characteristics about the city/nature dichotomy is revealed in the perspective of Lauren's father. Amid describing the current reality of Robledo, the fictional Southern California town where Lauren's community resides, she recalls her father's description of it as "*once a rich, green, unwalled little city that he had been eager to abandon when he was a young man*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 10). She adds that this city, which is, as she writes in her journals, home to "*most of the street poor—squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general*" (10), has once been an ordinary place that her father "*wanted to escape [its dullness] for big city excitement*" (10). Despite this accumulating resentment of the absence of signs from the past, Lauren remains unaffected by the romanticized past. Simultaneously, she rests impressed by and interested in the possibilities that nature offers instead of the guarantees of a city that does not exist anymore. Instead of perceiving nature as a sign of dullness or an omen of the end of civilization, she sees it as a starting point for something new that she cannot identify at first, but it becomes increasingly clear, as she carries on her journey.

To this end, it can be argued that nostalgia is perceived negatively by Lauren. Her "*dying, denying, backward-looking people*" (20) are stuck in a decaying past. The only way forward, for them, is backward. Lauren acknowledges this fact and voices it in a conversation with her friend Joanne about the newly elected American president. She remarks that he is "*like a symbol of the past for [them] to hold on to as [they]'re pushed into the future*" (41). Instead of bowing to the nostalgia of the elders, Lauren chooses to dream of a future fueled by the few inspiring things left in the world. Those reside, in her view, in the natural world. Notwithstanding the negative effect of nostalgia that paralyzes people from moving forward, the source of their resentment of the depicted futuristic setting is plausible. Additionally, Lauren's hope is not blinded by the disarray and chaos surrounding her. It is, thusly, substantial to tackle the devastating element of nature portrayed in *Parable of the Sower* as a way of demonstrating the status of the world through massive climate change and ecological disasters.

The clash between nature and the city can be interpreted as a debate between a humanist attitude and a posthumanist endeavor. Whereas nature is mostly attributed to the characteristic of backwardness, and since humanism is often thought of as having existed before posthumanism due to the controversial prefix 'post,' this analysis of the nostalgia at the beginning of the novel breaks the pattern. To begin, the debate over the 'post,' which was discussed in the previous chapter culminates in the conclusion that the 'post' refers to an ideological transcendence rather than a temporal and/or spatial one. More importantly, building on Andy Miah and Cary Wolfe's parallelism between humanism and posthumanism, the destructiveness of the city and the embracement of nature indicate that the former represents a humanist transitional state amid two posthumanist phases. In simple terms, nature comes before the city's construction, and, as the novel shows, it stands after the city's destruction as well. In this context, and due to the city's constant attachment to

humanism because of the emergence of city-states during the Renaissance, humanism is symbolized in the city while posthumanism is represented in nature. People's longing for the ghost of a long-gone city can, therefore, be seen as a failed attachment to the remnants and the hierarchy of humanism. Disregarding the new posthumanist rearrangement of the world, however, prevents them from the possibility of correct adaptability to the ecological devastation surrounding them.

1.2.Ecological Devastation: Nature's Intentions and the First Seed of Change

The increasing tabulations of the contemporary era inspire writers to create dystopian realities in their fiction as a way to object, proclaim, warn, or simply reflect on their surroundings. In this sense, the *Parable* duology can effortlessly be perceived as a dystopia. However, there is a recurring mention of an apocalypse (with the acronym Pox) that "*began well before 2015, perhaps even before the turn of the millennium*" (*Parable of the Talents* 6). This renders the novels post-apocalyptic, giving them slightly different characteristics. Therefore, it is important to refer to the main element that differentiates a dystopian from a post-apocalyptic world. On the one hand, the former often portrays a deeply disintegrated yet superficially functioning society. The latter, on the other, showcases a world in a state of utter disarray and chaos. It is also depicted to be preceded by a global event of mass destruction or simply negative change, be it an arbitrary natural disaster, a strategic human action like hypothetical nuclear and biological wars, or an unintentional consequence of human negligence such as climate change. In this regard, Jim Miller argues that "*Butler does not offer a full-blown utopian 'blueprint' in her work, but rather a post-apocalyptic hoping informed by the lessons of the past*" (Miller, "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision" 336) that adds to the cautionary tendencies of her work. He elucidates further that "*Butler stares into the abyss of the dystopian future and reinvents the desire for a better world. In doing so, she places herself firmly within a rich tradition of*

feminist utopian writing" (336). That being the case, this section approaches Butler's *Parable* series as both a dystopian –along with traces of utopian hope– and a post-apocalyptic work. The traits of this civilization in disarray assume various facets, the most notable of which is the troubled ecological system. Contemporary American fiction continues to reflect modern anxiety about climate change, inequality, government power, and global epidemics, and Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* can be the best reflectors of this.

Despite the initial indications of Lauren's attachment to nature, her awareness of the ecological devastations falling upon the world is strongly indicated. The actual events of the apocalypse are never revealed from an omniscient viewpoint, nor are the escalating events leading to it. However, *Parable of the Sower* describes, on multiple occasions, natural disasters that represent a continuation of a long chain of scourge. An example of this is an incident that Lauren mentions while attempting to separate the concept of nature from that of God:

> There's a big, early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico. It's bounced around the Gulf, killing people from Florida to Texas and down into Mexico. There are over 700 known dead so far. One hurricane. And how many people has it hurt? How many are going to starve later because of destroyed crops? That's nature. Is it God? Most of the dead are the street poor who have nowhere to go and who don't hear the warnings until it's too late for their feet to take them to safety. Where's safety for them anyway? Is it a sin against God to be poor? We're almost poor ourselves. There are fewer and fewer jobs among us, more of us being born, more kids growing up with nothing to look forward to. One way or another, we'll all be poor some day.

> The adults say things will get better, but they never have. (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 13)

This event showcases the wrath of nature against humans. However, from Lauren's perspective, nature is selective in deciding its victims, which are, from her view, which is to be supported with further evidence later, mostly from the lower class. This passage is important in comprehending the angle that the novels present nature from. While the latter is sometimes associated with divine intervention insofar as nature can be used by God as a tool to punish the sinful, Lauren thinks otherwise. Although her lenses are less clear at the age of fifteen, she begins by stating the facts that are tangible to her and questioning what is not apparent when she says, "*That's nature. Is it God?*" She does not come to a clear conclusion here, but one of the two ways that this question leads to, which is that nature could rather be a separate entity, falls directly into the dilemma of the agency, or lack thereof, of nature.

More deeply, the world that Butler describes is drowned in multiple major problems. The most emphasized area, though, is that of climate change. The author records in her journey several events throughout the United States where the threats of the real world are realized:

> Tornadoes are smashing hell out of Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and two or three other states. Three hundred people dead so far. And there's a blizzard freezing the northern midwest, killing even more people. In New York and New Jersey, a measles epidemic is killing people. Measles! (39)

Naturally, such events are accompanied by the spread of disease caused by polluted water and the rotten corpses thrown out on the streets. The reader is informed that "*[t]here's cholera spreading in southern Mississippi and Louisiana*" (39). Additionally, "*sea level keeps rising with the warming climate and there is the occasional earthquake [...]. The*

whole state, the country, the world needs help" (85). The factor that makes such disasters an actual threat to human existence is that they are not contained in a specific territory of the country. In the novels, humanity suffers from the retaliation of nature on a global level, which is referred to in various contexts addressing climate change as a global phenomenon and a major crisis overwhelming the entire world.

Most people in Lauren's circle can be said to fall into a state of denial in the sense that they refuse to admit, or so much as realize, that their current reality has become the only state of being. As has already been elaborated, they live in nostalgia and false hope that a certain politician or a magic hand would overnight undo all the ruin and disasters that befell the world. Conversely, Lauren's convictions differ. Instead of weeping over a long gone past or blaming humanity or nature, she chooses to acquire lessons from the past and inspirations from nature. An example from the many situations where Lauren thinks of the past as an indication of the human ability of adaptability and survival is when she mentions the infamous Black Death, when "*[a] lot of the continent was depopulated [and] [s]ome survivors thought the world was coming to an end*" (41). On this matter, Lauren is convinced that the only thing that helped fourteenth-century people overcome such a dreadful event was their flexibility toward the idea of change:

> [O]nce they realized it wasn't, they also realized there was a lot of vacant land available for the taking, and if they had a trade, they realized they could demand better pay for their work. A lot of things changed for the survivors. […] The changes […] were slow compared to anything that might happen here, but it took a plague to make some of the people realize that things could change. (41)

Lauren continues to conclude that change is unanimous and undividable. The change that occurred due to political upheavals resulting in the fall of the Roman Empire (476), the one

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that occurred because of fleas carried on rodents on board trading ships causing the death of one-third of the European population (1346 – 1353), and the one that is caused by climate change in the *Parable* world in the futuristic times, are all, according to the perspective of the novels, driven by the same universal power.

Moreover, Lauren appears to be increasingly bothered by the elder's attachment to the past:

> Things are changing now, too. Our adults haven't been wiped out by a plague so they're still anchored in the past, waiting for the good old days to come back. But things have changed a lot, and they'll change more. Things are always changing. This is just one of the big jumps instead of the little step-by-step changes that are easier to take. **People have changed the climate of the world**. Now they're waiting for the old days to come back. (42; emphasis added)

Instead of regarding nature as an evil being intended to harm humanity, as many of her community members allude in a few contexts, Lauren explicitly holds humans responsible for the declining state of their world. This remark can be interpreted in two slightly contradictory ways. On the one hand, it indicates that nature is passive in the sense that it does not act on its own accord, but it also showcases, on the other hand, that the events taking place are a part of nature's reaction to human actions. To add to this dilemma, it can be said that one cannot be responsible for everything if one is not in control of everything, and blaming humans for massive events indicates that they are in possession of enough influence and power to be able to dominate such a huge change in the universal system. However, Lauren's friend's comment that "*[her] father says he doesn't believe people changed the climate in spite of **what scientists say***" (42; emphasis added). This proves that Lauren's words are mostly a broken record reflecting the information that a fifteen-year-old relies on

as a means of reaching her own conclusion, which will come much later. Although this interpretation is inspired by the conventional views of Anthropocentrism, it does not resonate with Lauren's conviction about both nature and humans that will be revealed along her coming-of-age journey. More on these conflicting views, Lauren mentions the standpoint of her father, reverend Olamina, who attributes all that is happening to divine intervention. However, Lauren immediately excludes this Christian view by asserting that her father "*has his blind spots*" (42).

Along the same vein, a third perspective representing the estimation of the younger generation that was born amid this dystopia is reflected through the comments of Lauren's friend, Joanne. This generation has mostly been raised in a double paralyzing environment composed of the fear and helplessness of their elderly and the absence of any sight of hope for the future. Lauren remarks repeatedly that Joanne lives in a state of denial; when confronted, she collapses into saying, "*We can't make the climate change back, no matter why it changed in the first place. You and I can't. The neighborhood can't. We can't do anything*" (41). As it is built on a willing lack of agency that cannot be interpreted into a state of acceptance, this perspective can be excluded if measured by the strength of Lauren's and her father's views. Thus, the two initial perspectives tackled in this context, which are that of elder members of the neighborhood and reverend Olamina, are inspired by the humanist and the pre-humanist angles respectively. This leaves Lauren's analysis of this situation to be the posthumanist voice regarding this issue. Put differently, her ideas of 'Change' as a concept and the eventual success of her journey that is based on it represent the corrective vision of the dilemma presented herein.

A more vivid picture of the troubled ecology is also presented in *Parable of the Talents*:

The climate is still changing, and warming. It's supposed to settle at a new stable state someday. Until then, we'll go on getting a lot of violent erratic weather around the world. Sea level is still rising and chewing away at low-lying coastal areas like the sand dunes that used to protect Humboldt Bay and Arcata Bay just north of us. Half the crops in the Midwest and South are still withering from the heat, drowning in floods, or being torn to pieces by winds, so food prices are still high. The warming has made tropical diseases like malaria and dengue normal parts of life in the warm, wet Gulf Coast and southern Atlantic coast states. But people are beginning to adapt. There's less cholera, for instance, and less hepatitis. There are fewer of all the diseases that result from bad sanitation, spoiled food, or malnutrition. People boil the water they drink in cities where there's a problem and in squatter settlements with their open sewers—ditches. There are more gardens, and old-fashioned skills in food preservation are being revived. People barter for goods and services where cash is rare. They use hand tools and draft animals where there is no money for fuel or no power equipment left. Life is getting better, but that won't stop a war if politicians and business people decide it's to their advantage to have one. (*Parable of the Talents* 88 - 89)

Unlike most parts of the *Parable of the Sower,* this passage shows a sense of adaptation to the novice norms. It manifests the human ability to survive even if it means changing the mindset and behaviors that have been in practice for centuries. This can be read as an indication of the possibility of embracing post-humanist ideologies if they mean increasing the chances of survival and prolonging the existence of humans in the world and as part of the universal hierarchy. Regardless of this, the passage shows the terrible state of the planet Earth. The ending of the passage shows, more clearly, Lauren's accusation of human actions.

She blames corrupt politicians for ruining the ecology and possessing the power to still be able to start a war that can end whatever remains in the world.

Lauren's observation about the way the universe functions inspires her to take the concept of Change to an utterly existential dimension. However, she still embraces the natural world as a huge part in shaping her beliefs which accumulate eventually in a plethora of thought systems noticeably diverging from the conventionalities of humanism toward a rather posthumanist dimension. Thereby, it is required to investigate her conceptualization of Change and the act of 'shaping' in regards to the human/nature dichotomy, along with the significance of some specific and defining elements of nature in affecting this relationality and executing alteration.

2. Nature and Change: Relationality of Inspiration and Indication

It is a well-known fact that literature is composed of the web of reality. The first thing that comes to mind when attempting to explain the former is that it is a mirror capturing a specific angle from the actual world. With this in mind, an overview of the history of worldwide literature in general, and Western literature in particular, reveals a considerable change in the popularity of genres and the appeal of each genre to the audience. Moreover, the most triggering alteration might be related to the process of the theme throughout the epochs and the thematic statements announced during different eras. While Victorian literature, for instance, idealizes domesticized women, post-1960s literature celebrates independent women, and while pre-Great War literature glorifies battles and soldiers, post-World War II books condemn the wars. Furthermore, mainstream literature not only adheres to the popular opinion and issues of a certain epoch but also functions to address its problems, making the occurring change a driving engine in the literary sphere. For example, neither *Beowulf* can address the issue of unemployment nor is *Hard Times* designated to tackle space travel. While a few selective bodies of literature can be deemed universal for

tackling timeless and spaceless themes (which are collectively referred to as world literature), a large range of works are subject to one or more issues related to reality. To this end, the constant alteration of themes, and the accompanied, almost radical, diversity in the entire movements of literature, is an indication of the immense presence as well as importance of change in the world. In her *Parable* duology, Octavia Butler exploits the flexibility of speculative fiction to explore the concept of change unconventionally. A capitalized 'Change' becomes one of the central themes of the duology when the main character decides to perceive it as a sacred universal power that is worth worshiping. Lauren's conviction that Change stems from the natural world, and her belief in the human ability to willingly shape that Change, generate a question regarding the relationality among a triangle of nature, humans, and Change. The current section tackles this question by analyzing the demonstration of Change in the duology.

2.1. Apostasy to Earthseed: Nature, Religion, and Philosophy

Every chapter from *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* begins with a selected verse from a book entitled *Earthseed: The Book of the Living.* The reader learns later that this book represents a religious text authored by Lauren as part of her journey to reshape the disarrayed reality. In a background story, Earthseed is revealed to have begun as nothing more than bits and pieces of verses that Lauren starts writing when she was twelve (*Parable of the Sower* 19) to record her philosophy of life. The first verse mentioned, and the most recurring one, describes a state of constant becoming: "*All that you touch/ You Change./ All that you Change/ Changes you./ The only lasting truth/ Is Change*" (5). This belief, which is repeated throughout the duology, relates closely to the critical posthumanist tendencies that view the human as a concept to become rather than to be. While critical posthumanism is concerned largely with the homo sapiens, though, its view can be extended in this context to involve the natural world. Put differently, the idea contained within the

verse relies heavily on the state of attachment between the human and an unidentified 'all.' For the sake of this discussion, the 'all' can be perceived as the large universe with its natural and technological elements, but it also includes the human factor. These pluralized ranges of elements are combined by the factor of Change. Such observation triggers the protagonist to seek a more practical explanation for the way the universe functions, apart from the humanist hierarchy that her ancestors believed in.

Earlier in *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren professes that over three years from the time she is writing, she has abandoned the Baptist faith that her father not only follows but is a minister in (8). Times of hardships, wars, famines, droughts –and in this case, apocalypse that naturally combine them all and more– are common to lead people to question their faith and the existence of God. The Black Death in the fourteenth century, for example, was an important factor in shaking people's belief in the Catholic Church that was unable to provide answers and rationales to sick, hungry, and dying people and was instead busy collecting tributes and taxes. These seemingly minor questions made European peoples ready to accept a new religious approach. Without this readiness to accept and embrace, the Reformation would have never reached the popularity and success it did. Another example of this is the Great War, which introduced a massive wave of atheism to Europe that the continent never recovered from. However, Lauren's retreat from the Baptist Church does not result in her embracing another faith, neither diverging toward the path of atheism, but rather creating her new religion.

Before diving into the significance and doctrines of this new belief system, it is important to tackle the symbolism of the term. Lauren names her new religion 'Earthseed.' This term is a combination of two English words that indicate growth, bloomsome, and sprout. Conventionally, the rule of religion, among other things, is to explain the beginning of existence and the growth of beings. Lauren's religion, though, is inspired by existence

itself. To elucidate, Earthseed is a conclusion and an outcome of the world, rather than the

reverse. Furthermore, every religion requires the existence of an omniscient, unfathomable,

divine being that controls everything and everyone. It may, then, seem at first glance that the

concept of 'God' in Lauren's Earthseed would be nature. However, she explains early in

Parable of the Sower that she does not believe nature to be a divine figure but merely another

bolt in the large mechanism of existence:

> A lot of people seem to believe in a big-daddy-God or a big-cop-God or a big-
>
> king-God. They believe in a kind of super-person. A few believe God is
>
> another word for nature. And nature turns out to mean just about anything
>
> they happen not to understand or feel in control of. (13)

This discourse functions to contradict the aforementioned common beliefs. Despite the

immense significance that nature has in Earthseed, it is not put above the rest of beings. It

can, therefore, be said that Earthseed is a flat religion in the sense that it is not built upon a

hierarchal system where a certain being is glorified or worshiped more than the rest.

More significantly, Lauren goes a long way in thinking about the core conception of

Earthseed. She is, at first, reluctant to decide whether it is an "*idea, Philosophy, [or] New*

religion" (21). Eventually, she reaches a point of perceiving it as a religion, which is

demonstrated in the particular importance and repetitiveness associated with the phrase 'God

is Change.' At first glance, it appears that Lauren's newly founded religion is about

worshipping Change, but Earthseed is far more complicated than to be put in such simple

terms. Interestingly, Lauren relies on the various aspects of nature that are subjected to a

circle of Change to rationalize her belief. Instead of dealing with it as a fact taken for granted,

she subjects her conclusions to the effective factor of doubt:

> Dangerous question. Sometimes I don't know the answer. I doubt myself. I
>
> doubt what I think I know. I try to forget about it. After all, if it's real, why

doesn't anyone else know about it? Every one knows that change is inevitable. From the second law of thermodynamics to Darwinian evolution, from Buddhism's insistence that nothing is permanent and all suffering results from our delusions of permanence to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes ("To everything there is a season"), change is part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom. But I don't believe we're dealing with all that that means. We haven't even begun to deal with it. (21)

Besides indicating the level of intellect and knowledge that Lauren possesses in such a decaying world where people rarely ever think beyond their basic needs, this trait of thought shows that Earthseed is profoundly inspired by nature. Lauren does not refer to any Western religion or philosophy in this context but mentions, rather, Buddhism, which commonly perceives nature most harmoniously. After the fall of Robledo and the beginning of Lauren's path toward the North with her small group of multi-racial and multi-aged people, she begins her journey of teaching Earthseed. In doing so, she crafts her idea and some of the previously hidden angles for her along the way, adding to the concept of shaping, which is one of the main pillars of Earthseed. Along her way, a member of her group, who would later become her husband, refers to the same similarity between Earthseed and "*Buddhism, existentialism, [and] Sufism" in the sense that "the impermanence of everything is a basic Buddhist principle*" (185). Lauren admits to the similarity but insists that "*none of them are Earthseed,*" and that "*[t]hey go off in their own directions*" (185). As such, Earthseed becomes clearer as Lauren attempts to explain it to others. It adheres, hence, to its own path of shaping.

On a different note, Earthseed can be seen more as a philosophical stream than as a religious establishment. The fact that Lauren is the daughter of a preacher can be a good explanation for the religious terminology she uses. There are plenty of examples of

philosophers that can be noticed to have relied on religious phrases to promote their thoughts because commoners are often more familiar with religion than philosophy (Nietzsche comes to mind here). Adopting this approach in reading Earthseed requires a constant reminder that the word 'God' does not refer to a divine being or a superpower –which Lauren keeps emphasizing. It refers, instead, to the core of her philosophical belief. That being said, the phrase 'God is change' is a recurrent motif in the duology, interpreting change as a superior universal system:

> God is Change, and in the end, God prevails. But God exists to be shaped. It isn't enough for us to just survive, limping along, playing business as usual while things get worse and worse. If that's the shape we give to God, then someday we must become too weak—too poor, too hungry, too sick—to defend ourselves. Then we'll be wiped out. (55)

Despite Lauren's certain and decisive recognition of Change as the ultimate power that should almost be worshiped, she still believes that humans are still behind the driving wheel that directs the path of that Change. More deeply, neither human agency nor the lack of it, according to her, can stop the Change from taking place. The former, however, may allow change to occur and reside in a desirable position. She emphasizes that *"[t]here has to be more that [they] can do, a better destiny that [they] can shape. Another place. Another way. Something!"* (55).

Lauren emphasizes that Earthseed is not founded, but rather discovered by her. As a way of explaining this to one of the members of her small group traveling Northward after the fall of Robledo, she illustrates using a small rock: *"If I could analyze this and tell you all that it was made of,"* she demands, *"would that mean I'd made up its contents?"* (154). When Travis, her partner in the conversation, asks about the things she analyzed toward reaching Earthseed, she mentions *"[o]ther people [...], [her]self, everything [she] could read, hear,*

see, all the history [she] could learn" (154). To this end, insofar as the role of philosophy has always been to analyze and explain the aforementioned, Earthseed can, from this angle as well, be seen more as a philosophical stream given the name of religion to ease people's access to and acceptance of it. This diversity between perceiving Earthseed as a religion or a philosophy has been presented in *Parable of the Sower*. Questions were raised about "*what the point of Earthseed is. Why personify change by calling it God? Since change is just an idea, why not call it that? Just say change is important*" (157). When faced with such inquiries, Lauren explains that "*[p]eople forget ideas. They're more likely to remember God—especially when they're scared or desperate*" (157). This supports, again, the interpretation of Earthseed as the philosophy upon which Lauren's utopian hope is constructed.

Such perception of Earthseed resonates with Raymond Williams' elaboration of the conception of utopia in science fiction. While Emily Anderson (70) determines that utopia underwent a turbulent amount of misconceptions and changes in prospects since Thomas More, Williams specifies that the religious consciousness associated with dreaming about the perfect place cannot be considered a utopia, for it lacks the actuality of the "*ordinary human or worldly life*" (205). Therefore, Earthseed and its idealization of Change allow Lauren's dream to contradict such misconceptions and to be rendered a utopian dream. That is, the eventual end of Earthseed is not to reach an ultimate, unrealistic perfect place, but rather to pursue an everlasting endeavor toward directing Change in the right way while maintaining the effort toward surviving.

More importantly, Earthseed is clear-cut from the humanist perspective of the universal hierarchy. It can be read as the crystallization of posthumanist thought and an attempt, albeit unrecognized, to achieve it. In all its expressions, it functions as an opposition to the humanist mind that

is based on apparently scientific views –notably Darwinian concept of evolution – to offer an original, pure, and essential identity of true humanity. This has been widely used for racial justification that posits white Christian men as the truest image of God and, therefore, masters. At the same time it relegates nonhuman world to the lowest position which has no other function save to the survival of the fittest. (Achachelooei and Leon 112)

Earthseed becomes the core of, and the bound to, Lauren's foreseen community that is composed of men, women, blacks, whites, Hispanics, the straight, the gay, the old, the young, and the 'sharers' (which is another posthumanist trait that is elaborated on in the following chapter). This can be seen as an indication of their rejection of such humanist hierarchy. On top of that, although the destiny of Earthseed is prognosticated by Lauren to be placed in outer space, its name can indicate that it always remains engraved within the Earth. Therefore, instead of regarding the universe as a ladder that the human race must climb to survive, the novels adopt the critical posthumanist vision of a harmonious universe where all can thrive unanimously if all embrace Change and work on shaping it.

Earthseed becomes, at a certain point, the only motivation for Lauren to escape the remnants of the community that she grew up in and pursue her utopian dream. When her new community is established, the book containing the verses that explain Earthseed functions as a spiritual manuscript. It holds the community together until their comfort seduces them to give in to a relative stagnancy and neglect the sacredness of Change, which is when another massive change occurs. Before tackling the journey of Lauren's utopia from the womb of dystopia, it is important to investigate the wave of the important alterations taking place prior to her journey inasmuch as these changes hold a fair share in inspiring Lauren's thought toward discovering Earthseed. An overall glance at the chronological flow

of events reveals that Change, as an idea and an inspiration, is either preceded, driven, or triggered by two essential, and almost opposing, elements of nature, which are fire and water.

2.2. Fire and the Recreation of Humans

Fire is among the most powerful forces of nature. It is highly celebrated in myths and legends and has been worshiped by several civilizations. However, its Western conception is often traced back to the myth of Prometheus, who defied the Olympian gods and gave the gift of fire to humans ("Prometheus," para.11). It is important to emphasize here that fire is perceived as a 'gift,' although this act was met by eternal punishment. This story is relevant in demonstrating the various facets of perceiving fire. Other facets can be seen in the interpretation of the latter as a means of punishment in many religions yet a sign of greatness in others. Further, the more relative interpretation of fire in the *Parable* novels is inspired by the story of the phoenix, which is summarized in *Parable of the Sower* as part of a verse from *Earthseed: The Book of the Living* in the following phrases: "*In order to rise/ From its own ashes/ A phoenix/ First/ Must/ Burn*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 108). This procreative feature drives most interpretations related to fire as a force of nature and a tool of humans in shaping Change in the duology. To this end, fire is one of the recurring themes in the *Parable* novels, it exposes a considerable deal of the novel's thematic statement regarding nature inasmuch as fire is an essential part of this whole.

Right from the outset, the first mention of fire in the novel is attached to the idea of death and rebirth. Lauren recalls a past incident in which the church where her father preached was burned:

> Dad once had a church just a few blocks outside our wall. He began it before there were so many walls. But after it had been slept in by the homeless, robbed, and vandalized several times, someone poured gasoline in and around

it and burned it down. Seven of the homeless people sleeping inside on that

last night burned with it. (8)

This incident is narrated amid Lauren's description of her new religion. The Church symbolizes traits of the old faith, and, while it burns, a new faith is born. Interestingly, the church could have been destroyed, robbed, or fallen apart, like countless other places, but Octavia Butler chooses fire to mark the end of a symbol of the past. Moreover, fire is related to the idea of rebirth. The myth of the phoenix resurfaces here. While all forces of nature, including earth, air, water, and fire, can cause death and destruction, only fire is related to this mythical bird that rises from the ashes. This is a highly relevant symbolism to the post-apocalyptic setting of the duology, since, as has previously been mentioned, the entire plot revolves around rebuilding and rising again. In short, the first vivid encounter with nature suggests that it is an acting force in pushing people, harshly as it may initially appear, to overcome the remnants of the past in favor of embracing the future.

Another significance of fire appears in the repeating incidents where it threatens, damages, or takes people's lives. To begin, Lauren refers to the spread of a new type of drug that grants ecstasy in the sight of fire (19). Notwithstanding its illegality, the drug spreads widely, ripping the lives of those who inhabit less secure and less careful communities. The first time the fire turns from a possible danger to an actual threat is when one of Lauren's neighbor's

son, his five kids, his wife, her brother, and her brother's three kids all died

in a house fire—an arson fire. The son's house had been in an unwalled area

north and east of [Lauren's neighborhood], closer to the foothills. It wasn't a

bad area, but it was poor. Naked. One night someone torched the house.

Maybe it was a vengeance fire set by some enemy of a family member or

maybe some crazy just set it for fun. (19)

Lauren's assumptions that the fire could have been set as some sort of vendetta eventually fade away. She comes to encounter, later, a considerable number of similar crimes, where the fire is used to harm people arbitrarily and for no reason whatsoever. Being unable to endure the pain, Lauren's neighbor, Mrs. Sims, commits suicide by shooting herself. Once again, Lauren sees beyond the incident when she writes, "*[Mrs. Sims] believed, like Dad, that if you kill yourself, you go to hell and burn forever […] Yet, when things got to be too much for her, she decided to trade pain for eternal pain in the hereafter*" (19). While fire should be interpreted as a system of punishment here, it is once again, turned into a merciful option in comparison to the misery in life. This context is supported by Lauren's description of the dead corps as something "*disgusting*" but immediately remarking that "*[t]hey aren't suffering*" (19). Mrs. Sims' decision indicates that she would rather accept eternal fire than human brutality, and Lauren's statements seem to endorse her stand.

Fire can, yet again, be read as an instrument to wipe the old in favor of the new. However, it is important to note that the new is not born out of the fire but rather out of earth. To elucidate, after the fall of the neighborhood, the ideologies carried within Lauren's Earthseed increasingly become the most solid instrument keeping the surviving group going. Despite people's initial worrisome and confused attitudes, they soon adapted to Earthseed and eventually built a united and robust community around it. Even those who find it difficult to completely 'convert' to the seemingly religious part of it, such as Bankole, Lauren's later-to-be-husband, still adhere to the ideological side beneath it. One interpretation of coining the term Earthseed can be that Lauren wants her ideology to be planted on earth as a sign of continuation and renovation. While Earthseed is all about embracing Change –or even worshiping it, in the literal sense– fire is likewise all about enforcing Change. Fire and earth, hence, work together: the former in eradicating the past, and the latter in planting the future.

In another comparison between the old and the new view regarding fire, Lauren notices, "*People worry so much about fire, but the little kids will play with it if they can*" (24). Again, fire represents fear for the older generation due to associating it with damage that befell their civilization as a result of it. On the contrary, it represents the norm for the younger generation. When a fire erupts in the community, the fire department is usually out of reach because of its unaffordable fees. Even the water that is used to extinguish the fire is referred to by Lauren as "*wasted*" and "*hard enough to pay for*" (25). This discourse may indicate that, for Lauren, fire with all its mighty threat is not as threatening as the scarcity of water.

On top of it all, the new drug allowing people to find ecstasy in the mere sight of fire provides an entirely new dimension. The drug spreads fast and the news attached to it spreads faster. Some addicts become as high from seeing fire as they immerse their bodies in it and burn to death. On this note, Lauren comments, "*The reports say that it makes watching a fire better than sex. I don't know whether the reporters are condemning it or advertising it*" (39). Most of its victims are teenagers and young adults in their early twenties. While fire has been linked to the notion of the recreation of humans, this situation begs to slightly differ. Fire, here, stands for accelerating the situation that is bad enough already, but it is crucial to take into account the human element under which intent fire is used. The latter is an instrument in the hand of the former, which denies it its actual associated characteristics that have hitherto been elucidated. If the drug users are taken out of the picture because fire is tempting them to kill themselves, intentionally or not, then it can be concluded that fire stands for purification. It brings an end to the collapsing world along with the 'collapsing' people, leaving room for a tight possibility of rebuilding, but a possibility nonetheless, especially if executed by the right people such as Lauren and her newly founded community that appears more clearly in *Parable of the Talents*. A larger look at the representation of fire

reveals that, for the most part, the latter assumes some of the characteristics that are usually associated with water, especially that of purification. To this end, a discussion of the depiction of water and its related meaning in the novels is due.

2.3. Water as the Omen of Change

As opposed to fire and its rule in extinguishing the old world and birthing a new one, another quintessential part of nature is crucial to the plot, which is water. The significance of the latter to the survival of not only mankind but every other species on Earth is needless to debate. Nevertheless, Octavia Butler presents the binary opposition of fire and water in an unconventional manner. While fire in the traditional sense, as has already been mentioned, often stands for destruction and punishment, and water usually represents life and rebirth, the *Parable* duology presents them differently. Water, or the lack thereof, is among the elements that cause suffrage and hardship in the latter. Most of the incidents where water is addressed are related to the horrible conditions of Lauren's reality and the agony of people.

Similar to fire, water is first referred to in the context of religion. On their way to be baptized, Lauren invokes for the first time that water is extremely scarce, which makes it highly expensive:

> Dad had insisted on fresh, clean, potable water for the baptism. He couldn't afford it, of course. Who could? That was the other reason for the four extra kids […] along with my brothers Keith and Marcus. The other kids' parents had helped with costs. They thought a proper baptism was important enough to spend some money and take some risks. (12)

Due to his religious inclinations, Reverend Olamina believes that the act of baptism is worth spending one of the most crucial yet scarce resources for the sake of reviving a tradition from the pre-apocalypse world. Nevertheless, water is immediately stripped of its reviving

characteristic, for the fact that the traditional water is used to celebrate is already metaphorically dead for the protagonist.

While the reverse is usually true, the plethora of water in a normal, non-apocalyptic world allows the transition of abstract qualities; the reverse, nonetheless, turns it into a mere necessity for survival. This necessity forces people to abandon most of the utilization of water such as baptism, as has already been hinted, cleaning clothes, showering, and the like. In some communities that are still relatively sustaining, like Lauren's walled neighborhood in Robledo, some people started to deliberately dress and appear dirty because "*If you're clean, you make a target of yourself*" (15). That being said, both the lack and the presence of water are, hence, a threat to people. Water is, then, stripped of the revival and purification qualities, which are instead assumed by fire. This image that Butler draws provides a re-reading of the entire mechanism operating the world. That is, while the popular response to these hardships is, according to the novels, either denial or submission, Butler promotes an unconventional path driven by the hopes and wit of the protagonist in dealing with the crisis. Instead of condemning nature, Lauren adjusts to the changes around it. An important factor behind her will to adjust is her ability to observe the opportunities around her and the ways in which even the remaining good is exploited by humans.

To explain further, the irreplaceability of water and the threat associated with its increasing price and scarcity are emphasized on multiple occasions. This allows several other issues to stem from this problem:

> The cost of water has gone up again. And I heard on the news today that more water peddlers are being killed. Peddlers sell water to squatters and the street poor—and to people who've managed to hold on to their homes, but not to pay their utility bills. Peddlers are being found with their throats cut and their money and their handtrucks stolen. Dad says water now costs several times

as much as gasoline. But, […] most people have given up buying gasoline.

[…] It's a lot harder to give up water. (15)

Water is presented here as a commodity causing trouble in the market. This further reduces its abstract significance as opposed to fire which is much glorified. To illustrate, Lauren describes an incident where a fire is burning through some buildings in Los Angeles, and she immediately explains that "*no one would waste water trying to put such fires out*" (16).

The scarcity of water is once more demonstrated through the reference to water stations. After Robledo gets destroyed by the addicts of the spreading drug, who go by various names, among them is "*the paints,*" as "*they paint their skin green or blue or red or yellow*" (79), Lauren heads north with two surviving members of her old neighborhood, Harry and Zahra. Along their path northward "*where it still rains every year*" (139), the menace of fire is expected, and the several incidents that they face along their journey are accounted for. However, the threat caused by the lack of water imposes a rather unfathomable challenge:

> There aren't enough water stations. That's why water peddlers exist. Also, water stations are dangerous places. People going in have money. People coming out have water, which is as good as money. Beggars and thieves hang around such places—keeping the whores and drug dealers company. Dad warned us all about water stations, trying to prepare us in case we ever went out and got caught far enough from home to be tempted to stop for water. His advice: "Don't do it. Suffer. Get your rear end home." (143)

The human element reappears in abusing such a crisis. In addition to the skyrocketed price of water, people traveling to the North have to afford protection lest they become an easy target for crime. In addition to the allusions that this situation speaks about humans, which will be elaborated on later, it further supports the claim that nature is not acting on its own

accord to harm the entirety of humanity. Rather, people appear to exploit the decline of the climate to serve their own greedy needs. Oftentimes, just like those who use fire to harm others end up burning themselves, most peddlers "*sometimes poison themselves*" (143) because of using bottles that may contain "*chemical residue—fuel, pesticide, herbicide.*" Lauren mentions that "*[a]nything you buy from a water peddler on the freeway ought to be boiled, and still might not be safe*" (143). This problem is caused by the illiteracy of most peddlers or simply their carelessness and negligence. Moreover, "*[c]ommercial stations let you draw whatever you pay for—and not a drop more—right out of one of their taps*" (143) making greed and fear, in this context two faces of the same coin. Even the freshness of the water is a luxury that people are deprived of in such a world, as the water "*might taste, smell, or look bad, but you can depend on it not to kill you*" (143). Again, a huge part of the harm caused by nature is accelerated by the misdeeds of humans.

While fire stands for renewal, water is often associated with backwardness in several contexts. To illustrate, Lauren mentions a member of her old neighborhood by the name of Richard Moss, who supports and practices polygamy. One of his wives, Zahra, eventually becomes among the leading characters. Similar to Lauren, Moss adopts his own newly founded belief system that is "*a combination of the Old Testament and historical West African practices*" (27). His religion is constructed upon the conviction that he "*wants men to be patriarchs, rulers, and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible*" (27). The association of Moss with water appears when Lauren mentions that he works for a commercial water company. His job provides him with the rare financial stability that allows him to have more than one wife in a world where rules do not apply anymore.

Furthermore, the futuristic setting of the duology suffers from a massive hit of drought. Lauren narrates that rain comes once in about six years. Before recording this experience that took place on March 2025, Lauren remembers the last time she witnessed rain and all

the precautions that Cory had to take, representing, again, the attitude of the old generation towards nature:

> That's all there has been for six years. I can remember the rain six years ago, water swirling around the back porch, not high enough to come into the house, but high enough to attract my brothers who wanted to play in it. Cory, forever worried about infection, wouldn't let them. She said they'd be splashing around in a soup of all the waste-water germs we'd been watering our gardens with for years. Maybe she was right, but kids all over the neighborhood covered themselves with mud and earthworms that day, and nothing terrible happened to them. (35)

Corry's fear proves again to be wrong, and nature appears safe again. Their current experience, however, was slightly different. This time, the rain was perceived more gracefully:

> We heard last night on the radio that there was a storm sweeping in from the Pacific, but most people didn't believe it. […] This is a colder, winter storm. It began this morning as people were coming to church. In the choir we sang rousing old hymns accompanied by Cory's piano playing and lightning and thunder from outside. It was wonderful. Some people missed part of the sermon, though, because they went home to put out all the barrels, buckets, tubs, and pots they could find to catch the free water. Other went home to put pots and buckets inside where there were leaks in the roof. (35)

The rain lasts for several days without causing any harm or destruction. Lauren describes it to be "*[s]o different and beautiful [...], so incredible and wonderful". She feels "so overwhelmed by water*" (35) that she spends time outside in the rain, disregarding Cory's cautions. It is important to restate the difference between the representation of fire and water

in the duology. The former, on the one hand, often brings immediate devastation followed by renewal and is associated with people's agency, be it willingly or forcefully. The latter, on the other, is associated with bringing people's fear to the surface. It also indicates that an end to a larger phase is coming.

A common factor between the representations of fire and water is that the major appearance of both is oftentimes followed by a level of change in the plot that rates from mild to radical. To begin, while baptism was the first incident where water takes an important part and ironically represents the end of Lauren's bounds to her father's faith, rain brings a considerably larger amount of change. After immersing in water for several days in a row, Lauren's neighborhood wakes up to the news of a young girl's death, followed by a chain of atrocious events of robberies, disappearances, and deaths that include members of Lauren's own family. On a more immediate level, the cost of rain was a troubled and harmful weather-consuming Robledo:

> The rain stopped. My windows are on the north side of the house, and I can see the clouds breaking up. They're being blown over the mountains toward the desert. Surprising how fast they can move. The wind is strong and cold now. It might cost us a few trees. I wonder how many years it will be before we see rain again. (44)

The wind is not as much of a recurrent motif in the duology as fire and water. Therefore, it can be read in this context as the usual symbol associated with it, which is a sign of the realization of a certain destiny. The wind can also be interpreted as foreshadowing an upcoming chaos, fitting the following events perfectly. Once more, aspects of nature seem to warn against the harm that will be caused by humans.

Moreover, another example of a major plot twist following the sight of water is when Lauren's group encounters the ocean in their journey toward the north. For all the initial

members of her group, it was the first time they had seen such a huge amount of water. Their reaction varied from dazzle to sorrow for the fact that it was undrinkable. This day is considered to be the end of Lauren's secretiveness toward Earthseed and the beginning of a self-set mission to teach it to current and future members of her group. Although she allowed the first two members of what can hardly be called a group running from the decayed neighborhood, which is Harry and Zahra, to read her notes about Earthseed, Lauren did not decide to pursue this act of teaching it until the evening of the beach. In addition, this incident also coincides with Lauren's decision to include other people, which starts with "*the members of the mixed family […] Travis Charles Douglas, Gloria Natividad Douglas, and six-month-old Dominic Douglas, also called Domingo*" (149). Consequently, Lauren's community grows larger and her Earthseed ideologies spread wider, resulting in a step forward toward achieving her utopian dream based on posthumanist visions.

To conclude, it can be said that the idealization of Change, as an idea, is one of the central themes around which the duology is knit. It can also be concluded from the above analysis that nature is responsible for nothing more than inspiring Change. That is, the elements of nature do not appear to be a working force. Nature is merely there as a part of a larger universal mechanism operating in a constantly altering and alternating manner. It is, thusly, the human element that is responsible for –to use Lauren's words– 'shaping' the Change. On a more narrowed lens, Lauren's shaping of such Change meets her essential vision of reaching a utopia out of the dystopian reality. Through her works, Butler attempts to "*reinvent the utopian vision at a time when utopia allegedly has been rendered impossible*" (Phillips, "The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler's 'Parable of the Sower'" 300). To this end, it is important to tackle her idea of a perfect place from a posthumanist perspective and to measure what has hitherto been concluded about nature in accordance with such a place.

3. The Road to a Posthumanist Utopia

Growing up in a less-than-ideal world, almost every person has pictured, at least once in a lifetime, a paralleled version of one's world, in which the latter assumes the most perfect, peaceful, harmonious, and luxurious features that one's mind can stretch. Since it is the role of philosophy to frame the random circle of human thoughts into logicality, a description and terminology for such a place were birthed in philosophy texts. Inspired by Plato's enlightened place in *The Republic* (375 BCE), many civilizations rose with the hope of realizing justice and fairness. When the impossibility of this endeavor loomed ahead, people sought the promises of religion to bless the good-doers with a paradise in the hereafter. Finally, Thomas More identified this perfect place with a name in his *Utopia* (1516). Despite the imaginary and unreal connotation related to this concept, modern scientific progress has been promoting a slight hope of pursuing such a utopian endeavor. However, history reveals a pattern of either natural or human-made disasters that strike at the peak of these pursuits to reset the entire continuum of progress. The Dark Ages after the heights of the Roman Empire, the Great War after the Age of Imperialism, the Great Depression after the Roaring Twenties, and most recently, the worldwide pandemic, are a few examples of this. On top of it, a simple glance at the periods of seeming growth and stability could reveal an opposite side marked by discrimination, oppression, conflicts, and corruption. To this end, from the womb of utopia, there comes the concept of dystopia. Interestingly, utopian and dystopian works often crossover in the sense that the former may be a cover to an oppressive reality whilst the latter may be a motive for a utopian endeavor. That being said, Octavia Butler's *Parable* novels, with a special emphasis on *Parable of the Sower,* can be read as a journey to escape a current dystopia towards achieving a utopian dream. This section analyses the decisive rule that Lauren's attachment to the natural world and the inspiration she acquires from its play drive her journey and questions the ultimate goal of her pursuit.

3.1.The Reflection of a Ustopia: The Fight for Nutrition and Survival

Amid the Dystopia that Lauren inhabits, the first glimmer of a relative 'luxury' that she refers to stems from nature. In describing neighboring families in Robledo, Lauren mentions the Yannis family, who trade in "*fruit, fruit juice, acorn bread, or walnuts. Whatever they had too much of in their garden they found a way to sell*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 16). These items can be referred to as luxuries inasmuch as they stand for sweetness, freshness, and tastefulness in a world where people stay dirty to avoid wasting water or being discriminated against for looking rich. However, from an early age, Lauren learns that luxury, or simply a tasteful fruit, does not come across as priceless. Fruits and plants also represent a sign of good faith. When an old lady living alone in Robledo gets robbed, her neighbors "*brought her peaches and figs and a length of good cotton cloth*" (18). Alas, the old lady, Mrs. Sims, commits suicide a month later.

Despite the molecules of hope and utopian dreams that nature might offer, they are only visible to young characters who have the misfortune of not witnessing the glory of the good old days. This misfortune can be interpreted as their only surviving mechanism. That is, the only reason that allows such a young girl as Lauren to spend passages writing about the comfort she finds in fantasizing about nature and the stars is that she did not taste the pleasure of progress and the might of the American civilization as the elders in her community did. It can be derived from this that the perspective regarding nature varies in accordance with the circumstances surrounding the beholder. Nevertheless, as long as the *Parable* novels are for the most part centered on Lauren's view, it can be said that the overall thematic statement of the duology regarding nature is a positive one. Nature is viewed as a working force and an inspiration that pushes the engine of rebuilding and progress.

A huge reason that lies beneath the perspective held by the young is that they grow up in a world where most of them have to rely on nature for survival. In *Parable of the Sower,*

there is an immense emphasis on the reliance on agriculture for nutrition, and in *Parable of the Talents,* agriculture opens the door of trade, which leads the newly founded community toward paths of sustainability and progress. Still, this reliance is paralleled by aggressive behavior towards animals. Due to the necessity to protect themselves, Lauren mentions that members of her community had to learn to shoot. The youngest occasionally accompanies Lauren's father to practice:

> Most of us have practiced at home with BB guns on homemade targets or on squirrel and bird targets. I've done all that. My aim is good, but I don't like it with the birds and squirrels. Dad was the one who insisted on my learning to shoot them. He said moving targets would be good for my aim. I think there was more to it than that. I think he wanted to see whether or not I could do it. (28)

Lauren expresses her disapproval of this act despite the reasons that her father gave:

> I didn't like it, […] [Squirrels, rats, and birds] had to be killed, though. They ate our food or ruined it. Tree-crops were their special victims: Peaches, plums, figs, persimmons, nuts. … And crops like strawberries, blackberries, grapes. … Whatever we planted, if they could get at it, they would. Birds are particular pests because they can fly in, yet I like them. I envy their ability to fly. **Sometimes I get up and go out at dawn just so I can watch them without anyone scaring them or shooting them.** Now that I'm old enough to go target shooting on Saturdays, I don't intend to shoot any more birds, no matter what Dad says. Besides, just because I can shoot a bird or a squirrel doesn't mean I could shoot a person (28; emphasis added)

This behavior can be seen from two main angles. On the one hand, this is a typical 'survival-for-the-fittest' scenario, where the powerful species neutralize the Other. In more ways than

one, even other humans living outside the walled communities are perceived as Others. This manifests in the constant tension, fear, and violent activities between people from the inside and those from the outside. Initially, this tension is depicted from the one-dimension of the walled communities' inhabitants, which shows the outsiders as barbarians and savages. Later, however, when Lauren herself becomes an outsider, a new dimension is uncovered, proving that fear is mutual. On the other hand, this behavior reveals the anthropocentric tendencies of the older generation. It is not uncommon for humans to harm other species for the sake of their own benefit. While the survival-for-the-fittest motive that pushes humans to eliminate other beings that are eating their food, which is already scarce enough, might be understandable, the act of killing animals for the mere reason of practice is unacceptable for Lauren. The latter, hence, demonstrates posthumanist traits that allow her to regard all life as sacred and refuse an unnecessary sacrifice of a life.

In a different context, the aforementioned similarity between the perception of humans and animals as both Others appears more straightforwardly:

> There are always a few groups of homeless people and packs of feral dogs living out beyond the last hillside shacks. People and dogs hunt rabbits, possums, squirrels, and each other. Both scavenge whatever dies. The dogs used to belong to people—or their ancestors did. But dogs eat meat. These days, no poor or middle-class person who had an edible piece of meat would give it to a dog. Rich people still keep dogs, either because they like them or because they use them to guard estates, enclaves, and businesses. The rich have plenty of other security devices, but the dogs are extra insurance. Dogs scare people. (29)

This comparison between dogs and homeless people paves the way for a discussion about the transformation that the wild executes upon beings. It is a well-known fact that all animals

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belong to the wild and that some have only been domesticated by humans to serve certain needs, from nutrition to protection or simply good company. In the case of a disaster, however, the survival instinct of humans labels them to prioritize attaining themselves and their own, leaving animals in the arms of nature. Various literary works have discussed this issue, the most notable of which is "The Call of the Wild" (1903). The latter, on top of a set of works about nature and animals, indicates that the wild is the true home of animals that reveals their buried essence and transforms them back to their primitive state. Interestingly, the primitive state can be read on either end of the spectrum: as a backward state of existence and being; or as a free, unrestricted state of behaving. Conversely, a definition of both civilization and the essence of being can stem from this. From the first perspective, civilization, as a state of becoming, is necessary for the process of identifying humans as the superior species, and without it, the essence of being, which consists of obedience and regulations, is lost. The opposing perspective indicates that civilization can be seen as a taming tool that functions against humans' –or animals', for that matter– nature, which consists of an essence that is liberated and harmonious towards other species.

Both ends of the spectrum reemerge once again in the similarity that Lauren views between homeless people and dogs. This relationality surfaces when Lauren writes, "*I wish I knew more about [dogs]. I've read books about them being intelligent, loyal pets, but that's all in the past. Dogs now are wild animals who will eat a baby if they can*" (148), which might as well be an exact description of humans and the degraded state that they have reached in the futuristic setting of the novels. Lauren initially regards the world outside the walls –which, for the sake of this discussion, can be referred to as the 'wild'– as a consuming environment that turns people into soulless monsters craving food, fire, and murder. This vision that has been promoted to her mostly by the elders of her old communion in Robledo, and by the few encounters that she had at the demise of the latter and the beginning of her

journey, motivates her to construct a new walled community to remain in the civilized zone. The fall of her second community, though, and the devastations that she was less young to recover from, eventually drive her to jump to the other end of the spectrum by regarding the 'wild' as a free place where her thoughts and beliefs can circulate without any restriction or fear. In others, she comes to realize that any possible presence of a utopia can only exist if it is stripped from the idea that a utopia, or, to use more tangible words, the smallest civilized place, can only survive in a vacuum, inside walled communities that are separated from nature and the world. It takes Lauren an entire journey, numerous deaths, and two failures in preserving walled communities to come to this conclusion. The latter permits her to take her unspoken utopia fueled by the doctrines of Earthseed to another level, escaping the entire dystopia of Earth to reach the stars.

On a different note, before setting a plan for her utopian dream, Lauren's initial focus is on survival. The reader learns that she reads the books in her father's library that are dated back to when things were still holding. She cares about reading books "*on handling medical emergencies, California native and naturalized plants and their uses, and basic living: logcabin-building, livestock raising, plant cultivation, soap making—that kind of thing*" (42). Lauren's determination to survive depends hugely on the element of nature. Moreover, When she assembles what she calls a grab-and-run pack, she collects all the essential items necessary for survival, and she includes something that is often not thought of when preparing such a bag, which is "*a lot of plantable raw seed*" (59). This supports her conviction that mere survival is not enough. Lauren relies on the seeds more than anything else. They represent a symbol of starting over as well as continuation and grounding.

These varied reflections of utopian hopes stemming from the womb of a dystopian reality are best put in what Margret Atwood terms 'ustopia.' The latter, according to her, "*is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia – the imagined perfect society and its*

opposite – because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other" (Atwood 82). It can, therefore, be said that Nature reflects both sides of the coin simultaneously; it is the reflection of an actual dystopia and the inspiration for a possible utopia. To this end, it is relevant to trace the realization of such inspiration by focusing on the two pillars of Lauren's journey, which are community and destiny.

3.2. The Question of Destiny and the Stars

Lauren's observations at the age of fifteen drive most of her future path. In addition to paying special care to the natural world on Earth, Lauren does not cease to think about outer space whenever an opportunity is presented. Building on her first attachment to the stars when she is seven, her attention is caught years later by the news of a female astronaut, who led an unsuccessful mission to Mars resulting in her demise. This occurrence, which is also one of the last few events podcasted on television, or at least one of the last that Lauren was able to watch, triggers in her a keen desire to seek the path of the stars. This desire emerges progressively from a state of describing to rationalizing then defending:

> ONE OF THE ASTRONAUTS on the latest Mars mission has been killed. Something went wrong with her protective suit and the rest of her team couldn't get her back to the shelter in time to save her. People here in the neighborhood are saying she had no business going to Mars, anyway. **All that money wasted on another crazy space trip when so many people here on earth can't afford water, food, or shelter**. (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 15; emphasis added)

The last statement reflects the voice of the crowd that Lauren is surrounded by. It is a legitimate claim in a situation where people are starving to be angry about investing in a project that probably would not pay back during their lifetime. Soon thereafter, though,

Lauren jumps from judging the budget of the entire mission to expressing deep sympathy for the astronaut:

> The dead astronaut is going to be brought back to Earth. She wanted to be
> buried on Mars. She said that when she realized she was dying. She said Mars
> was the one thing she had wanted all her life, and now she would be part of it
> forever. But the Secretary of Astronautics says no. He says her body might
> be a contaminant. Idiot. (16 - 17)

Lauren's emotions appear strongly in her reaction to the minister's claims. She carries on to rationalize that no "*microorganism living in or on her body would have a prayer of surviving and going native in that cold, thin, lethal ghost of an atmosphere*" (17). She immediately concludes that the entire space travel and the endeavor of constructing colonies on Mars are more of a political rather than a humanitarian or environmentalist agenda, indicating along the way that they ought not to be so.

At this young age, Lauren does not refrain from arguing her thoughts about space. She explains to her father that the future of humanity, in her view, resides in outer space, which is a belief that, later, assumes the term 'destiny' as an ultimate goal for the foundation of Earthseed. One reason for her belief can be traced to the disrupted reality she was born in. As elaborated on earlier, Lauren is a character that can be labeled unique on a variety of criteria. Among those is her constant and strong connection to the natural world, which allows her to see beyond narrow-scale events. While most people are concerned about the problems, Lauren is concerned about the solutions. Interestingly, nature –and outer space, if in this context can be viewed as an annexed part to nature– represents the largest part of and the foundation for those solutions. In other words, nature reflects a beacon that guides a utopian dream to land on the shore of realization.

The *Parable* duology might well be perceived as a utopian endeavor fueled by the hope that resides in nature and space. Despite the author's insistence that she "*[does not] deal in Utopia*" because it "*is so cartoonish, so unreal [and] not human*" (qtd. in Warfield 61), the concepts of utopia and dystopia never escape a context where her works are tackled. Critics and scholars such as Peter Stillman (15), Angela Warfield (63), Hoda Zaki (242), and others, have sought to tackle one aspect of utopianism in Butler's works, particularly either or both of the *Parable* series, indicating the enormous presence of a utopian end to the novels. In this work, the theme of utopian hope amid dystopian reality is highly visible. The entire duology can be read as a cry for utopia. More importantly, Lauren's journey to escape the "*increasing social divisions, economic inequality, global warming, and the political fantasies of the anti-government right (in Sower) and the religious right (in Talents)*" (Stillman 15) is run from disarray to shape prosperity.

The meaning that Mars represents here is of high importance in triggering this utopian hope that replaces overwhelming devastation. To elaborate, Lauren, unlike many of her contemporaries, is not in a state of denial. She realizes that Mars is not the ultimate solution to all of humanity's problems, especially the extreme issues that are facing her futuristic world. She also realizes that Mars is no more than "*a rock—cold, empty, almost airless, dead. Yet it's heaven in a way. We can see it in the night sky, a whole other world, but too nearby, too close within the reach of the people who've made such a hell of life here on Earth*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 17). However, the distinct vision that allows her to see continuity in seeds, survival in acorns, and salvation in the stars, aids her to predict the destiny on Mars. Despite the initial scattered state of her thoughts, most of which are born without a specific name or term to identify them, the word destiny may, throughout the novel, represent the most accurate and inclusive term that combines such fragments.

Coming back to one of the central and unconventional themes of the novels, Earthseed is highly related to the idea of constructing a utopia in space. Religions have mostly been associated with the concept of 'utopia' in the sense that it represents a reward for the good-doers. Paradise, or heaven, can be seen as the perfect identification of a utopia inasmuch as the latter is the 'no place' or 'nowhere.' To explain, one cannot locate paradise on the map, which allows the former to assume the characteristics of the two Greek words that Thomas More combined: ou-topos. Opposite to conventionality, Earthseed does not promote promises to heaven but rather triggers them to seek the literal 'heaven.'

Lauren's dream that is set from the beginning of her recorded journey in 2024, when she is just fifteen years old, is finally realized at the end of *Parable of the Talents* in the year 2090:

> I have not given them heaven, but I've helped them to give themselves the heavens. I can't give them individual immortality, but I've helped them to give our species its only chance at immortality. I've helped them to the next stage of growth. They're young adults now, leaving the nest. It will be rough on them out there. It's always rough on the young when they leave the protection of the mother. (*Parable of the Talents* 448)

At the age of eighty-one, she finally manages to arrange the first expedition to Mars. She fulfills the promises and the destiny of Earthseed to go to heaven in the literal sense. The starship headed to outer space is named 'Christopher Columbus.' Lauren expresses her objection to the name that she thinks carries a burdened history. She clarifies that her mission "*is not about a shortcut to riches and empire. It's not about snatching up slaves and gold and presenting them to some European monarch. But one can't win every battle. One must know which battles to fight*" (449). Her mission is, rather, about ensuring the continuation of the human race under the ideologies of Earthseed. Her strong belief in her followers and the

faith that she has in humanity despite all the atrocities that she witnesses allow her to tolerate the name of the ship, focusing more on the hope that it carries underneath. However, it is undeniable that the discovery of the new world in the Age of Exploration carried equal hopes and dreams. America has been regarded as the ultimate success and the land where the old world was annexed for the first couple of centuries that followed its discovery. It was not until centuries later that the inhumane acts that were practiced there came to the surface, which was the beginning of the end of all that has once been ideal, leading to the accumulated events of the *Parables,* as fiction would picture the future of America. The possibility that history may repeat itself even on Mars is not a remote chance. Adding to this pattern, Lauren's death immediately before the beginning of the journey, hence ending a journey of her own, represents yet another negative sign of where the destiny of humanity is headed. While these minor events may prove to be a disturbance in the full image of the ultimate utopian goal, they are still the most real inspiration of the natural cycle of humanity, where the peak of progress necessitates an ultimate fall. Without this cycle, utopian hope would eventually cease to exist. From this, it can be said that the idea behind the utopianism of *Parables* does not lie in its realization, but rather in the aspiration to and the constant hope for that realization.

Lauren believes this voyage to be her "*immortality*" (449). Driven by reason, as she constantly is throughout the duology, she refrains from being a part of the first voyage, for she realizes that her old age and weak body can be a burden to the dream that she devoted her life to achieve:

> I will go with the first ship to leave after my death. If I thought I could survive as something other than a burden, I would go on this one, alive. No matter. Let them someday use my ashes to fertilize their crops. Let them do that. It's arranged. I'll go, and they'll give me to their orchards and their groves. (449)

Lauren prioritizes the success of the mission over her passion to be in it. She admits, "*I would have traveled across the world on foot to see this Departure if I'd had to. This is my life flying away on these ugly big trucks […] I have a right to see it, hear the thunder of it, smell it*" (449). Even at this stage, she can see ways in which her body may be useful "*to fertilize their crops,*" indicating once more her eagerness and willingness to remain an active contributor to the natural world. Despite all of her achievements and contributions to saving humanity, she does not once perceive herself as superior to the rest of beings but is always a part of it.

Lauren's endeavor to lead the human race to the start is aligned with a sense of belonging and oneness that joins mankind to the rest of the universe. In *Earthseed: The Book of the Living,* she records this relationality to assure that human eagerness and superiority are not transmitted to any future community amid the stars:

> We are all Godseed, but no more or less so than any other aspect of the universe, Godseed is all there is—all that Changes. Earthseed is all that spreads Earthlife to new earths. The universe is Godseed. Only we are Earthseed. And the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars. (*Parable of the Sower* 57)

This provides a rational explanation for Lauren's constant concern for the fate of humanity, which might, at first, be interpreted as an anthropocentric attitude. Instead, Lauren's behavior can be seen as an instinct stemming from survival mode. Put differently, her concern for humanity is not a step toward detaching it from the universe or placing it in a somehow powerful or superior position. It is rather an attempt to return humans to their original place as a part of a larger, harmonious universe.

Conclusion

This chapter was an endeavor to read the relevant representations and appearances of certain elements of nature in the futuristic dystopian setting of Butler's *Parable* novels. The chapter projected a special emphasis on *Parable of the Sower* inasmuch as the representation of nature appears more vividly in the first half and decreases in the second half where references to technology become more dominant in the plot. Insofar as the duology is written from the first-person perspective in the form of journals, it was important to read the theme of nature in accordance with Lauren's perspective and comments. This approach is endorsed by the supposition that Lauren is a posthuman character, which will be elaborated on further in the following chapter. In other words, reading nature from Lauren's view can be perceived as one way to read it from a posthumanist perspective. In addition to this, the chapter offers a consideration of nature as a separate entity. Hence, it was simultaneously read in direct parallel to posthumanist theories. Furthermore, the chapter reached supported claims as to answering the main questions that have initially been suggested. Those are related to the agency of nature, its role in shaping or being shaped by the human, and its place amid the posthumanist condition. The chapter, hence, concludes that the novels promote a spiritual image of nature without which the events remain incomplete. Instead of an active being, nature is depicted more as an idea and an essence of everything, including humans, communities, and religion. To this end, a dual relationality of shaping appears between nature and humans without neglecting or romanticizing the importance of each to the other. Finally, nature functions as the solid ground in the continuation of the human species and the revival of human values, which are emphasized as equally important, as mere survival does not sustain for long. Based on the above inferences, the next chapter tackles the circumstances, factors, and ways of the emergence of the posthuman as far as the duology is concerned.

Chapter Three

Human Progression in World Regression and a Posthumanist Protagonist

Chapter Three's Table of Contents

Introduction

In the context of relating the posthumanist discussion to fiction, it can be observed that the three early forms of literature identified by Anthony Burges (2) have focused on explaining and narrating the human experience. While lyrical poetry was centered on describing human emotions toward objects, events, and each other, the dramatic and epic branches created characters with extraordinary challenges and often labeled the human to be victorious. That is to say, the idea of a human above the herd and one with an elevated level of emotions has often been the center of literature regardless of the plot. However, following the Industrial Revolution, the mundane, day-to-day life with all its consumeristic and materialist problems started to overwhelm the largest share of literature. Movements such as realism and modernism began to shed the spotlight on what came to be known as the 'common Man.' Nevertheless, with the coming of postmodernism and the revival of the science fiction genre, the idea of the common Man started to be reduced at the expense of the extraordinary character with an extraordinary chain of events. Therefore, it can be claimed that literature has been accommodating the human need for relevance and importance, which narrows the ultimate purpose of literature to discuss the human.

This chapter focuses on the representation of humans in the *Parable* series, along with their actions, inactions, and reactions amid the dystopia of the novels. In reaching this endeavor, the chapter dives into three main discussions. First, it analyzes the being and becoming of the posthuman in the novels as opposed to the conventional human. It attempts to argue that the protagonist represents a typical fictional posthuman. Second, and with this argument in mind, the chapter moves toward tackling the main character's relationships and ties with other characters to determine the nature of the posthuman's surroundings and its ability, or lack thereof, to affect and be affected by them. Third, the chapter circles back to the notion of a utopia by building on the first chapter's conclusions about the relationship

between nature and utopia. It finally culminates in narrowing this topic by tackling the black utopian tradition and the birth of a futuristic posthuman that diverges from mainstream Western tradition to be more inclusive toward minorities.

1. The Making of the Posthuman in *Parables*

Resonating with Nietzsche's and Fukuyama's previously elaborated perspectives regarding the becoming of the human, Butler creates leading characters who defy the conventional norms of the latter's making. It is admittedly common in literature to personify noble, maleficent, and witty traits, along with others, through characters. E. M. Forster argues that the characters are the next most fundamental aspect and the most interesting thing about a novel (Forster and Stallybrass 54). It can be said that a linear categorization of the representation of central characters in literature is a fairly unattainable task due to the vastness of literary creations. Nevertheless, a pattern, as shady as it might be, can still be observed in mainstream literature throughout the ages. Since the scope of this observation is English Literature –with the word English referring to the language with which the literary piece is written rather than the political and/or geographical borders where it is published– the pattern commences within the Anglo-Saxon community. The oral tradition, which is accepted by many as literature since "*myths are vehicles for transmitting cultural values and concepts about the earth in which we live*" (Sanka et al. 10), usually pictures a male protagonist whose resourcefulness, morality, and physical power render him superior to his fellow Men. Beowulf is the best example of this since he meets these features along with being introduced as part of an oral tradition that was later penned down. Gradually, with the level of economic comfort and political stability increasing during the Age of the Tudors and beyond, fighting for the tribe became less relevant and, therefore, less depicted in literature. Shakespearean tragic heroes highlight this period of English literature. The hamartia of the tragic hero, albeit its negativity that inevitably leads to his demise, can still

be seen as a feature labeling him above the rest. From here, protagonists began to assume flawed characteristics, the use of which skyrocketed during the modernist era. Modernist literature, however, strips the leading characters of the elevating-above-the-herd feature and renders them average. This pattern starts to fade away with the emergence of postmodern literature, which takes the randomness to its extreme. To this end, contemporary literature rises with a new perspective of admitting and embracing the human flaw as a window of opportunity to elevate and even save the human race, resonating with the posthumanist philosophy of transcending human weakness. Butler brings this perspective to the surface through her treatment of hyperempathy in the *Parable* duology. The current section analyses the representation of the extreme level of human flaw and the ways in which it can be perceived as a posthumanist possibility.

1.1. Hyperempathy

Among the many features that distinguish the human from the nonhuman is the former's ability to comprehend abstract emotions as well as formulate a concrete understanding of physical sensations without the actual act of experiencing them. Examples of this can be provided rating from a highly elevated pain such as a woman, who has previously given birth, being able to formulate an instant and effortless attachment to the pain of another woman giving birth, to a person having a none deliberate cringe expression at the sight of another mistakenly drinking expired milk. Although this "*detached cognition*" (Halpern 670) is often attributed to negative feelings, positive feelings can also be shared. Empathy varies in intensity from one person to another; some are easily consumed by people's feelings while others are not. An extreme case of empathy has been shown in studies conducted in 2013 after right amygdalohippocampectomy, indicating "*a higher affective theory of mind than controls (which concerns the affective states, emotions, or feelings of others) in patients who reported a new spectacular emotional arousal*" (Richard-Mornas et

al. 4). Despite this unique incident, the chance of acquiring hyperempathetic abilities remains extremely rare. Twenty years before the mentioned study, Octavia Butler introduced a fictionalized vision of hyperempathy syndrome through the protagonist of her *Parable* duology.

It can be argued that the most defining posthumanist trait in the *Parable* novels is the representation of the hyperempathy syndrome and the ways in which it functions as a constructive force rather than a destructive one. Initially, Hyperempathy is portrayed as a flaw and a sign of weakness for the protagonist. The latter appears, at first, to be the only person suffering from such a rare medical case. In describing her syndrome, Lauren admits that "*[t]he sharing isn't real, after all. It isn't some magic or ESP that allows [her] to share the pain or the pleasure of other people. It's delusional*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 10). In a world full of pain, agony, starvation, disease, and death, sharing everything that another person in plain sight is feeling can admittedly be a destructive and threatening feature. When forced to go outside the walls of her community –such as the day she gets baptized or when she goes out to practice shooting– Lauren's father constantly checks out on her well-being:

> My father glanced back at me every now and then. He tells me, "You can beat this thing. You don't have to give in to it." He has always pretended, or perhaps believed, that my hyperempathy syndrome was something I could shake off and forget about […] Even I admit that. My brother Keith used to pretend to be hurt just to trick me into sharing his supposed pain. Once he used red ink as fake blood to make me bleed. I was eleven then, and I still bled through the skin when I saw someone else bleeding. I couldn't help doing it, and I always worried that it would give me away to people outside the family. (10)

This passage shows the extreme degree to which Lauren's hyperempathy stretches. The flexibility of the science fiction genre allows Butler to create a character unwillingly capable of sharing physical pain and physical injuries. Sharing the latter, however, disappears at age twelve when she reaches puberty (11). Additionally, Lauren's sharing ability extends beyond the actuality of what other people are feeling to include what they pretend to be feeling as well.

Many passages from *Parables of the Sower,* and a few extending in *Parable of the Talents*, are devoted to elaborating on the scientific explanation, rationale, and impact of the syndrome. This reinforces the centrality of it to the overall dystopia and survival plot:

> Hyperempathy syndrome is a delusional disorder, after all. There's no telepathy, no magic, no deep spiritual awareness. There's just the neurochemically-induced delusion that I feel the pain and pleasure that I see others experiencing. Pleasure is rare, pain is plentiful, and, delusional or not, it hurts like hell. (*Parable of the Talents* 11)

Naturally, the hyperempathy syndrome inflicts unreal pain onto the "*sharer*" and prevents one from causing pain in fighting or self-defense lest the pain is reciprocated. Lauren mentions that, as a kid, she avoids getting involved in fights unless necessary:

> I felt every blow that I struck, just as though I'd hit myself. So when I did decide that I had to fight, I set out to hurt the other kid more than kids usually hurt one another […] I got punished every time, and I resented it. It was double punishment, after all, and my father and stepmother knew it. But knowing didn't stop them. I think they did it to satisfy the other kids' parents. (*Parable of the Sower* 11)

Lauren criticizes other doctors' terminology of her case, which is "*organic delusional syndrome*" (11), and emphasizes that the pain she feels is rather real.

Lauren's sharing abilities cease to function when the opposite person is dead, regardless of the terrible state of the body that may indicate prior pain:

> To me, dead bodies are disgusting. They stink, and if they're old enough, there are maggots. But what the hell? They're dead. They aren't suffering, and if you didn't like them when they were alive, why get so upset about their being dead? Cory gets upset. She jumps on me for sharing pain with the living but tries to share it with the dead. (19)

This shows that Lauren's empathic sharing goes beyond the body to include the actual feeling instead of what the feeling may look like. It puts Lauren, during her journey, in the hard situation of choosing between ending the life of someone suffering to prevent herself from being paralyzed by the pain or leaving him with no help to suffer till death for the same reason.

Furthermore, Lauren's hyperempathy is not merely exclusive to humans. In multiple situations, she demonstrates a sharing ability with animals. The most notable example of this occurs earlier in *Parable of the Sower* during one of the shooting training outside the community when Lauren's father shoots a dog that was "*getting too close*" (32). Before realizing that the dog is still alive, Lauren catches on the pain it was feeling:

> I saw its bloody wounds as it twisted. I bit my tongue as the pain I knew it must feel became my pain. What to do? Keep walking? I couldn't. One more step and I would fall and lie in the dirt, helpless against the pain. Or I might fall into the canyon. "It's still alive," Joanne said behind me. "It's moving." (32)

This may be read as an indication that Lauren's condition goes beyond a mere psychological illusion stemming from a piece of prior knowledge or an awful sight of wounds. Sharing transcends the sight and interpretation of it to instantly hit the feeling mechanism. Lauren

describes the dog's physical appearance and the feeling of every pain and discomfort. Amid the sight of the dog's "*forefeet*" that "*were making little running motions [and] its claws scraping against the rock*" (32), she expresses her admiration of the dog, by writing, "*It was a bigger, grayer animal than the one I had seen. There was a beauty to it. It looked like pictures I had seen of wolves*" (31). when she passes by the wounded, moving dog, she feels nausea and demonstrates an ache in her belly that mirrors the dog's. To escape the pain, she shoots "*the beautiful dog through its head*" (31), ending, therefore, its suffering along with hers. This analysis also meets with that of the second chapter inasmuch as it showcases her deep connection to the natural world, which can be read as a cry against human supremacy.

Along the veins of the same incident, Lauren chooses to bring the life of the dog, together with its and her agony, to an end. This creates her first recorded experience with the line that separates life and death:

> I felt the impact of the bullet as a hard, solid blow—something beyond pain.
> Then I felt the dog die. I saw it jerk, shudder, stretch its body long, then freeze.
> I saw it die. I felt it die. It went out like a match in a sudden vanishing of pain.
> Its life flared up, then went out. I went a little numb. Without the bike, I would
> have collapsed. (32)

The culmination of the wounded body into endless rest, and the permanent end of suffering, albeit the extremity of the strike of death, tempt Lauren to seek solace in ending the lives of the nearly dead.

A similar encounter takes place a while later when Lauren escapes the decayed community in Robledo with Zahra and Harry toward the North. One night along that journey, and when her guarding shift is over, Lauren wakes Harry up, gives him the gun, and makes "*him as uncomfortable as [she] could by warning him about the dogs, the gunfire, and the many people who wandered around at night*" (133). After exhaustingly falling asleep,

Lauren wakes up to a gunshot and the fall of a body over her. An encounter takes place between Harry and two men, resulting in killing one of them and severely wounding the other. When Lauren shoots the first man, she experiences the exact same pain of the shot, which makes her fall "*unconscious for a while*" (133). Realizing that the other man is still alive, though unconscious, she gathers the strength to cut his throat with a knife after Harry refuses to hand her the gun. This situation shows, again, that hyperempathy does not function from the sight of the injury but again from the feeling of pain that the injured person is experiencing at the moment. Lauren does not share the pain of the unconscious injured because they don't experience pain either. Her justification for ending the man's life to her partners who are at this point unaware of her condition, is that he would not survive anyway, and that ending his life would be the merciful thing to do. Lauren argues to Zahra, "*I hope you'd find the courage to shoot me if I were like that, and out here with no medical care to be had. We shoot him or leave him here alive. How long do you think it will take him to die?*" (134). Lauren's true motive, however, is that she cannot afford to have him regain consciousness and involve her "*in his agony*" (134). These death-related experiences further emphasize the centrality of hyperempathy to the posthumanist discourse of the series. In other words, they aid in crafting the protagonist's personality, growth, and sense of responsibility, which in turn affect her posthumanist view of life.

At many points throughout the series, the hyperempathy syndrome becomes the defining feature of Lauren's experience and the determining factor of her reaction. For this reason, it can be concluded, from the above analysis, that Lauren's condition leads to a considerable deal of her posthumanist tendencies. An illustration of this appears in *Parable of the Talents* when she has a dream about her long-deceased family. In the dream, Lauren is stripped of her hyperempathy, which "*should be like having a toothache vanish away,*" but instead, "*[she is] afraid. A part of [her] is gone. Not being able to feel [her] brothers'*

pain is like not being able to hear them when they shout" (*Parable of the Talents* 11). This experience, along with her inability to feel others' pain makes her feel that the "*dream begins to become a nightmare*" (11). It can, hence, be said that hyperempathy locates Lauren as a part of the universe and an entity within rather than an entity without. It is also the core posthumanist feature in the duology and the engine that drives her posthumanist attitude.

To summarize, comprehending the representation and symbolism of the protagonist's hyperempathy syndrome is crucial in relating the posthumanist depiction in the case study. According to the novels, hyperempathy is the ability to share another person's pain and pleasure. In a world overwhelmed with destruction, pain is the predominant feeling shared by the sharers. The latter only experience the pain of alive, conscious people. The sharing abilities do not function with the unconscious, regardless of the atrocity of the sight of their wounds. Despite the seeming burden that this extraordinary ability may appear to cause to its holders, the protagonist manages to overcome, harness, and tame it to serve her philosophy and goal in life.

1.2. Taming the Human Flaw

In generalizing about Octavia Butler's works, Naomi Jacobs claims that her "*critical dystopia suggests a resource for hope in these very violations and ruptures--indeed, in the evolution of the human toward a posthuman body, posthuman subjectivity, and posthuman form of agency*" (1). Butler creates characters that aim toward survival regardless of their destroyed and destructive circumstances, and Lauren is no exception. In many situations, she manages to overcome her flaws (hyperempathy being the biggest of which) and emerge alive.

Taming the human flaw begins with observing the two opposing halves of the half-filled cup. Although sharers are "*supposed to share pleasure and pain, [...] there isn't much pleasure around*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 11). Lauren writes that the pleasure she

acquires due to her hyperempathy is limited to intercourse. She "*get[s] the guy's good feeling and [her] own*" (11). Besides, the "*Hyperempaths*" or "*hyperempathists, or sharers,*" as people would "*politely*" call those who suffer from the hyperempathy syndrome, are looked down upon by others because of their "*vulnerability*" and "*high mortality rate*" (*Parable of the Talents* 12,13). Uncannily, Butler is recreating the experience of minorities by evoking novice aspects of discrimination. The so-called sharers appear as a marginalized, unvoiced group even though "*there were once tens of millions of [them]*" (12), which are reduced to "*quite of a few*" (13). This reduction is due to the extensive physical dangers that their condition exposes them to in addition to being used as slaves because of "*what good slaves sharers […] make*" (*Parable of the Sower* 213) due to being highly easy to control.

In elaborating on this point, it is important to contextualize the novels and to refer to the black feminist tendencies of the author. Octavia Butler has constantly evoked the issues of her community in her writings and her social activism is an indication of the failure of the already functioning system. As has been detailed in the previous chapter, most humanist tendencies favor the white, male, hetero, Christian, capitalist human and disregard, to varying degrees, the very presence of the minorities. This makes the call in favor of the latter to be one of the core triggers of the egalitarian front of the posthumanist thought. This also makes the sharers an illustration of Bhabha's definition of the oppressed peoples who seek to mimic the oppressors despite being "*almost the same but not quite*" (Bhabha 126). Lauren's attempt to conceal her sharing abilities, which will be analyzed in what follows, is a further indication of the Othering of her people. To this end, the story of Lauren's taming of what condemns her as a 'minority' is yet another posthumanist cry for equality and rejecting the system of hierarchy.

Since childhood, Lauren's parents "*cut [her] as little slack as possible when it came to [her] hyperempathy syndrome.*" Their refusal "*to let [her] be handicapped*" is a crucial

factor in nourishing her ability to overcome the flaws she was born with. For example, being "*the oldest kid*", she "*was held responsible for [her brother's] behavior. [she] had to control them even though [she] couldn't escape their pain.*" This is a straightforward survival technique, which, as the reader learns later, is exercised by the "*[s]harers **who survive**,*" as they "*learn early to take the pain and keep quiet*" (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 35; emphasis added). Lauren's selected diction indicates that death is common among sharers because of the danger that their voice or movement may expose them to in life-threatening situations. She continues to refer to the imposed necessity to adapt to the pain regardless of how insufferable it may get by writing, "*We keep our vulnerability as secret as we can. Sometimes we manage not to move or give any sign at all*" (35). This meets with Bhabha's theory of mimicry because the sharers attempt to behave like people who don't have the syndrome, therefore mimicking a pattern of behavior that has been deemed, in an unspoken way, by everyone to be 'normal.' This is the essence of every discriminatory system.

Lauren's awareness of her flaws can be deemed her first line of defense against the wild environment outside the walls. Part of this awareness manifests when she attempts to address the nature of her syndrome apart from the scientific explanation behind it. She mentions that "*[i]t is incomprehensible to [her] that some people think of sharing as an ability or a power—as something desirable*" (35). More importantly, despite her reliance on the natural and technological elements to survive, which manifests in her prior readiness for a journey yet to come, Lauren remains unsure about her own abilities as a black, female, disabled human. In a world where racism, sexism, and violence hit the extreme, Lauren's awareness becomes her strength. In her way of overcoming these boundaries that may form a thin line between life and death, Lauren begins with the most accessible trick to hide her gender. Following the destruction of her original walled community in Robledo, Lauren decides on an early departure for her journey northward. She immediately thinks of cutting

her hair and posing like a man to avoid the possible dangers that her gender may attract toward her, which showcases "*her heightened awareness of gender roles, as she embodies and performs masculinity and femininity as necessary*" (Gartner 2). She seizes the fact that she is "*tall enough to fool people*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 121) and "*talk[s] macho enough to be a guy*" (129). Even her androgynous appearance and name, "*in pronunciation at least*" (*Parable of the Sower* 150; *Parable of the Talents* 371), functions in her favor when called in front of strangers while pretending to be a man. Lauren is, thus, highly adaptable to the life-threatening situation she finds herself in.

One immediate yet flawed interpretation of this cross-dressing is that being a female is a flaw. Nevertheless, Butler shows through her narrative that during life-or-death situations, actions count more than abstract ideologies. Lauren's disguise cannot be seen as abandoning one's identity because it does not force her into an identity crisis or any sort of dilemma concerning who she is and where she wants to go. Her goals are constant throughout the duology, and even the darkest situations do not affect her overall plan. Furthermore, Lauren adopts the posthumanist way of transcending human differences (in this case, gender) in favor of ascending human existence. Overall, the protagonist's conviction that femininity is not a flaw does not prevent her from hiding it when it becomes a threat. She exercises a level of flexibility that leads her toward the ultimate utopian existence. This resonates with a combination of Deleuze's philosophy of imminence and Derrida's transcendence in the sense that a fundamental and imminent aspect of the human making (gender) is transcended not for its own sake but for the sake of preserving the larger whole (life). It is important to note that "*disguising as a man is a sufficient solution to women's heightened threat of sexual violence*" but is rather "*a call to [take] action*" (Gartner 3) that is not restricted by physical boundaries. The philosophical trajectories of imminence and transcendence are simplified in Daniel W. Smith's words:

> [T]he concept of immanence refers to the sphere of the subject, while transcendence refers to what lies outside the subject, such as the 'external world' or the 'other'. In this tradition, the term 'transcendence' refers to that which transcends the field of consciousness immanent to the subject. (47)

Given the importance of Deleuze's and Derrida's contemporary philosophies in crafting posthumanist thought, which is tackled in the first chapter of this thesis, Lauren's approach can be labeled posthumanist. Although neither the philosophers nor the author explicitly refer to the term posthumanism, its aspects are revealed in multiple contexts of their thought.

Instead of thinking of it as a liability, Lauren's hyperempathy is regarded by her to be a possible reason for a harmonious and compassionate lifestyle among humans. After the terrible death of her brother, Keith, and the disfigured state that his body was found in, Lauren writes, "*If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do such things*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 83). She realizes the physical disadvantages implemented by hyperempathy, yet transcends the physicality to envision a world where no one can dare to cause pain for the simple reason that pain would be reciprocated. This does not make Lauren a weak character nor does it deem her to be in a state of denial because she immediately recognizes the rare necessity to "*kill if [one] had to, and bear the pain of it or be destroyed by it*" (83). She continues to elaborate that "*if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain?*" (83). Her conviction in the thought that sharing the pain can ironically be the seed of a world without pain persists throughout the second half of the series, which is set after the end of the Pox and within the year of her initial utopian endeavor. In her journal, Lauren writes, "*The one good thing about sharing pain is that it makes us very slow to cause pain to other people. We hate pain more than most people do*" (*Parable of the Talents* 35). The same factor that

is initially introduced as a form of disability is seen by Lauren to be the only aspect that may prevent people's brutality and beastly manners.

Whenever the context of the posthuman is tackled, the thought of a physically superior human often comes to mind. Butler's narrative, however, presents a unique form of the posthuman through her protagonist. As has been tackled in the first chapter, a posthuman may include, but is not limited to, a genetically modified human. In an unintended way, Lauren meets the standards of genetic modification since her case is a direct result of the drug abuse habits of her dead mother. Her physique, hence, can be labeled a posthuman body. Moreover, she displays the mental aspects of a typical science fiction hero in the ways she harnesses her abilities toward the endeavor of surviving. She does not shy away from admitting that she desires a life among other sharers (*Parable of the Sower* 83), indicating, again, her vision of a utopian reality. Lauren's hopes in elevating the human self manifest, as well, in her belief that a "*biological conscience is better than no conscience at all*" (83). The narrative shifts hyperempathy from a "*sign of powerlessness*" to a "*source of power and knowledge*" (Romdhani 85). It can then be said that, inside the human mind and body, Lauren manages to see a path to go beyond the destruction of the world that is caused by the same mind and body of the human.

1.3. Lauren as an Overwoman

In deconstructing the mechanism behind the system of leadership and the making of leaders throughout history, Gustave Le Bon argues that the crowd is more likely to follow religious figures than to pursue the causes of political leaders. In his highly acknowledged book *Psychology of Crowds* (1896), he provides the examples of Mohammad, Moses, and Budha to prove his point by emphasizing the impact they left on inspiring communities and constructing civilizations is far more unfathomable than that of political leaders such as Napoleone, Hitler, or Stalin. Along a similar vein, speculative fiction draws examples of

characters who can lead the herd to a certain destiny. The latter is irrelevant in its positivity or negativity, as landmark speculative fiction novels such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) display the ultimate political leader in an antagonistic shade. The *Parable* duology follows the same pattern of creating effective leaders through the protagonist.

It is significant to tackle Le Bon's elaboration on the meaning of a religious leader by emphasizing the quality that tempts the crowds to follow:

> A person is not religious solely when he worships a divinity, but when he puts all the resources of his mind, the complete submission of his will, and the whole-souled ardor of fanaticism at the service of a cause or an individual who becomes the goal and guide of his thoughts and actions. (Le Bon 43)

Lauren's conviction in the doctrines of Earthseed that are inspired by the surrounding mechanisms of the universe, as has previously been discussed, allows her to meet Le Bon's identification of a successful leader of the crowd. In the second part of the duology, Lauren's daughter comments on her course in life by assuming that, "*[i]n spite of all her protests and denials, she's always needed devoted, obedient followers—disciples—who would listen to her and believe everything she told them. And she needed large events to manipulate*" (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 3). Lauren's ability to cope with the world around her and to seek to create, on top of that, a utopian hope out of its ruins, label her to be an effective political leader. She displays a high level of wit in overcoming her hereditary disability and harnessing it in productive ways. For this reason, it can be argued that she meets Nietzsche's description of the overman, which is seen in many ways to be the first recorded philosophical understanding of the posthuman.

For the sake of the present discussion, and to avoid a literal interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophical term, Butler's narrative can be considered the source of a novice sense of the posthuman, which can be termed the overwoman. It is important to note, though,

that rendering Lauren as an overwoman does not necessitate her physical or mental superiority over the herd, as any form of hierarchy goes against the fundamental principles of posthumanism. Lauren's superiority, however, lies abstractly in her ideological posthuman(ness). Despite her physical disability and spending a part of her life as "*one of the street poor*" (*Parable of the Sower* 110), she demonstrates a high level of concern toward the human race and the universe as a whole. In a dystopian world where it is easy to regard the actions of mankind as devilish, Lauren does not cease to believe in a way of recovering the good essence of humanity. Her ultimate aim is to construct a "*unifying, purposeful life here on Earth,*" encourage people to go beyond the falling reality, and hope "*of heaven for themselves and their children. A real heaven, not mythology or philosophy. A heaven that will be theirs to shape*" (185). By this heaven, she refers to building a utopian community on planet Mars.

The ultimate evidence in proving that Lauren possesses crucial aspects rendering her an overwoman resides in her book *Earthseed: The Book of the Living*. The latter functions as a manuscript dictating the principle that ought to be held by humans to reach the kind of utopia amongst the stars, which is indicated in the book as 'the Destiny.' At the bleakest of her days, Lauren initiates her journal with a verse from *Earthseed* saying that "*kindness eases Change*" (118). In three words, she, first, alludes to her ways of overcoming as well as embracing her physical flaw by implicitly referring to empathy. Second, she reemphasizes her glorification of Change as a divine process, which hints at a keen appreciation of the natural and universal mechanism as was elaborated in the second chapter. Finally, she grounds her faith in humans' ability to practice kindness even in the darkest of times. Thus, this attitude, stemming from a wide insightfulness and a rooted sense of patience, is another argument supporting the claim that the character of Lauren can be read as an overwoman.

Discussing Lauren as an overwoman brings to the fore the core issue of gender in the context of surviving a dystopia and aspiring for a utopia. It is commonly known that the protagonists of science fiction works are predominantly male. In English literature, this can be observed to have stemmed from the oral tradition of the Anglo-Saxon community, which is argued by many historians to have defining aspects of a typical patriarchal hierarchy (Brookbanks 25; Silverman 10; Kapturkiewicz 69). As it is the feature of literature to mirror reality, their folklore reflects the conventional damsel-in-distress plot. Also, as language and its content are bound by numerous cultural and philosophical criteria –among which is Saussure's signifier/signified dichotomy (de Saussure 65)–, most English literature can be said to be constructed upon similar patriarchal norms. It could be true that one may think of the Renaissance as a turning point in which art managed to influence people's perspectives rather than the opposite. Still, humanism, as the defining intellectual movement of that period, evidently failed to build an equal Western society, and the still-emerging waves of feminism are the largest proof that the fight is still ongoing. Therefore, it is important to tackle the issue of the female gender in the context of mankind's survival from the perspectives of philosophers and thinkers who are argued in the first chapter to be the ones setting the initial stones of posthumanist thought.

The representation of the woman, according to those who may be labeled unadmitted early posthumanist thinkers, is brought in a way that escapes the conventional feminist stream. It should be noted again that feminism is seen in this context as one of the many indirect products of humanism given the fact that the latter encourages the centrality of the human race. Early posthumanists saw an underlying hierarchy and an unnatural split underneath the calls for gender equality. For example, commenting on Nietzsche's highly controversial metaphor at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) that "*Truth is a woman*" (F. Nietzsche XV), Derrida argues that feminism falls into the slip of drawing an

aspiration for a woman to be more like a man (Derrida 102–03; Ansell-Pearson, "Who Is the Ubermensch?" 327). To back this claim, it is important to revisit Nietzsche's questioning of conventional Western philosophy and his critique of the 'essentialist fallacies' stemming from it. Feminism, being a direct product of this questionable system of thought, is no exception (Ansell-Pearson, "Who Is the Ubermensch?" 327). Before rushing into the assumption that such thinkers fall into the category of misogynist thinkers, it is important to remember that a considerable number of thinkers, including, for example, feminist French philosopher Sarah Kofman and Luce Irigara, exonerated Nietzschean philosophy from traces of misogyny (328). Rather, Nietzsche opts for a pluralistic understanding of mankind, where patterns of existence are rejected in favor of a multiplicity of beings, which sets an early stone of the posthumanist human. Following this argument, the claim of the existence of a female overman, or as it is referred to in this section for the sake of emphasizing the gender of the leading character, an overwoman, is asserted. To this end, despite Butler's explicit identification as a black feminist, her work still falls into the more posthumanist stream according to this analysis.

In addition to the previously discussed reason, female leading characters were especially avoided in science fiction due to the relatively weak building of the average woman compared to the average man. This includes both the physical structure and the mental and emotional state of being. As one of the few female authors of science fiction and one of the most acknowledged, Butler takes the same reasons why a female protagonist has been avoided and pushes them to the extremes in creating her leading character of the *Parable* duology. While an average woman cannot fight as hard as a man and is much more overwhelmed by her emotions, Butler's protagonist can never fight because any damage she causes is reciprocated. She is, also, paralyzed by her hyperempathy in the literal sense. Creating a character such as Lauren and labeling her successful in the journey toward a

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utopia amid the stars can hence be seen as an uprising against the stereotypical norms of the science fiction genre. It can, moreover, be seen as another argument supporting the claim that Lauren meets Nietzsche's imagination of the overman not by being a cut above the rest but by elevating the rest to a higher level than the malfunctioning humanist societies.

In the end, Nietzsche concludes that an overman is a state of becoming rather than that of being. He adds that no one can be an overman all the time, which similarly meets Lauren's framed images that are drowned in *Parable of the Talents* by her daughter:

> [T]he skeptical voice of Olamina's daughter, Larkin, frames Olamina's narrative throughout *Talents*. Larkin's rejection of Olamina's program—and Olamina herself—reminds readers that the collectivity Olamina hopes for **can never be total**. (Morris 17, emphasis added)

Morris believes that the perspective of Olamina's daughter, Larkin, is an assertion that Olamina's utopian hopes can never be collectively agreed upon. This breaks the dominant narrative of the first novel in the duology by showing a different lens to it. Along a similar vein, the distinctive narrative voice of the protagonist's daughter in *Parable of the Talents* is used to invoke critical literacy about the narrative itself (McCormack 7). This metafictional purpose of writing asserts the novels' stance as speculative fiction that aims, not only at addressing the catastrophes in the fictional realm of the works but also the real-world disasters that are looming in the near future. All in all, these interpretations of an already pattern-breaking facet in the overall narrative function as an interruption in Lauren's image as an overwoman, which is, in itself, an affirmation of the same fact since an overman, according to Nietzsche is not constantly so. Whether Butler had Nietzsche's overman image in mind while creating her protagonist remains unknown. As much as it is unlikely that such a coalition has happened, there is still a clear pattern that combines the making of the two, despite one being philosophical and the other fictional.

In conclusion, the first section of this chapter tackles one of the core questions of this research, which is that of the posthuman being and becoming. The analysis concludes that hyperempathy is among the defining features that label Lauren as a posthuman. The latter, in this context, transcends the physical disability to include the protagonist's attitude toward such abnormal change. Her adaptability and 'taming' of her flaw can be said to have turned the disability into moral amelioration. Furthermore, identifying Lauren as a posthuman takes a step further by labeling her an overwoman. It is important to note that this claim does not necessitate an identical being to Lauren to be called so; rather, it shows the novel's version and image of the latter, which, of course, may take other forms in other works of speculative fiction. Upon the analysis of the main character, various other conclusions are built to reach the overall endeavor of the chapter, which is tracing the survival and destructive methods of homo sapiens in a possible dystopian future. Such a conclusion necessitates the inclusion of various other characters to draw a behavioral pattern that stems from the surrounding people and environment of the protagonist. Accordingly, the next section begins with the inner circle of people around Lauren, who possess a direct, innate, or otherwise, connection to her.

2. Posthuman Relations in *Parables*

Notwithstanding the unfathomable importance of the main character in leading the plot of a fictional work and directing its themes and sequences, the rule that other characters execute is no less significant. On the one hand, supporting characters may lead to certain sub-plots that either serve the main one or provide additional themes, dimensions, and depth to the literary work. On the other hand, they may contribute to shaping the roundness of the protagonist, regardless of their round or flat nature. Moreover, it can be noticed that the works of speculative fiction usually include a plethora of characters, as they are constructed upon depicting as many possible reactions to the life-threatening –or sometimes, existence-threatening– course of action in an attempt to 'speculate' the most efficient surviving

mechanism in a world going down. Therefore, analyzing the relationship between the protagonist and the most notable characters is due. In Butler's series, such relationships can be categorized into two groups, both of which revolve around the area of family and hold an unfathomable weight in raising, quite literally, the persona of the central character. It is important to recall that among the many genres that the *Parable* novels fall into is that of African-American literary tradition, and it is likewise essential to recall that the theme of the family is highly common in this tradition, regardless of the thematic statement associated with it. In this case, identifying Lauren Oya Olamina as a posthuman and an overwoman opens the discussion of whether or not the two categories, namely motherhood and fatherhood, aid her in her becoming and fulfillment. To answer this question, the section studies each category in a separate way, which leads to its division into two subsections.

2.1. The Rejection of Biology: Motherhood Crisis

The theme of motherhood in the novel is portrayed in a fairly unconventional manner. The mother/daughter relationship, in *Parables*, is rarely represented as a duality. The absence of one part is often faced with the indifference of the other. Examples of this are found in the relationship between Lauren and her dead biological mother, and between Lauren and her stolen daughter. Other examples are shown through characters such as Cory and Larkin, Lauren's daughter. Importantly, the repercussions of such an unfulfilled sense of motherhood contribute to the emergence of posthumanist agents stripped from the traditional biological bounds and ready to embrace other forms of relationships available in the gradually collapsing world around them.

On the one hand, the first mother/daughter relationship, although unreal, that appears in the duology is that between Lauren and Cory. The protagonist's relationship with her stepmother proves to be a more humanist one than that with her biological mother. On the one hand, Lauren and Cory execute a natural form of bonds between homo sapiens, which

varies in emotions according to the situation at hand. The first conversation that Lauren records in *Parable of the Sower* is with Cory under the context of discussing nature and the stars, showing an intimate closeness between the two. In the dream that inaugurates the first novel, Lauren mentions that, amid darkness and fear, "*[her] stepmother is there, and she isn't afraid. [Lauren] stay[s] close to her. [she is] seven years old*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 6). Moreover, Lauren explicitly infers that the fact that Cory taught her Spanish – Cory's native tongue– to be able to communicate with her is an act of "*intimacy somehow*" (6). While language can be an instrument of inclusion, it can also be one of exclusion, and teaching Spanish to her stepdaughter can, indeed, be considered a fine gesture. However, as Lauren grows older, she begins to notice an increasing level of inconvenience toward her.

Cory's nickname is short for Corazon, which is a Spanish word for heart, and the heart is often a symbol of the essence of human emotions in literary texts. Cory's actions are, hence, driven by irrational love toward her eldest son. It can be claimed that human emotions remain the deadliest flaw of homo sapiens. Lauren mentions that Cory prefers her eldest son, Keith, despite being the "*dump one*" among the other three (9). On multiple occasions, Lauren emphasizes that "*Keith is Cory's favorite. If you asked her, she would say she didn't have a favorite, but she does*" (67). When Keith goes missing, Cory shouts to her husband, "*If it were your precious Lauren out there alone, you would have found her by now! You don't care about Keith*" (70). As true, unpolished emotions are more likely to be revealed at moments of devastation, Cory's words indicate a keen resentment toward the way reverend Olamina values his only daughter at the expense, at least from Cory's view, of her male kids. This shows again an incision in the motherly attachment. Cory preserves her love for the most troublesome of her children, who soon leaves at the first window of opportunity presented to him, leading to his eventual cruel death.

By exploring this point, it can be claimed that Butler indicates the irrationality of humans. To explain, Lauren demonstrates, from an early age, a keen survival instinct, making her the best hope of the family to survive amid the chaotic world. The other children appear in this part of the duology as too young to have a decisive view of life and existence. Still, Kieth is admittedly and unanimously perceived by family members as a recluse and, to some extent, evil (which will be detailed in the following section). Nonetheless, he remains his mother's favorite. This indicates the failure of motherly feelings in identifying the best survival mechanism when it comes to a world about to collapse.

On the other hand, Lauren's relationship with her biological mother, or the absence thereof, represents the typical making of the posthuman. It is mentioned several times that Lauren's hyperempathy is the product of her mother's abuse of a drug referred to as "*Paracetco, the small pill, the Einstein powder*" (11). As has already been elaborated on, sharing is among the defining qualities that label Lauren a posthuman, making her mother a direct cause of this creation. Moreover, some argue that the posthuman is intentionally engineered while others believe that its making is a spontaneous incident taking place as a part of meeting the epoch's necessities and circumstances. In favoring the second perspective, the novel shows that Lauren's posthumanist making is accidental. Although it initially appears to be a negative trait, it eventually becomes a crucial factor leading to the survival of a large number of people and the establishment of a new, posthumanist way of existing.

Lauren's only visual attachment to her biological mother stems from a picture she has of her that was given to Lauren by her father but was destroyed by her brother Keith. Out of the memory that remains in her mind about her mother, she sees her once in a dream as

> a tall beautiful woman, black-brown-skinned and slender with long, crow-
> black hair, gleaming. She's wearing a soft, silky green dress that flows and

twists around her body, wrapping her in some intricate pattern of folds and gathers from neck to feet. (*Parable of the Talents* 11)

Immediately following the same description, Lauren uses two concise and slightly paradoxical statements to describe her. She writes, "*She is a stranger. She is my mother*" (11). Given the fact that Lauren's dreams aid in interpreting a considerable part of her perception of the world, her detachment from the biological mother both in reality and in dreams further indicates the posthumanist needlessness of biological ties. This point relates to Nietzsche's refusal of social and biological determinism in his advocation against imposed definitions.

Moreover, in the dream, Lauren struggles to touch her mother but fails because of two factors. The first is that her mother appears to be moving away from her, and the second is that she finds herself unable to move as her "*body won't obey her*" (13). Building on the above analysis of Lauren's posthumanist body, this can again be read as an indication that posthumanist entities and beings are stripped away from their biological ties to the past. In the protagonist's subconscious, her body functions as an active being through its determination of inaction, providing, once more, an illustration of one of the posthumanist tendencies.

A third mother/daughter relationship that communicates some of the posthumanist tendencies regarding the former is one in which Lauren assumes the rule of the mother. Following the footsteps of her mother, Lauren's biological daughter assembles a book as a means of understanding who her mother is. This book, in addition to parts of Lauren's, Bankole's, and Marcus' journals and verses from *Earthseed: The Book of the Living*, are all assembled within *Parable of the Talents*. The events taking place after the end of the first novel are narrated in a scattered, nonlinear way throughout the latter. The subplot of Lauren's daughter is, therefore, crucial in linking the events together.

Lauren's daughter was born in the year 2035, Eight years after the establishment of the Acorn community. Two months later, she was abducted from her mother along with all the children of the community, when the latter was deemed by the newly founded government to be nothing more than a "*heathen cult*" (236). The daughter was delivered to a "*new Christian American*" family (314), where she gets to be raised according to the social and religious norms that are accepted by the American government in the post-apocalypse world. The daughter showcases a sense of detachment and refusal of those norms but faces difficulty in embracing her mother's ways as well.

Despite being the most spotlighted mother-daughter duality throughout the duology, Larkin's perspective of her mother appears to be the most damaged:

> I have wanted to love her and to believe that what happened between her and me wasn't her fault. I've wanted that. But instead, I've hated her, feared her, needed her. I've never trusted her, though, never understood how she could be the way she was—so focused, and yet so misguided, there for all the world, but never there for me. I still don't understand. (3)

The paradoxical feelings demonstrated in the present passage convey a realistic emotional stand that fails to rationalize and objectify every action. Comparing this to Lauren's perception of her biological mother could reveal that the former has a far less chain of thought regarding who her mother was. She realizes that her hyperempathy is a side effect of her birthgiver's drug abuse, yet her tone in narrating this remains neutral. She never blames her for her actions and the condition she imposed on her almost arbitrarily. Conversely, Larkin's criticism is a recurrent motif. In a direct reference to humaneness, she explicitly wishes to have met her father and the "*version*" of her mother that was "*struggling, focused, but very young, very human*" (21). This shows that Lauren's actions and

philosophies have moved her beyond the state of the human condition to be seen, in the eyes of the following generation, which her daughter represents, as a posthuman "*version.*"

After spending an entire novel establishing the new philosophical (and less theological) trajectory of Earthseed, Butler creates a character that harshly questions its principles. Larkin makes a conscious effort to comprehend Earthseed through her father's notes, which she praises, then returns to mock the very core of Earthseed:

> My father has, in this piece, defined Earthseed very well and defined it in fewer words than I could have managed. When my mother was a child, protected and imprisoned by the walls of her neighborhood, she dreamed of the stars. […] As far as I'm concerned, that's what she was doing when she created her Earthseed Destiny and her Earthseed verses: dreaming. (50)

Larkin asserts that her mother is mistaking "*fantasies for reality*" (50). She also demonstrates a considerable level of intelligence when she accurately analyzes Lauren's state of mind through her writings by concluding, "*It seems that she doubted herself from time to time, but she never doubted the dream, never doubted Earthseed*" (50). The daughter further clarifies her stand toward Earthseed by admitting that she "*can't feel that secure about any religion*" (50). Although Earthseed has been proven to be more of a philosophical trajectory than a theological dispute, Change is still identified by Lauren as a divine mechanism.

Larkin's criticism of Lauren stretched to include the optimistic attitude she holds for the world:

> My mother, on the other hand, was a somewhat reluctant optimist. Greatness for her, for Earthseed, for humanity always seemed to run just ahead of her. Only she saw it, but that was enough to entice her on, seducing her as she seduced others. (67)

This passage can be read as a humanist criticism of posthumanism insofar as the former opts for realistically perceiving the surroundings while the latter takes some rather extraordinary and abnormal approaches in the sole measures to preserve the human race. Such measures are, almost always driven and fueled by technology. The use of the term 'seduce' here provides a negative yet tempting connotation to the context. Following the same analysis, it can be theorized that the temptations offered by the posthumanist philosophies represent a threat to the humanist stands. At this point, the daughter's voice can easily be read as a trial to revive the humanist tendencies, which have failed the world in the first place.

As another attempt to rationalize Lauren's admittedly successful attempt of aiding mankind toward surviving the Pox and beyond, Larkin praises the act while purposefully leaving out the thought system that motivated the act in the first place: "*If my mother had created only Acorn, the refuge for the homeless and the orphaned.... If she had created Acorn, but not Earthseed, then I think she would have been a wholly admirable person*" (68). Amid her criticism, Larkin falls into a fallacy when she extracts one of the core ideas of her mother's philosophy. In analyzing the idea, Larkin faithfully draws her conclusion by writing:

> We human beings seem always to have found it comforting to have someone to take down on—a bottom level of fellow creatures who are very vulnerable, but who can somehow be blamed and punished for all or any troubles. We need this lowest class as much as we need equals to team with and to compete against and superiors to look to for direction and help. (87)

This can be read as a synopsis of the exact opposition of hierarchy that Lauren spent her life fighting for. Therefore, Larkin's objection is merely targeted against the names that Lauren chose for her system of thought and not the system itself. As has been explained in the previous section, giving the title of religion to a system combined with social, political,

philosophical, or even economic aspects is not new to mankind. It is, rather, the most effective engine that drives the mob in one direction and toward a single destination. Larkin's voiced narrative can be read less as a subplot and more as a criticism of the protagonist's course of actions, ways of life, and what can be labeled posthumanist agency.

From the above analysis of the theme of motherhood and its connection to the posthumanist discourse, it can be inferred that the humanist or posthumanist stand of the characters appears to be of much importance. It can determine a considerable deal of their perspective and the nature of their relationship, which, then aids in driving their actions or inactions toward events. Additionally, hard times seem to bring out posthumanist measures, while peace and prosperity push people toward safety and stability. The rationale behind this could be that homo sapiens are willing to diverge from the norm and adopt novice approaches and aid if and when their very existence is threatened. However, when the sociopolitical and ecological sphere is stable, they, consciously or otherwise, restart their mundane and norm-obeying circle of life and thought, which eventually leads back to the construction of a hierarchy.

2.2.Father Figures and a Link to the Past: Remnants of Humanism

Relating to the African-American context of the case study is sometimes necessary to tackle the posthumanist side of the plot. Similar to motherhood, the theme of fatherhood often seems to be highly present in the mentioned genre. Many female leading figures in the black feminist literary tradition, such as Morrison and Walker, tackled such topics as the absent father, "*dupes of patriarchy*" (Narayan 418), and the destructive father figure. However, while Butler identifies herself as an activist and a black feminist, and despite tackling the above-mentioned themes in her other fictional works such as *Kindred* (1979), she represents a rather harmonious and more even level of cohabitation between fathers and daughters.

Lauren's relationship with her father remains one of the least developed plotlines of the series, which, brief as it may be, constitutes a few of the pillars of the overall plot. To begin, Lauren refers to the tangible similarities between her and her father on multiple occasions. She mentions, for example, that they both share the same birthday (*Parable of the Sower* 5), and that her physical appearance resembles her father's more than that of her biological mother, "*which*" her father "*used to say was a pity*" (*Parable of the Talents* 12). On many occasions, Lauren discusses layers of her perspective of life with her father, who works to mentor and, for lack of a better term, censor them. Lauren is constantly careful of letting him know about her religious and philosophical orientations. Their relationship, though, is not characterized by similar emotional intensity as her relationship with her biological birthgiver and stepmother.

While biological detachment is a highly tackled topic in science and speculative fiction, the absent father is a common theme in literature generally and African American tradition in particular. However, the *Parable* novels derive, in tackling the latter, from conventional thematic statements. The absence of the father, which occurs in the middle of *Parable of the Sower*, does not result in a negative course of action, for his presence, in the first place, can be regarded as a nourishing factor that helps to set the upcoming journey of the posthumanist protagonist. For instance, Lauren mentions that her father used to give sermons through parables:

> Stories that taught, stories that presented ideas and morals in ways that made pictures in people's minds. He used the ones he found in the Bible, the ones he plucked from history, or from folk tales, and of course he used those he saw in his life and the lives of people he knew. (13)

The fact that the entire series is entitled after what the protagonist's father "*loves*" (13) is an indication of the importance of his presence in shaping the coming-of-age journey of the

leading character. Consequently, a brief comparison between the protagonist's ties, or lack thereof, with her biological parents –while taking into account that the protagonist is one possible and unintentional fictional representation of the posthuman– may indicate that posthumanism rejects biological boundaries and attachments unless they objectively serve to draw the path of the posthuman. This can also be read as an example of a situation where theory is derived from fiction instead of the typical vice versa. It supports the claim that speculative fiction, in particular, can work as a convenient medium to theorize about posthumanist thought, supporting the claim that was defended in the theoretical chapter.

Interestingly, Lauren's husband, whom she meets on her utopian endeavor northward, can symbolize another father figure in her life, both physically and mentally. When she marries Taylor Franklin Bankole, she is "*almost young enough to be his granddaughter*" (7). Due to this, Lauren mentions that "*[h]e's always being mistaken for [her] father. When he corrects people, they wink at him or frown or grin*" (46). Being a year younger than her father makes him another mature character who has witnessed the world before it was overwhelmed with chaos. Additionally, Bankole appears as "*a thoughtful, somewhat formal man*" (7), making him another mentor in Lauren's life. In *Parable of the Talents,* shorter passages written by him are presented at the beginning of each chapter. His tone seems to differ from the other two main narrators in *Talents*, namely Lauren and Larkin, inasmuch as the language is precise and informative. This is pointed out by his and Lauren's daughter:

> My father, perhaps because of his age, seems to have been a loving pessimist. He saw little good in our future. According to his writing, our greatness as a country, perhaps even the greatness of the human species, was in the past. His greatest desire seems to have been to protect my mother and later, to protect me—to somehow keep us safe. (67)

In addition to his wisdom, Bankole represents safety to the protagonist. Years after constructing Acorn, Lauren starts to have constant nightmares but says that she does not experience them when she is with Bankole (15).

The idea of old men as father figures appears twice in the duology. The first one is demonstrated in Lauren, reverend Olamina, and Bankole while the second one is shown in Larkin, Bankole, and Marcus. Larkin never meets her father, as she is abducted from her birth parents at the age of two months. Her connection to him, though, surfaces from her readings of a journal penned by him and entitled *Memories of Other Worlds.* His brief narration and objective tone become the source of many of Larkin's criticisms of her mother's actions and favoring of Acorn Earthseed over the stability that Bankole sought in an already established town. Interestingly, Larkin does not, even once, project any criticism toward Bankole, even when her mother's decisions and course of action prove to be more survival-oriented. Furthermore, at age eighteen, and after Lauren's failed attempts to locate her, Larkin leaves her adopted New Christian family with the intention never to come back and is then approached by her uncle Marcus, who becomes a Reverend at this point in the narrative. Despite learning later that Marcus always knew her whereabouts and deliberately conceals it from his sister, Larkin cannot help but acquire a certain love and admiration for him:

> I love my Uncle Marc. There were times when I was more than half in love with him. He was so good-looking, and a beautiful person, male or female, could get away with saying and doing things that would destroy a plainer one. I never stopped loving him. Even my mother, I think, loved him in spite of herself. (339)

This love persists even after she finds out that he hid the truth from her. Soon after she meets him, he becomes her family, and she describes the situation: "*All of a sudden, I had family*"

(390). Eventually, she chooses to spend her life with him as opposed to her mother, whom, Larkin decides, prefers to find purpose in pursuing Earthseed and the Destiny. These intermingling triangles of father figures differ in the motherly links inasmuch as the latter formulates a direct biological link to previous generations, while the fatherly connections appear to be mere guidance and support that stem from the lessons of the past without having to deal with most of the burdens that come with such lessons.

There are some exceptions to these harmonious and constructive father/daughter relationships, which appear, noticeably in the subplot of the sisters Allie and Jill whose father used to sell them to prostitution before they joined Lauren's group. However, such characters and the fatherly abuse that befell them, along with others, might be considered to be the remnants of the old broken humanist system. Although they did join the Acorn community and the Earthseed Destiny, they still lack the agency of the main character that drives her not to join, but to find the posthumanist endeavor. As the constructive fatherhood that Lauren and Larkin experience is opposed by a rather abusive one with other characters, the successful marriage that Lauren has with Bankole is likewise opposed by a chain of destructive marriages. It is important to note, though, that domestic violence is not as dominant in the novels as vehemence from outsiders, which is, again, another point of difference between *Parables* and other black feminist works.

As a matter of fact, remnants of the old cultural system and all of civilization allow practices such as polygamy to resurface, which is an aspect that has nearly vanished in the contemporary Western world. Ironically, polygamy is not depicted as badly as one would anticipate. Lauren mentions Richard Moss, a neighbor in their old community in Robledo, who "*pick[s] up beautiful, young homeless women and live with them in polygamous relationships*" (*Parable of the Sower* 27). Zahra, one of the characters that are highly visible in the novels, has her initial appearance as one of Moss's wives, whom he bought from her

vagrant, homeless mother when she was young. Interestingly, Zahra never complains about her life with Moss nor does she regard it as anything abnormal. This communicates both the more devastating life as a homeless child, which makes her find comfort in such a marriage, and the normalization of the act in the setting of the novel. More importantly, Lauren demonstrates a neutral tone in addressing such topics:

> Some middle-class men prove they're men by having a lot of wives in temporary or permanent relationships. Some upper-class men prove they're men by having one wife and a lot of beautiful, disposable young servant girls. Nasty. When the girls get pregnant, if their rich employers won't protect them, the employers' wives throw them out to starve. (27)

This journalist-like mode of writing indicates a lack of decisive opinion. Lauren grows up in an environment that perceives such practices as normal behavior. On the one hand, it can be said that Butler is implicitly warning against the prevailing wrong activities for fear of creating a generation that normalizes them. On the other, this system may seem to have reappeared in a time when women are deprived of most of the work because of the danger that threatens them outside, and even inside, locked communities. Men are subjected to this victimization as well, but a woman's chances to be raped and/or murdered are much higher as can commonly be observed. This forces educated women and Ph.D. holders such as Cory to leave their jobs and find work inside the community. To further support this claim, when Lauren decides to travel North, she cuts her hair and dresses like a man to reduce the danger that can befall her as a woman. This point will be further elaborated on in the following section.

Overall, fathers in the *Parable* duology appear to be a more constructive force than mothers. Characters who represent father figures, which can sometimes be found in husbands, also reflect safety, maturity, shelter, and, on rare occasions, love. This benign

depiction of old male authoritative figures may be interpreted as a call against the harsh criticism that feminist writing often imposes on the male presence. It can also be read as a rejection of obsolete gender hierarchy and an indication that the positive role of a character can sometimes align with what is expected from them. As it has been repeatedly emphasized, any rejection of hierarchy and acceptance of egalitarianism can be perceived, partially, if not wholly, as a posthumanist claim. However, this section also proves that gender issues are far more complicated to be simply dismissed, and what was once seen as a destructive force can as easily be depicted in an opposite manner. To this end, another social movement comes to the fore in diagnosing the social struggles that may stand in the way of achieving the ultimate utopian pursuit for a more harmonious survival-oriented humanity, which is the black utopian tradition.

3. The Black Utopian Tradition

As lowbrow literature, works of speculative fiction are often committed to a certain cause making them the product of their environment. As it has already been argued, this genre embraces the social, political, economic, ecological, and technological aspects of the Age and knit a more hyperbolic and extreme version of the events, mostly in a negative manner, to warn against possible threatening scenarios. This claim, along with the strict ties between posthumanism and utopianism due to the futuristic tendencies of both and many other shared interests, urges the study at hand to dive into the issue of minorities and its relation to the posthumanist discourse. To tackle this issue, it is important to briefly refer back to the black utopian tradition founded on the closing edge of the past century.

The nineties can sometimes be regarded as a period of relative progress and stability in the United States of America, especially since it is located in the middle of two highly pressured military and political phases, which are the Cold War and the War on Terror respectively. Amid this peace, intellectuals such as Octavia Butler noticed that minorities

generally, and blacks specifically, continue to suffer social injustice. Her writings are, hence, read by many as a call for equality and a reminder of the plight of her people. Therefore, many viewpoints in her *Parable* novels seem to stem from the black utopian tradition. The latter is a cultural movement founded by African-American intellectuals who aspired for a utopian world where all humans are regarded and treated equally regardless of their skin color, features, gender, class, religion, and the like. The defining works of highly acknowledged figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King Jr. were among the foundation stones of this movement. Given the time frame of the publication of *Parables,* they can be read as an attempt to enrich this tradition by offering an extreme version of futuristic violence and violations while proposing ways to rectify such misdeeds. This rectification is proposed through the posthumanist view and endeavor of the black female protagonist. To this end, the final section of this chapter attempts to contextualize the motives behind such endeavors by shedding the spotlight on the malfunctioning future and the ways in which Lauren emerges out of the wreck while still carrying her utopian hope.

3.1. Violence as the Norm

Based on the reverse logic, all the less-agreed-upon definitions of a utopia meet at the point that necessitates the existence of flawed reality. Despite Butler's constant insistence on writing outside "*all critical theory*" (Potts and Butler 331), her works uncover defining aspects of critical dystopia and function to enrich the studies conducted on this field of literary study inasmuch as they reveal brutal details about inhabiting a malfunctioning society. A conviction is, after all, accepted by a considerable number of critics and philosophers that a critical reading of a literary text is stripped away from the author's intentions. This Intentional Fallacy (Wimsatt and Beardsley 468) can aid in reading the *Parable* duology as a critical piece of the failure of contemporary systems and ideologies in maintaining a fairly livable Earth and a conveniently adjusted society. The eventual utopian

inspiration stemming from nature, which has been elaborated on in the previous chapter, is constantly interrupted by moments of harsh awakening to the rotted state of the world. The overwhelming share of such bleak reality is due to the destructive actions and stagnant reactions of humans. Their behavior can be said to be the defining line between a productive society and a looted one. This makes violence a crucial engine in proving the failure of humanism and promoting a posthumanist stance in the novel.

The *Parable* duology shows on multiple occasions the dismantlement and demolition of the human body and, consecutively, the human mind. They depict "*a human body whose integrity is violated, a human identity whose boundaries are breached from all sides*" (Hurley 205). Horrifying images of violence are shown in *Parable of the Sower* when members of Lauren's family become subjects to murder. When he is almost thirteen years old, Lauren's half-brother, Keith, who is depicted to be a violent and insufferable kid "*not quite 14*" yet (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 14), decides to "*[steel] Cory's key and [take] off on his own*" (65). Disregarding the consequences of his reckless actions and the danger that he allows against himself and his family and community, Keith returns a while later "*[...] sprawled, panting, on the floor, wearing only his underpants. He was scraped and bruised, bleeding, and filthy*" (66). The image of his return immediately speaks of a violent world outside the walls.

Instead of teaching him a lesson about acting more wisely, Keith's experience leads him to go back outside the walls. This second time, Keith returns with a "*clean new set of clothing—even new shoes. All of it was of much better quality than he had when he left, and much more expensive than [his family] could have afforded*" (71). His immature and unthoughtful action is met by severe beating from his father, showing that violence is rooted from within and without. In a later conversation with Lauren, he asks her whether she was ever beaten by their father, and she admits that she was when he "*caught [her] and Rubin*

Quintanilla in the bushes together" (74). In a world where fierceness is deemed superior, violence prevails and injustice becomes the norm, exercising physical assault with the intention of disciplining others starts to be seen as a minor incident. Even Lauren, whose mind nourishes ideologies that transcend the limited mindset of her people, refrains from perceiving her father's actions toward her and her brother as insulting, despite admitting that they are horrifying.

Following this incident, Keith chooses a life outside the walls. He not only manages to survive out in the 'wild' environment but also to construct a fairly financially secure short life. Every once in a while, he sneaks inside again when his father is not home to see Cory, provides her with "*a lot of money done up in a fat roll,*" and gives the younger kids "*expensive bars of milk chocolate with peanuts*" (72). Despite Cory's awareness that it "*must be stolen money or drug money or worse,*" her emotions blind her toward accepting it. Lauren's principles surface here when she expresses her rejection of the survival-for-the-fittest hierarchy that allows the weak to be looted by the more powerful. During the last of his visits, Keith tells Lauren about a man he robbed, shot, and left to death and Lauren's disgust for this act is evident. Lauren's rejection of violence persists, but her awareness of the certain dangers looming ahead in the outside world as a cause of human greed becomes more grounded. She utilizes this awareness to draw a realistic map of the possible outcomes of her journey.

Outside the walls, Keith utilizes the education that he got from his mother and half-sister to aid minor criminal activities. He reads the manuals of stolen machines and does other things with his literacy in a world where the latter becomes a luxury. Keith's subplot in *Parable of the Sower* concludes with his brutal death:

> Someone had cut and burned away most of [him]. Everywhere except his
> face. They burned out his eyes but left the rest of his face intact—like they

wanted him to be recognized. They cut and they cauterized and they cut and they cauterized. … Some of the wounds were days old. Someone had an endless hatred of [him]. (81)

Keith represents one facet of an entirely new generation growing in a dystopian reality. He escapes the stagnation of the herd, yet fails to escape the violence of the world. His ways of nourishing corrupt activities are the main attraction that fuels and leads these corrupt ways to turn against him.

It is important to draw a comparison between Keith's reckless escape and Lauren's initial plan of leaving towards the North. Both characters meet in undermining the false protectiveness of a walled community, which the elders seem to allude themselves into believing in. They both are convinced of the necessity of facing the collapsing world instead of escaping it. Their awareness of their surroundings and absence of denial or exaggeration is a third point of similarity between the two. The line, however, is drawn through their intent. Lauren's plan to go outside Robledo is, on the one hand, fueled by her philosophical, ideological, and, to a larger extent, religious views that manifest in the emergence of Earthseed. Keith, on the other, views the collapsing civilization as a box of treasury ready to be looted with no further intent than to be financially and physically superior to the herd. Moreover, Lauren's intentions are directed toward taming the herd and creating an entirely new community ready to adapt to the new norms of the world instead of immersing in useless nostalgia and empty hope. Her intentions are, hence, inclusive while Keith's are, conversely, exclusive and selfish. This fine line between Lauren and Keith widens into a defining variance in their characters. While Lauren continues to represent the posthumanist stand of the novels, Keith's subplot terminates in the first half of *Parable of the Sower* with not much impact on the overall plot.

Besides Keith, other supporting characters are subjected to violence regardless of their good or bad nature. Among those is Lauren's father, reverend Olamina. One day he goes to work in the college outside the walls and never returns. Years later, Lauren reflects on her father's disappearance and the certainty of his death:

> Yet how many years has it been since my father vanished? Or rather, how many years since he was killed? He must have been killed. He wasn't the kind of man who would abandon his family, his community, and his church. Back when he vanished, dying by violence was even easier than it is today. Living, on the other hand, was almost impossible. (*Parable of the Talents* 9)

This stream of violence, which begins in the first part of the series, continues in a nonlinear and less extensive scheme in the second one. *Parable of the Talents* takes place at a period of relative peace. The latter, as it is described by the protagonist, still represents an extreme degree of unsafety. After the brutal destruction of a neighboring community near Acorn that goes with the name Dovetree, Lauren insists that

> That attack shouldn't have happened. Things have been quieting down over the past few years. There's still a crime, of course—robberies, break-ins, abductions for ransom or for the slave trade. Worse, the poor still get arrested and indentured for indebtedness, vagrancy, loitering, and other "crimes." But this thing of raging into a community and killing and burning all that you don't steal seems to have gone out of fashion. I haven't heard of anything like this Dovetree raid for at least three years. (16 - 17)

Lauren's tone indicates that the level of crime has culminated since the atrocities that the world saw during the Pox when Lauren was a child and then a teenager. More importantly, there seems to be an emphasis on the violence projected against the poor. This is yet another

direct criticism of the hierarchal remnants of what can be labeled 'the old world,' which is the world where the author was writing.

The stream of violence presented in a large number of passages in both novels -from which a mere sample is presented in this subsection, speaks of a dystopian reality at its finest. The ways to relate such dystopia to the black utopian tradition lie in proving the existence of a desirable purpose. To put it in simple terms, no one would seek improvement if one's life is fairly comfortable. Accordingly, the worse the images of dystopia appear in the piece, the more it becomes relevant to seek a utopia. Hence, relating the analysis presented in this section with the conclusions drawn from analyzing the hyperempathy syndrome, it can be said that violence formulates the second most important factor driving the utopian, posthumanist goal. While violence against people with colored skin is not emphasized by the author over that against the white, another form of discrimination appears strongly, which is against the female body.

3.2. The Female Body in the Apocalypse

It can be argued that posthumanism is, in more ways than one, a theory that builds up the shortcomings of previous theories to fulfill the intended goals of comprehending the human self under the increasingly overwhelming umbrella of technology. Each new day is bringing new concerns about the future of mankind, and the recent controversial speculations about the possible existence of aliens ("What Nasa Said about Those 'aliens' in Mexico") are among the things that further highlight the importance and necessity of a solid theory regarding human existence and centrality. Alas, the new emerging concerns are never replacing previous ones but are rather constructed on top of them to increase the complication in talking about humanity-related subjects. As has previously been mentioned, humanism can be labeled the ground upon which all theories related to continental philosophy stem. Similarly, posthumanism can be seen, in the present context, to be an

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inclusive medium of all human-related discussions within the anthropocentric epoch. To this end, the father/daughter relationship appears to be the only constructive male/female relationship in the novels (in addition to a few marriage relations that are built on a similar system as has been elaborated in the previous section). Because of this, tracing the making and becoming of the posthuman subject in the *Parable* duology reveals a repetitive pattern of evoking the theme of the female body under the context of violence and exploitation.

The mind and self are contained within the body and the fact that the leading character of the duology is a female, the posthuman self becomes closely attached to the female body in this study. In this context, feminist studies come to the fore in analyzing the treatment of the female body in the apocalyptic world as opposed to the posthumanist survival endeavors practiced by the protagonist. While all characters appear to be subjected to possible acts of vehemence, women seem to be more vulnerable than men. Since childhood, Lauren grew up watching severe incidents of violence against women, represented, mostly, in sexual violence. Repetitive images of "*young, naked, and filthy*" women, who give the expression of being "*dazed or drunk or something*" (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 9) are scattered throughout the novel. Lauren comments on one of them that "*[m]aybe she had been raped so much that she was crazy*" (9). Sexual violence continues in the sight of "*a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs*" (11). It appears from Lauren's short trips outside the walls that, while the outside danger threatens men's properties and lives, danger against women includes an easy violation of their physique as well, leaving them with tremendous mental and physical injuries. Men's lives are often immediately taken away, whilst women's are preserved to be treated as usable sex objects. This showcases the dominion of the animal instinct in the immediacy of the fall of civilization. One can conclude the possible failure of the humanist principles, and, all that is constructed upon it, in taming the humans. Put differently, humanism creates a set of

civilized principles and sets a hierarchy that functions to preserve, enforce, and protect these principles through the conventional system of law and punishment. However, the slightest inconvenience or disruption that befalls the mentioned hierarchy results in a forthright collapse of the principles and, along with them, the civilized human, which in this case can be referred to as the humanist human.

While violence against men is depicted in the first novel to be a danger awaiting outside the walls only, sexual violence against women is exercised inside the community as well with no punishment or restriction. When thieves manage to get inside the walls and rob the house of Mrs. Sims, they "*tied her up and left her—after one of them raped her*" (18), adding another reason for her to commit suicide. During this incident, the community appears to be more concerned about the robbery and scared of another similar action taking place than about the mental and possibly physical harm made by the rape. Neither the elderly nor young girls are safe inside the walls. Lauren writes about a neighbor named Tracy, who "*was 12 when her 27-year-old uncle who had been raping her for years managed to make her pregnant*" (25). The fruit of this rape is the birth of "*poor little Amy Dunn,*" whom "*[n]o one cares about.*" Lauren mentions that "*[h]er family feeds her and, now and then, cleans her up, but they don't love her or even like her*" (25). To make things worse, victims of rape are yet again blamed for the crime committed against them:

> Uncle Derek was Tracy's mother's youngest brother, her favorite brother, but when people realized what he had been doing, the neighborhood men got together and suggested he go live somewhere else. People didn't want him around their daughters. Irrational as usual, **Tracy's mother blamed Tracy for his exile, and her own embarrassment.** (25; emphasis added)

One rationale behind the existence of the system of punishment is to restore a portion of the victim's dignity, which explains the possibility of reducing the penalty should the victim

choose remission. However, the origin behind the existence of Western systems of punishment –that can be traced to the Roman civilization, before which the only punishment was the death penalty regardless of the nature of the crime– is to prevent the criminal from repeating the crime. It can be observed here that exile was the easiest way of keeping the criminal away from the community for fear of causing more out-of-wedlock pregnancies since the exile did not take place during the year spent in harming the victim. Moreover, the victim is denied any form of compensation; she does not even earn the compassion of her own mother. This "*dystopian fear*" portrayed by the author "*arises from the knowledge of our human history of violence and oppression*" (Kasai 1383). The duology, however, moves toward a utopian glimpse of hope stemming from such an extremely bleak and violent environment to emerge with a posthumanist possibility amid the humanist certainty.

These incidents, which are marginally mentioned in the novels, demonstrate a keen level of misogyny in the futuristic setting of the novels, indicating that the severe problems of the past and the present may not be entirely resolved through the current social and intellectual movements such as feminism and all the movements that stem from its waves. This creates a vivid illustration that the future, which is sometimes thought of to be a product of social correction and development is, according to Butler's narrative, probably going to be a mere continuation of a present "*patriarchy on steroids*" (1387). Creating a futuristic scenario where things are either identical to the worst version of the past or worse than the best version of the present may, then, be interpreted as a critique of the humanist-based systems of thought and a prediction of their failure to create a better environment for the Anthropos or to maintain an even level between the good and the bad.

The violence extends to the second part of the duology, where the hope for a utopia ascends from being a mere fantasy promoted in the verses of Earthseed to becoming an actuality in the form of the small Acorn community. Most of the events of *Parable of the*

Talents take place after the end of the Pox; nevertheless, when vehemence is expected to culminate, violence against women begins to take more brutal and 'medieval' versions at their worst:

> I've heard that in some of the more religious towns, the repression of women has become more and more extreme. A woman who expresses her opinions, "nags," disobeys her husband, or otherwise "tramples her womanhood" and "acts like a man," might have her head shaved, her forehead branded, her tongue cut out, or, worst case, she might be stoned to death or burned. I've only heard about these things. (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 53)

Such violence against women transcends, in *Parable of the Talents*, from side characters and sights of strangers to get closer to the protagonist's personal experience. Immediately after the fall of Acorn at the hands of forces that answer to the newly elected president of the State, the so-called Christian Americans separate the men from the women of Acorn and hold each group in a small space. After a night spent in physical and emotional agony because of the loss of their men and children, the nineteen surviving women, who were held in the school start thinking about their fate. The first thing that comes to the mind of one of them is that they will be subject to physical violation. In this regard, Lauren reluctantly agrees that her "*luck*" of not being raped so far in such a world "*has run out*" because "*[w]hen men have absolute power over women who are strangers, the men rape*" (120). Soon afterward, this prediction manifests in the most brutal way when the people who claim to be good Christians, patriarchs, and bringers of peace treat their captives as sex objects for their amusement. Despite this, Lauren's sense of mission and hope in the prosperity of her Earthseed philosophy persists, asserting that "*Butler's critical dystopia suggests a resource for hope in these very violations and ruptures--indeed, in the evolution of the human toward a posthuman body, posthuman subjectivity, and posthuman form of agency*" (Jacobs 1). The

inevitability of sexual violation in the setting of the novels, to which the protagonist does eventually fall victim, becomes, therefore, another motive to seek a world of equality and peace instead of a reassuring factor that evil prevails.

The fall of civilization and the absence of laws often bring people to their primitive, barbaric state of existence. In such a reality, violence prevails and physical power becomes the only means of survival. Amid the disarray, an intellectual minority emerges with novice ideologies and principles to correct the flaws of mankind and rise with humanity to a new level. The change is "*never [driven] by crowds. Crowds are only powerful for destruction. Their rule is always tantamount to a barbarian phase*" (Le Bon 19). In the context of the novels, the new wave of thought brought by the intellectual can assume the notion of posthumanism insofar as it transcends the previously established and already failed humanist rules. The crowd depicted in the novels can roughly be divided into three groups: The first group represents the blinded people, who are led by their animal instincts and barely appeal to their physiological needs, unable to ascend higher in Maslow's pyramid. They are deprived even of their safety needs. The novels provide plenty of examples of people from this category, but their presence is rarely significant. The second group emerges gradually starting with Lauren, Zahra, and Henry, and growing larger to include fifty-nine people inhabiting and composing Acorn (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 21). The small number of this group and their ability to stand behind the ideologies carries in Earthseed label it as Le Bon's intellectual minority group who are destined to bring civilization back on its feet. The third, final, and most dangerous group is formulated by the government-obeying recruits under the leadership of President Andrew Steel Jarret, who emerge in *Parable of the Talents*. This group appears in the novel to be antagonistic. It carries an agenda of reviving what can be termed the old civilization when humanity is crying for novelty and renewal. The conflict between the second and the third groups brings to the fore the debate between the ideologies

of humanism and those of posthumanism inasmuch as each one of the formers symbolizes the latter respectively.

3.3.Novelty versus Conventionality

Among the highly common themes in contemporary literary tradition is the dichotomy of tradition and modernity. Discussions about the latter are relevant in almost every contemporary humanitarian context due to the increasing gap between the two ends of this continuum. To explain this point, it is important to go back once more to the defining historical landmark of the Industrial Revolution. Prior to the latter, the rate of progress, with all the attributed social, political, and technological alterations, along with the changes in values, goals, and ways of life, was considerably slow compared to the later phase. Evidence of this fact is numerous, and since this discussion is literary, a glance at the timeframe that literary movements covered before and after the mentioned historical landmark can support this claim (a comparison between classicism and modernism, for example). Due to this rapid change in values, and because of humans' innate instinct of survival, a conflict emerged in questioning the approach that is more likely to lead humanity toward continuation. Out of this, a philosophical debate stems between the advocates of a conventional way of living to grant survival and the believers in adapting and adjusting to novelty to ensure continuity. As a mimic to life, literature reflects such debate in several pieces that tackle human existence, survival, or even cohabitation. Butler's *Parable* duology is among the literary works that reflect the conflict between tradition and modernity at its finest, with all the contradictions and gaps presented in such discussion. This debate is mostly noticeable in the second part of the series.

Parable of the Talents is crucial in deconstructing the duality of humanism and posthumanism and the less-than-smooth transition between the two. It reintroduces a previous side character and centers him in the core of the plot opposite the blurred ideologies

surrounding the protagonist. In her attempt to locate the whereabouts of a fellow Acorn inhabitant's teenage sisters, Lauren stumbles upon a slaver who happens to be in possession of her half-brother, Marcus. Long thought to be dead, the latter is purchased by Lauren and joins her small community. Marcus is Lauren's "*favorite brother and always the best-looking person in the family.*" She describes him as "*always stubborn, always tough*" (10). As it turns out, Marcus survives the fall of Robledo and is taken by a neighboring community, where he follows his father's path of preaching for a short time before this community is likewise destroyed. He, then, ends up being a slave until he is accidentally found by Lauren. Marcus's revived subplot is highly relevant to the discussion of modernity and conventionality, as he represents the blur between good and evil.

The Manichean worldview is a recurrent motif in the duology. For example, people inside the gated communities are often regarded as good and those outside as evil. However, such a perspective is repeatedly challenged especially when the protagonist experiences, or utterly becomes, the other side of the spectrum. Before tackling the challenge that befalls the modernity-versus-conventionality debate, it is essential, first, to present the two opposing viewpoints as they appear in the *Parable of the Talents* to identify which one of the two represents tradition and which one does modernity. To do this, the theme of religion becomes relevant again. Lauren's idea about Earthseed becomes, in this novel, an asylum for people despite its inability to offer much reassurance. As the Acorn community grows larger, it becomes more visible to politicians and religious men. This increasing attention coincides with the rise of a new presidential candidate and Texas Senator, Andrew Steel Jarret. Jarret's campaign is constructed upon the idea of bringing America back to its glory through eradicating "*heathenism*" (228) and reviving Christianity. This allows the emergence of a group called Christian America (or CA, as it is referred to in the novel).

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Humanity has been raging wars in the name of religion since the dawn of time. In recent centuries, ideologies replaced religious disputes as the main reason behind political and military conflicts (capitalism and socialism come to mind here). By reinventing such conflict, Butler targets one of the essential flaws of humanness which costs humanity millions of deaths, which is the urge to impose one's belief upon others. At first glance, the conflict between Earthseed and Christian America appears a clear Manichean opposition. On the one hand, Earthseed drives people to be good to each other, it does not force people in, and it offers shelter and purpose to those who lost them. In addition to this, it maintains a promise of eternal survival, not in the traditional sense of immortality in paradise, but in terms of the continuation of humanity and finding "*roots among the stars*" (57). Those who refuse to accept Earthseed as a religious doctoring (mainly adults), still manage to cope with it as a philosophy. Bankole is the best example here. On the other hand, Christian America seems to be a supremacist system that opposes any other form of living except the severe one dictated by it. When Acorn becomes too large to hide, Christian Americans invade it, destroy its fences, kidnap its younger, enslave its adults, and turn it into a "*Camp Christian Reeducation Facility*" (248). Despite claiming that the purpose of this is to "*educate*" (223), the so-called "*teachers*" (152), who are nothing different than jailers, exercise all sorts of atrocities against the previously Acorn inhabitants and the other people gathered from the street to be imprisoned and 'educated' as well.

Marx famously argues that ideology can be an instrument assuring the hegemony of a ruling class (Engels 64), and both Earthseed and Christian America can be read, in this context, as ideologies. At this point, one ideology seems good and the other evil, but a third perspective, which has initially been alluded to, functions in blurring this good/evil binary, and is represented in the character of Marcus. Soon after being saved from slavery, Marcus

expresses his absolute rejection of the Earthseed thought system as well as its desired Destiny:

> The Earthseed Destiny," he said yesterday, "is an airy nothing. The country is bleeding to death in poverty, slavery, chaos, and sin. This is the time for us to work for our salvation, not to divert our attention to fantasy explorations of extrasolar worlds. (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 170)

Instead, he openly expresses his support for Jarret's program:

> He seems to have decided that the unity, the Christianity, and the hope that Jarret has brought to the country make Jarret not the monster we all feared but a potential savior. The country, he tells us, must get back to God or it is finished. (169)

Eventually, Marcus joins Christian America and becomes Reverend Duran, assuming his mother Cory's family name. When Lauren confronts him about the atrocities conducted by this group, he refuses to believe. According to other characters' comments on Marcus, in addition to his experience and perspectives, he can be said to have good intentions and to be innocent of the thoughts of hurting others. Despite Lauren's presented evidence, He sincerely believes that the people who turned Acorn into the Reeducation Facility belong to an extremist group. Therefore, Marcus can be seen as an indication that there are people who believe in the greater good and the constructive intentions of Christian America. Simultaneously, a couple of sisters from the Earthseed community turn against two other members, causing the death of one and severe mental and physical injury of the other (273). This causes a crack in the one-dimensional perspective of the two ideologies.

After clarifying the blurriness between them, the analysis comes to determine which of the perspectives reflects the modern perspective and which one sticks to conventionality. The answer to this inquiry leads to another ambiguity. Both ideologies are presented in the

form of religions, making them a possible product of conventionality and conservativism. Moreover, Christian America openly calls for bringing remnants of the past, while Earthseed is deemed by many to be a heathen religion. To make the matter more complicated, both of them persist at the end of the duology, making it more difficult to determine which one prevails over the other. However, two gaps allow the interpretation of Earthseed as a defender of a more modern thought system and Christian America to be deemed as a stand for conventionality. First, despite the outsiders' conviction that Earthseed is a cult that worships trees (238), the truth behind it, which was elaborated on in the previous chapter, is more systematic and philosophical than mere paganism. This exonerates Earthseed from the claim that it is a mere heathen cult. Second, While Christian America persists with a considerable number of institutions and followers, it fails to bring novelty to humanity and focuses merely on surviving and maintaining a well-functioning present. Conversely, Earthseed succeeds in its intended task by launching the first extraterrestrial expedition, an event that closes *Parable of the Talents.* Hence, it can be said that Earthseed represents modernity, yet the existence of both at the end shows that both the remnants of the past and the dreams about the future are essential in human survival. If posthumanism is said to stand as modernity and humanism as conventionality, then it can be concluded that posthumanism does not undermine the importance of humanism nor undercuts its function.

To conclude, this section reaches an overall understanding of the background and the path upon which the protagonist's posthumanist philosophical thought system is built. It observes that the decaying world with its horrible violence, sexual violation, inequality, and merciless opposing ideologies can give birth to a futurist dream of sustainability and growth. Unlike humanism, which required such glorious periods of peace and prosperity as the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment to be found, posthumanism finds itself facing terrible economies, decaying ecology, and scattered communities. Still, waiting for another

Renaissance might as well be waiting for the extinction of humanity. The only way for another revolutionary philosophy is through the destruction instead of around it.

Conclusion

This chapter was inaugurated with the endeavor of tracing human behavior in the decaying fictional world imagined by the author. It is central to analyzing the posthumanist discourse of the case study, as it sheds the spotlight on the one feature central to reading the novels both as science fiction and posthumanist works, which is the medical condition that the protagonist has. On the path toward reaching this end, the chapter trembled against the essential questions of the posthuman's constituents, which obliged it to dive into the portrayal of the hyperempathy syndrome and its crucial rule in crafting the mind of the main character. Along a similar vein, following the biological makings led to turning the page of the biological parents as well as the parent figures and mentors that surround the protagonist in her journey and help, likewise, in adjusting her posthumanist philosophy and destiny. Finally, the chapter related such fictional and futuristic plotlines to contemporary social issues to establish a bridge between the fictional and the factual and create a more concrete and realistic image regarding the urgent need for a posthumanist system of thought. To this end, it is safe to conclude that the posthumanist stance owes a considerable deal to the flaws and imperfections of the previous thought system. Out of every wrecked system, a new, more advanced, and more subtle one emerges. This chapter functions as a solid ground upon which many of the general conclusions of the thesis will be drawn, as it offers the most coherent observation regarding the representation of science in fiction and the post-thought in posthumanism. It also ties the previous chapter on nature and the following one on technology by focusing on the most concrete connection that links them both, which is the protagonist of the novel, Lauren Oya Olamina.

Chapter Four

The Question of Technology in the Fictional Posthumanist Context

Chapter Four's Table of Contents

Introduction

The themes related to the representation of technology in literature are often limited. They diverge from those related to the depiction of nature, for example, insofar as the latter has always been there along with humans whereas technology is something rather new. Although technology is a human product, its destructive and unfathomable abilities led people to question its possible effects. While analyzing nature carries vague conclusions as to whether it is depicted as benevolent or mischievous, tackling the theme of technology almost always ends in antagonizing it. To illustrate, most works of science and speculative fiction negatively depict such ideas as walled communities, surveillance, biological alteration, and the like. Examples may include Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954), and Brooks' *World War Z* (2006). Along the same vein, Butler's *Parables* provide a combination of such themes, along with others, related to technology. The aspect that distinguishes Butler's presentation of such themes is the slightly realistic tone associated with the narrative. Put differently, tackling the destructive side of technology may sometimes lead to a hyperbolic representation due to the vastness and often unfathomable size of the technological sphere (compared to the natural world, for example, which humans have had an eternity of experiencing and exploring its threats).

This realistic tone of speculating about technology allows the chapter to relate the latter to the posthumanist discourse. Instead of regarding the threats and advantages of technology in a vacuum, the chapter contextualizes its features and reflects on them from the posthumanist philosophical trajectory to investigate its contributions and consequences on the posthumanist condition. In doing this, the chapter scrutinizes how technology can be harnessed to serve protective ends. Next, it covers the dilemma of whether technology drives corrupt activities or the reverse. Finally, the chapter attempts to read behind the obvious and dive into more generalized notions of the significance of tools to human survival.

1. Harnessing Technology in Favor of Survival

The *Parable* series offers an implicit perspective on technology. Due to the fact that the novels are set in an apocalyptic future, the present of the latter may seem more distinctive than what the contemporary reader may expect. When thinking of technological protection nowadays, one would envision password-protected accounts, fingerprint-protected devices, surveillance cameras, and/or digital security systems. The novels in question, on the opposite side, offer a technologized pattern of protection that may be strange in its familiarity. The present section endeavors to transcend the surface representation of technological protection at the expense of reading into the perspectives that such patterns impact and are impacted by. To do this, the section is divided into three subsections, each of which analyzes the depiction of technology in relation to one aspect of the survival of the human and the making of the posthuman.

1.1. Technological Protection and Walled Communities

When studying the hierarchy of human needs, Maslow famously locates safety right above the preliminary physiological needs because *"people want to experience order, predictability, and control in their lives"* (Mcleod, para.2). The innate human need to secure a level of safety is responsible for most of the defense mechanisms that might, sometimes, function in the opposite way of what is intended. Among the 'tools' that mankind has opted for as a means of staying safe and worrying less about sudden invasions are, simply, walls. The idea that *"Man ceased to be a wild animal only when he built the first wall"* (Zamyatin 93) exists in a plethora of speculative fiction works because walls often operate as a measure of military protection. The Great Wall of China and the Wall of Berlin are the best examples. In a work penned by an African American author, the idea of enclosed communities becomes more relevant. Alice Walker famously states, *"What the black Southern writer inherits as a*

natural right is a sense of community. Something simple but surprisingly hard, especially

these days, to come by" (qtd. in Dubey, "Octavia Butler's Novels of Enslavement" 104).

The sense of community can be described as a sacred essence for African Americans or, to

a larger extent, humanity. Therefore, it is natural to turn attention towards the broader arena

of walled communities. According to the deduced definition of technology in the first

chapter –broadly stating that technology can be defined as any man-made object intended to

make life easier for humans– walls can fall into the category of technologized items.

However, given the walls' passiveness representation in *Parables,* in addition to the

extensive analysis that has been conducted in other papers about walls and enclosed

communities, this reading sheds the spotlight on the protective side offered by even more

advanced tools attached to the walls.

In the first half of the duology, the author begins by offering a seemingly advantageous

perspective of living inside the walls. On multiple occasions, leading characters emphasize

how *"dangerous"* (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 8) it is to live on the opposite side of the

wall, and that it is *"[c]razy to live without a wall to protect you"* (10). Along the same vein

of this initial perspective, the walls seem to offer not only protection against life-threatening

dangers but also against communal disputes and discrimination. The community is supplied

with an *"emergency bell"* (24) that aids in announcing potential dangers ahead, making it

further dependable on technological protection. Apart from a few incidents that were

elaborated on in the previous chapter, people inside the walled community appear to live in

harmony under an unspoken code of coexistence. The walls are not set based on ethnicity,

religion, or any other discriminatory factor. Although *"not all of the people who live within*

[the] neighborhood walls are Baptists" (8), most of them attend the Church services held

by Reverend Olamina. The latter mentions to his daughter that Robledo used to be an

unwalled community, but the threats accompanying the Pox necessitate a higher level of protection.

Soon thereafter, the shortcomings of the walls in offering the needed protection begin to surface, as the community starts to be subject to numerous attacks:

> Three men climbed over the neighborhood wall, cutting through the strands of barbed wire and Lazor wire on top. Lazor wire is terrible stuff. It's so fine and sharp that it slices into the wings or feet of birds who either don't see it or see it and try to settle on it. People, though, can always find a way over, under, or through. (18)

In this passage, it becomes clear that the wall itself has been further enhanced with contemporary tools such as barbed and Lazor wire to increase its levels of protection. However, such tools appear to be useless against the human ability to detect and avoid them. The only victims here, according to the nature-compassionate eye of the protagonist, are the birds. Moreover, this particular incident foreshadows the eventual failure of the protectiveness of the wall. It is mentioned, later, that the *"rich have plenty of other security devices"* (30), which alludes to the observation that more technologically advanced security tools could have offered better protection. Of course, this theory remains abstract and inadequate to judge the degree to which technology can save and preserve walled communities. This is because more enhanced walls can always be challenged with more enhanced material for breaking and entering. Nonetheless, this observation proves that people in the novel tend to have a considerable trust in their walls.

Before the unfortunate event, the importance of the wall is repeatedly emphasized by Lauren. When the neighboring house of Mrs. Sims is robbed, causing her rape and eventual suicide, Lauren mentions that the house is inherited by some cousins of the deceased. She claims that *"[i]f it weren't for [the] wall, the house would have been gutted, taken over by*

squatters, or torched as soon as it was empty" (26). This faith in the protective ability of the wall is always, almost immediately, juxtaposed with other passages that foreshadow its eventual collapse. For example, shortly after this incident that makes Lauren grateful for the presence of the wall, another tragic event takes place:

> Someone shot Amy right through the metal gate. It had to be an accidental hit because you can't see through our gate from the outside. […] Most bullets wouldn't have gotten through the gate. It's supposed to be bulletproof. But it's been penetrated a couple of times before, high up, near the top. Now we have six new bullet holes in the lower portion—six holes and a seventh dent, a long, smooth gauge where a bullet had glanced off without breaking through. (37)

This unfortunate incident nourishes the protagonist's skepticism toward the community that she inhabits, but it does not trigger her to question the abstract idea of the usefulness, or otherwise, of the wall.

To elaborate on this point, Lauren preserves her perspective regarding the importance of the wall even when it fails to protect her family and community. This remains one of the few points on which the protagonist demonstrates short-sidedness. She only becomes aware of the failure of the very idea of walled communities at the end of *Parable of the Talents*. She believes that the failure of her old community's wall can be seen in the vacuum of its lack of enhancement. At this stage, she questions the community more than she does the wall. She mentions, under more than one context, that the neighborhood she and her family inhabit is nothing more than a *"cul-de-sac with a wall around it"* (40 - 61). This tone of description alludes to the idea that the wall is the only aspect giving merit for the community to survive and sustain.

Among the contextualized arguments that may be deemed permissible is considering the wall as a technological aspect is Lauren's description of it:

> Our wall is three meters high and topped off with pieces of broken glass, the usual barbed wire, and the all but invisible Lazor wire. All the wire had been cut in spite of our efforts. What a pity we couldn't afford to electrify it or set other traps. But at least the glass—the oldest, simplest of our tricks—had gotten one of them. We found a broad stream of dried blood down the inside of the wall this morning. (54)

Remnants of the previously glorious America appear in bits and pieces of tools attached to the wall to ensure it stands guard between the wild streets and the relatively safer neighborhood. The previously mentioned chain of incidents, along with others, eventually triggers Lauren to anticipate the fall of the wall, an idea she attaches solely to its lack of maintenance. This, in turn, inspires her survival plan, leading to her posthumanist journey as was previously elaborated.

The previous indications of the failure of technology are finally realized with the fall of the wall and the community. Despite the many signs that pave the way for the eventual and unwanted conclusion, Lauren still expresses her awe when she attempts to rationalize the event:

> I don't know how they disabled the burglar alarm. I know they cut the electrical and phone lines to the house. That shouldn't have mattered since the alarm had back-up batteries. Whatever else they did, or whatever went wrong, the alarm didn't go off. (84)

After the actual fall, the protagonist preserves a considerable degree of faith in the protective ability of walled communities. This faith is strengthened along her journey.

The reliance on technological fences for protection appears in various other contexts. After the fall of the neighborhood, the first three survivors, Lauren, Harry, and Zahra go to what appears to be a market untouched by the disarray that befell the world. They seek it to purchase the necessary equipment for their journey northward. This designated place, called Hanning, is *"one of the safest places in the city"* (123). It owes a considerable deal of this status to the *"sniffers, metal detectors, package restrictions, armed guards, and willingness to strip-search anyone they thought was suspicious on the way in or out"* (123). In addition to watching the customers, Hanning records the behaviors of the guards because *"[s]uch a security conscious store wouldn't want its guards stealing the customers' money"* (123). This place may be read as a glimpse into the world that proceeds the events of the novels. It is a scarce remnant of a world that was once overwhelmed by technology and another sign of the failure of the latter in protecting and preserving such a world.

The walled community notions are scattered, more extensively, throughout *Parable of the Sower*. Whenever this context is evoked, there seems to be a repetitiveness in the representation of technological protection and the associated allusion to safety. In many encounters with such communities, there never seems to be a conclusion to the eventual destiny of the latter nor the extent to which technologically supplied walls manage to sustain the designated community or institution. Instead, the author leaves it to the pessimism or optimism of the reader to create one's own ending for such minor subplots. To provide another example of this, Lauren's small group that was traveling on the road is obliged to enter a *"'stay on the road' type town—the kind that wanted you gone by sundown unless you lived there"* (170) because of their need to resupply:

> The security guards in the stores were as well-armed as the cops—shot-guns
> and automatic rifles, a couple of machine guns on tripods in cubicles above

us. Bankole said he could remember a time when security guards had revolvers or nothing but clubs. My father used to talk like that. (171)

The description of this place offers a more direct reference to the past, which is, according to the setting's timeline, the reader's present.

Despite the high regard and hopes attached to technology's ability to protect humans, the former proves its eventual failure repeatedly throughout the series. As has been elaborated at first, this failure begins with the fall of Lauren's first neighborhood, but it becomes more apparent in the sequel. When establishing Acorn, Lauren revives the notion of the wall:

> Cactus by cactus, thornbush by thornbush, we've planted a living wall in the hills around Acorn. Our wall won't keep determined people out, of course. No wall will do that. Cars and trucks will get in if their owners are willing to absorb some damage to their vehicles, but cars and trucks that work are rare and precious in the mountains, and most fuels are expensive. Even intruders on foot can get in if they're willing to work at it. But the fence will hamper and annoy them. It will make them angry, and perhaps noisy. It will, when it's working well, encourage people to approach us by the easiest routes, and those we guard 24 hours a day. (*Parable of the Talents* 28)

This time, Lauren's tone appears more realistic. She acknowledges the limits of the wall and the possible dangers that her newly founded community may still be subjected to. The failure of the wall appears when such fears are realized with the coming of government agents who destroy the wall, take hold of Acorn, and rename it Camp Christian to become an arrest facility (207). The situational irony of this plot appears when the intruders build a fence as well (219). The latter does not seem to be intended to keep the prisoners inside because the new piece of technology known as the collars is already more effective in doing so (this is

elaborated in the following section). Hence, the direct interpretation of it is the possible argument that it has become almost a custom for people to construct walls for the 'fake' sense of safety that they deliver. The word 'fake' here can be justified with the falling action where the fence built by the Christian Americans likewise proves inefficiency in protecting them when, this time, it is ruined by forces of nature (284).

This repetitive scheme of caged communities can be viewed as a recreation of a novice discrimination basis. In other words, the *Parable* series can be perceived from various angles as minority literature. However, Butler cleverly tackles the issue of the minority differently by introducing a new, speculative, basis for discrimination. Humans have found a way to discriminate against other humans since the dawn of history, and every discrimination process necessitates the presence of a literally or metaphorically enclosed community or tribe that shares common features (skin color, religion, social status, gender, and the like). In the case of *Parables,* humans appear to have moved beyond such discriminatory aspects, which may as well be read as a remnant of the author's contemporary nineties world that was struggling to fight traditional discrimination. Instead, discrimination reemerges based on the ownership of technologized means of protection. One may see a slight resemblance between this observation and the discourse of classism; nevertheless, *Parables* do not shed light upon the conventional fight between the bourgeois and the proletariat. The clash is much simpler than that: it is between those who own technology and those who do not, regardless of their means of obtaining the technology. Aspects of this new kind of discrimination appear in the behavior of the people inhabiting walled communities or institutions, which is characterized by textbook discrimination acts such as rejecting outsiders, xenophobia, and hierarchy. This discussion is intensified more with the dominant presence of technologized weaponry.

1.2.Guns and the Posthuman Mind: Dependability and Balance

It can be observed from the previous section that whenever the discourse of technological protection is evoked, technologized weaponry comes to the fore. From a broader prism, it can be seen that contemporary American literature is more committed to social and political issues insofar as it follows the footsteps of the previous postmodern tradition as an "*incredulity toward metanarratives*" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* XXIV). On another matter, discussions over the issue of gun control and its unpleasant clash with the Second Amendment of the American Constitution are among the topics responsible for an upheaval in the American political sphere. To add to this, colored people in America –and more specifically, the African American community, given its relatively large number and long history– are the group that is closely associated with this discussion. Surveys show that the popular belief in the United States of America states that black neighborhoods are more subjected to life-endangering crimes than white ones due to governmental neglect and a long-dated chain of racist behavior (Quillian and Pager 749). Regardless of the accuracy or falsity of this conviction, it is widespread, and it puts black people in a more urgent need of protective weapons. This creates a vacant loophole, where the right to bear arms results in fear that in turn feeds the urge to bear arms in certain neighborhoods (Ellingboe, para.7). To this end, Octavia Butler presents the issues revolving around the constitutionally granted right of gun possession in a hyperbolic way. In her dystopia, she creates a world where the licensing system enforced in some States over some weapons becomes irrelevant. Such issues appear in the conflicting attitudes of different characters toward this topic, and it helps establish the posthuman mindset concerning the matter.

In the novels, guns seem to offer a relative level of safety. Going back to the first recorded trip outside the walls, Lauren mentions that if it were not for the guns they were holding, the street poor, who "*just stand and stare,*" might have attempted to rob their bikes

and clothes, and left them as an easy target for murder (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 10).

Even though "*guns cost a lot*" (79), they represent a crucial investment for survival. Further,

outside the walled communities, "*it's easier to get [a gun] if you already got one*" (79),

which indicates that obtaining a gun does not always come through legal purchase. Most of

the time, as the novels prove on multiple occasions, guns –and, in a more general sense, any

piece of technological weaponry– are obtained through scavenging, robbery, or murder. A

considerable portion of the reasons that push people to steal guns as opposed to obtaining

them legally is their unaffordable price (29). This creates a paradox, as it makes such tools

a necessity for survival and simultaneously a piece of luxury that catches the wrong kind of

attention, causing, possibly, a threat to the obtainer's life. Lauren reflects on this point when

her community starts to be heavily attacked because people from the outside resent the

seemingly safe and rich inhabitants of rich communities:

> If this is what's happening to us, what must it be like for people who are really
>
> rich—although perhaps with their big guns, private armies of security guards,
>
> and up to date security equipment, they're better able to fight back. (84 - 85)

This paradox opens the door for discussing the dilemma attached to the representation of

weapons, which varies between utter dependence and rational balance. Such a dilemma is

best shown through the ways in which characters deal with these tools. For the sake of this

discussion, the term 'gun' is used to refer to any piece of technologized weaponry, regardless

of its size.

To begin, it is important to tackle Lauren's upbringing regarding gun culture to

formulate a more general view of her adult attitude concerning the matter. In her walled

community in Robledo, most people own guns for protection, and practice their use *"at home*

with BB guns on homemade targets or squirrel and bird targets" (28). Being the Reverend

of the community, Lauren's father's perspective on the matter of guns seems to be

transmitted to other community members. Lauren mentions that "*[i]t's [her] father's fault that [they] pay so much attention to guns and shooting*" (28). This remark makes it sound cynical to carry guns because of the use of the word 'fault.' However, Lauren's tone changes as soon as she realizes that "*[a]rmed people do get killed—most often in crossfires or by snipers—**but unarmed people get killed a lot more often***" (28; emphasis added). Lauren learns from her father that the sight of a gun "*discourages mistakes,*" in a reference to attacks from strangers. For this reason, Reverend Olamina makes sure to carry "*a nine millimeter automatic pistol whenever he leaves the neighborhood*" (28).

The possession of guns is mostly legal in the novels. However, some types remain illegal, such as submachine guns (28). This still does not prevent people from owning it, and an example of this is Reverend Olamina. The latter is described in various contexts as a law-obeying citizen. His mind appears to be mature and his behaviors are intended for the greater good. For this reason, the fact that he does not keep regard to the law when it comes to the possession of guns can be read as an indication that guns provide more chances for survival in the novel than the law. Moreover, Reverend Olamina assures that his family is well protected:

> Dad also has a silenced nine millimeter submachine gun. It stays at home with Cory in case something happens there while he's away. Both guns are German—Heckler & Koch. Dad has never said where he got the submachine gun […]. It must have cost a hell of a lot. He's only had it away from home a few times so he, Cory, and I could get the feel of it. He'll do the same for the boys when they're older. (28)

This unfathomable circulation of guns appears to have lasted for a considerable while. It can be concluded from the fact that "*Cory has an old Smith & Wesson .38 revolver that she's*

good with. She's had it since before she married Dad" (29). Given the age of Lauren's siblings, the necessity for guns to survive has been there for at least a decade.

Despite all of this, Lauren's father does not view guns as an end in themselves but rather as a mere means for preserving life against the overwhelming evils of the world. Such an attitude can be seen to transcend into the protagonist's mindset in the second half of *Parable of the Sower* and throughout *Parable of the Talents.* However, Reverend Olamina's attitude toward guns is not positively transferred to everyone. His stand toward guns is associated solely with protectiveness:

> "I have a wife and five children," he said. "I will pray for them all. I'll also see to it that they know how to defend themselves. And for as long as I can, I will stand between my family and any intruder." He paused again. "Now that's what I have to do. You all do what you have to do." (29)

Reverend Olamina refrains from expressing any speech in favor of guns for their own sake. He constantly assures that the end of protection justifies the means of obtaining even the illegal pieces of weaponry so long as they are effective. His assertion of this point appears in a plethora of his sermons:

> At neighborhood association meetings, Dad used to push the adults of every household to own weapons, maintain them, and know how to use them. "Know how to use them so well," he's said more than once, "that you're as able to defend yourself at two A.M. as you are at two P.M." (29)

Such a speech motivates people to rely on guns for protection. However, even though *"there are at least two guns in every household"* (29), the walled community still eventually collapses. Besides the conclusion that guns do not achieve their intended purposes in the novel, they create a sense of hostility in some of the youngster's consciousness:

All the kids who attend school at our house get gun handling instruction. Once they've passed that and turned fifteen, two or three of the neighborhood adults begin taking them to the hills for target practice. It's a kind of rite of passage for us. My brother Keith has been whining to go along whenever someone gets a shooting group together, but the age rule is firm. (29)

Measures preventing a hostile attitude from ensuing a few regulations are elaborated in the above passage. Still, Keith represents the odd divergence from the norm. Lauren explicitly expresses, *"I worry about the way Keith wants to get his hands on the guns. Dad doesn't seem to worry, but I do"* (29). Once again, Lauren's prophecy regarding Keith comes to life.

After escaping home with his mother's gun, Keith brings it back in one of his visits *"along with two boxes of ammunition"* (78). Lauren comments that *"he never said how he got the ammunition,[…] or how he got his replacement gun—a Heckler & Koch nine millimeter just like Dad's"* (78), which indicates that it is obtained illegally. This shows how easy it is to gain control over guns and ammunition. In the same conversation, Keith asserts to Lauren, *"That's what it's like outside. If you got a gun, you're somebody. […] And a lot of people out there don't have guns"* (78). Because of the stories heard about the outside world, Lauren admits that she *"thought most of them did—except the ones too poor to be worth robbing"* (79). This conversation speaks to the fact that guns become the only sign of power. The thin line that distinguishes Lauren's and Keith's perspectives also manifests here. It is easy to see the points of similarities in their views regarding guns; however, Keith, again, views this matter as an end in itself, while the protagonist regards it as a means to survival and security. It remains undeniable that both view technological weaponry as a crucial aspect of their dystopian world.

Along the same vein of utilizing technological tools as a means of protection, and besides the context of walls, technology appears to offer a relatively false allusion to safety

that is demonstrated in other ways. For example, technology appears to ease travel. At first, Lauren mentions that she, her father, and the group from the old neighborhood used to rely on bikes to travel (10). On the road, people with vehicles find it much easier and safer to cross even the shortest distances. Technological transportation, therefore, seems to initially provide a façade of protection that coincides with that which was alluded to by the walls. However, this level of protection can be compromised if it is not met with human wit. For example, an entire family of seven members loses its highly advanced, supplied, and armed truck to thieves as a result of the slightest error (*Parable of the Talents* 31).

As much as the reliability of technology remains intact, some of the technological tools that contemporary readers are familiar with seem to take a step back in this futuristic setting. For instance, cars seem to almost completely vanish in the first novel of the duology. This is indicated when Lauren describes a household in the neighborhood that turns *"a converted three-car garage added to the property in the 1980s"* into a *"rabbit house"* and then marvels that *"[i]t's hard to believe any household once had three cars, and gas fueled cars at that"* (*Parable of the Sower* 53). Instead, new forms of trucks seem to be more popular among those who can afford, or steal, them. Such aspects of technological transportation are mentioned along the way northward:

> We saw a few trucks—most of them run at night—swarms of bikes or electric cycles, and two cars. All these had plenty of room to speed along the outer lanes past us. […] It's against the law in California to walk on the freeways, but the law is archaic. Everyone who walks walks on the freeways sooner or later. Freeways provide the most direct routes between cities and parts of cities. Dad walked or bicycled on them often. (124)

The passage above offers a more direct insight into the dystopian world of the novels. Aspects of civilization seem to disappear gradually, as laws are no longer enforced. Amid

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such chaos, the might of technological transportation that once offered comfort and luxury become a mere tool to preserve one's life. When cars take a step back, roads are invaded by pedestrians desperate for a hope for survival. Although it is still *"illegal to walk on highways in California, [...] everyone does it"* (*Parable of the Talents* 57). Among such desperate travelers, technology reappears, as *"some weren't carrying anything except weapons"* (*Parable of the Sower* 125). Therefore, the role of technology is, once again, reduced to seeking protection and preserving life. Anything else that was once associated with the concept of technology is lost in the setting of Butler's fictional world.

Amid such conflicted perspectives, the protagonist's focus on survival remains the most relevant one to the posthumanist context. Nonetheless, other surrounding aspects prove similarly relevant insofar as they present an image of the posthumanist condition that thrives despite the collapse of the human element itself. This appears in the juxtaposition between the near extinction of cars and the appearance of more advanced armed vehicles. The first mention of the latter appears when a private company called KSF enters Robledo to recruit inhabitants (99). Later on, they start to represent the safest way to travel and even reside. Lauren describes people who own such vehicles as lucky (*Parable of the Talents* 25):

> In a truck like that, the guns should be run by a computer. Automatic targeting. The only way you can miss is if you insist on doing things yourself. You might forget to put your guns on the computer or you might leave the computer off if you just wanted to scare people. But if you're serious, you shouldn't **keep** missing. (34; emphasis in the original)

As indicated herein, these trucks are supplied with computers that make missing a target almost impossible. They also have sound repressing systems (32), *"night-vision equipment"* (36)*, "infrared, ambient light, and radar devices"* (42)*, solar wings to recharge their batteries (57), monitors to look discretely outside (*Parable of the Talents* 58), and

"maneuverability and sensory systems" (176). Such technological enhancements, and the fact that it does not get damaged by fire (58), may indicate that a piece of technology possesses more survival equipment than an average human being. More details are described in a tone that alludes to a sense of superiority over humans:

> Along with the truck's ability to "see" in the dark via infrared, ambient light, or radar, it also has very good "hearing," and an incorrectly designated sense of "smell." This last is based on spectroscopic analysis rather than on actual smelling, but it is a kind of chemical analysis over a distance. It could be used on anything that emitted or reflected electromagnetic radiation—light—of some kind. And the truck had plenty of memory. It could, and had, recorded all that it could of each of us—our voices, hand and foot prints, retinal prints, body sounds, and our general shapes in several positions to help it recognize us and not shoot us. (176 - 77)

The analysis previously coincided with such a near personification of the non-human element while tackling the representation of nature. This repetition in the style of narrative may, thus, locate the human in an existential challenge with the two forces of nature and technology, both of which appear to be easily capable of sweeping the human existence.

To make things more uneven, a more antagonistic type of truck is introduced in the climax of *Parable of the Talents.* This is described as *"A maggot, nicknamed in its ugly shape, is something less than a tank, and something more than a truck. It's a big, armed and armored, all-terrain, all-wheel-drive vehicle"* (203). With a name that stems from death, Maggots are used by *"Private cops and military"* (204) for purposes of protection but also raids. When the presence of Acorn comes to the attention of the government, seven Maggots are sent to seize control of it. In this incident, the wires and wall surrounding the newly

founded community collapse easily, and the inhabitants of Acorn, despite being well-armed and trained, have no chance opposite the weaponized truck.

The presence of technological weaponry, along with advanced vehicles, may be read as an indication that the growth of technology is proving to be an overwhelming force in the novels. However, it is likewise crucial to refer back to the eventual fate of such tools. Just as the walls eventually fail to protect its inhabitants despite all the gratification that they are viewed with, weapons and trucks almost always prove to be insufficient in fulfilling their intended purposes. Even the Maggots, with their mightiest representation and descriptions, appear to be subjected to failure with the slightest error. This may be read as an indication that technology is an unpredictable agent in the novels. The only permanent effect that it has on the characters is shaping their posthumanist minds and perspectives in relation to the issue of survival. While the human remains the only element that is not weaponized (eliminating any direct reference to the transhumanist discourse), its body undergoes some changes as an indirect effect of technology.

1.3. Drugs and the Recreation of the Human Body

In a post-COVID world, the threat of a nuclear strike takes a back seat. Ever since March 2020, the world has been in constant fear and anticipation of a weaponized biological disease. The latter's dangers lie in the fact that it cannot be restrained by walls (or borders), opposed by armies, redirected by missiles, nor contained by lockdown and curfew, as this century's early twenties have tragically proved. Moreover, a bioweapon can easily get out of control to harm even the manufacturing state. Interestingly, Octavia Butler foresaw the threats that a lab-made piece of biology may infer and expressed such fears over twenty years before their realization. The *Parable* novels offer a suitable case to study the ways in which bioweaponry may prove to be catastrophic. They tackle this point through the theme of drugs and the accompanying tragic effects that they bring on consumers and otherwise.

Going back to the posthuman condition of the protagonist, the very existence of her hyperempathy syndrome is due to the drug that her mother consumed when she was pregnant with Lauren. While this point has been analyzed as a forward-leading factor when the theme of motherhood was examined opposite the posthuman existence, another perspective may be open to debate here. When Lauren meets Belen Rose at the end of *Parable of the Talents,* she discovers that she has the same condition as her. However, Belen Rose does not use it in the humanitarian and forward-looking manner as Lauren does, which, again, could be an argument in favor of the innate posthumanist tendencies of the protagonist. Belen Rose, instead, appears to be a victim of both her parents' consumption of a Paracetco. Therefore, to analyze the destructiveness of drugs in interfering with the biology of mankind, it is better to regard it in a way that is separate from Lauren, since the latter manages to turn its results into a constructive force.

Paracetco, also known as the *"smart drug"* (12) can, in many ways, be seen as a result of human error rather than that of human wit. However, its enormous effect on the making of the human body –and, therefore, its rule in the creation of the posthuman– allow it to be read as one of the defining characteristics of bioweaponry and biological interference in the series. Paracetco *"began as a legitimate drug intended to help victims of Alzheimer's disease"* (*Parable of the Sower* 103). At first, the drug showcases positive results, then soon afterward, its effect starts to cause damage not only to its consumers but to their offspring as well:

> It stopped the deterioration of their intellectual function and enabled them to make excellent use of whatever memory and thinking ability they had left. It also boosted the performance of ordinary, healthy young people. They read faster, retained more, made more rapid, accurate connections, calculations, and conclusions. As a result, Paracetco became as popular as coffee among

students, and, if they meant to compete in any of the highly paid professions,

it was as necessary as a knowledge of computers. (*Parable of the Talents* 12)

This passage demonstrates the keen human desire for enhancement. The human mind has been more than enough to secure the continuation of the species; still, people jump at the first opportunity to boost its function. That is, humans' desire to transcend whatever biological limits that appear to them may sometimes lead to less favorable results.

Along the same vein, drugs play a considerable role in coloring the dystopic elements of the novels. *Parable of the Sower* introduces, and heavily emphasizes, a new drug on the streets famously known as 'pyro' in addition to a *"dozen or so names: Blaze, fuego, flash, sunfire"* (*Parable of the Sower* 102). People who consume this substance are referred to as 'Paints' because they "*shave off all their hair—even their eyebrows—and they paint their skin green or blue or red or yellow. They eat fire and kill rich people"* (79). Pyro is *"short for pyromania"* (79), which stems from its effect that *"makes watching the leaping, changing patterns of fire a better, more intense, longer-lasting high than sex"* (103). This drug has become highly popular in a short period. It creates an irrational level of obsession over fire. Interestingly, the addicts target rich people, which may be read as an implicit cry against the influencing and privileged minority:

They take that drug that makes them like to watch fires. Sometimes a camp

fire or a trash fire or a house fire. Or sometimes they grab a rich guy and set

him on fire. […] They're crazy. I heard some of them used to be rich kids, so

I don't know why they hate rich people so much. That drug is bad, though.

Sometimes the paints like the fire so much they get too close to it. Then their

friends don't even help him. They just watch them burn. (80)

Pyro seems to create an animal-instinct behavior toward fire. It blurs the rational mind of its consumers and appeals to their desires. The drug is compared, on various occasions with the

pleasure of sexual intercourse, which, again, opposes the most bragged-about feature that distinguishes Man from beast to label the former at the top of the hierarchy: reason.

Pyro becomes more important than such basic needs as food, for example. It costs people their lives. This becomes clear when Lauren's group gets attacked on the road and manages to overpower their attackers. As the chaos of the world makes it a custom to search corpses for food and ammunition, the group discovers that the bodies lying before them *"carried neither food nor water nor adequate weapons"* yet have *"[t]wo boxes contain[ing] a couple of pills each"* (168). In addition to being an indirect instrument adding to the rupture of reality, drugs become a direct cause of setting fires to create the worst version of the apocalypse:

> Addicts are running wild, setting fires in areas that the earthquake didn't damage. Bands of the street poor precede or follow them, grabbing whatever they can from stores and from the walled enclaves of the rich and what's left of the middle class. (175)

Because of fire's association with renewal in the novel, which was previously analyzed in the second chapter, drugs can be interpreted as a trigger for erasing the old and paving the ground for the new. Still, the unfathomable damage that they cause their consumers and others alike cannot be overlooked.

Ironically, and in a similar fashion to Paracetco, the creation of Pyro comes across as a mere mistake:

> Pyro was an accident. It was a homebrew—a basement drug invented by someone who was trying to assemble one of the other higher-priced street drugs. The inventor made a very small chemical mistake, and wound up with pyro. That happened on the east coast and caused an immediate increase in the number of senseless arson fires, large and small. (103)

This may be said to speak to an implicit absurdity. The paints are admittedly responsible for nation-level destruction, yet the substance directly responsible for their behavior is not plotted or planned. It can, therefore, be said that the author is making the point that has been emphasized by environmentalists for ages: if you mess with nature, nature messes back with you (Hameed, para.4). The scientific and technological development that the human race reached at the expense of the planet and everything in it seems to have found a way to bounce back. Accordingly, the hierarchy that was set by the humanists and wholeheartedly believed by mankind for ages appears to fall all apart as a result of an unintentional, minor incident. Again, this resembles the real-life tragedy of COVID-19, which, according to the accident theorists, is a result of an unplotted accident (Gardner, para.1; Brumfiel and Kwong, paras.2–3; "U.S. Intel Agencies Still Haven't Ruled out Lab Accident Origin for Covid," para.3).

Furthermore, drugs can be categorized as the most imminent biological danger because of their massive effect on the human mind and biology. This appears in the inexplicable desire to immerse one's body in fire in addition to the fact that they have been manufactured in a lab (there is no reference to mushrooms, for example). Such an observation is also emphasized by Lauren when she determines, from the news she hears on the radio, that both Pyro and Paracetco *"screws around with people's neurochemistry"* (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 103). More importantly, the repetitive pattern of substances accidentally turning into drugs that cause such an immense alteration in the making of human biology may be interpreted as a direct link to the emergence of the posthuman. Put differently, it may be read as an indication that the latter does not stem from a thoughtful human plan to evolve. It, rather, comes across as a natural way for humanity to correct itself when becoming unfit or too damaged for and/or damaging to the world.

Accidental biological weaponry that appears in the form of drugs is not the only form of biological threat present in the series. On various occasions, there are references to fatal

incidents caused by the unintentional scientific behavior of humans. For example, when it rains for the first time in six years in Robledo, Lauren's stepmother, Cory, instructs her kids against going outside for fear of polluted rain (35). This is read as a form of danger anticipation, which can only stem from the certainty of its prior occurrence. In simple terms, there must have been news about incidents where polluted rain caused fatalities or serious damage to people, which drives Cory to be wary of it. Additionally, the absence of some biological substances proves to be as equally harmful as harnessing them for the sake of intentional harm. To explain, in the futuristic world of *Parables,* the overwhelming majority of people are too poor to be able to *"afford immunizations"* (39), leaving them vulnerable to disease and death. When Lauren's friend Joanne expresses her surprise at the fact that people are dying from measles, the former attempts to rationalize that:

> Those people are half dead already […] They've come through the winter cold, hungry, already sick with other diseases. And, no, of course they can't afford immunizations. We're lucky our parents found the money to pay for all our immunizations. If we have kids, I don't see how we'll be able to do even that for them. (40)

In addition to harnessing science for mischievous deeds, biological threats to mankind are, thus, caused by the absence of centuries of scientific discoveries just the same.

To add to the point of biological interference, Butler introduces the often-discussed point of artificial wombs. However, unlike other defining works of speculative fiction, Butler refrains from detailing this idea, possibly, due to the plethora of themes discussed in her duology:

> More news. Scientists in Australia have managed to bring a human infant to term in an artificial womb. The child was conceived in a petri dish. Nine months later, it was taken, alive and healthy, from the last in a series of

complex, computer-controlled containers. The child is the normal son of
parents who could not have conceived or borne a child without a great deal
of medical help. (*Parable of the Talents* 93)

Referring to this idea may, therefore, be a mere allusion to the fact that scientific and
technological progress is pushing its path ahead regardless of the state of the world in the
setting of *Parables*. This point also serves the falling actions of the plot insofar as it presents
an idea to Lauren to utilize this new technology in carrying human fetuses to outer space
colonies as part of the fulfillment of Earthseed's Destiny.

In relating the current discussion to the posthumanist discourse, it may be safe to claim
that technologically administered tools that target the biology of humans are more strongly
influential than traditional weaponry. To support this claim, a glance at the latter section
shows that biological weaponry drives a smooth, though slow and unwanted, transition of
the body from the humanist to the posthumanist one. Guns, on the other hand, influence the
mind rather than the body, but this influence seems to include only a few subjects. While the
overwhelming majority of people in the duology seem to submit under the influence of guns
and others to assume more destructive mindsets to themselves and others, only the
designated ones appear to seize the opportunity that the apocalypse brought to level up with
their thought system toward the posthuman condition. The aforementioned category that
accompanies the possession of technological tools with deteriorating the human species
appears more thoroughly in the next section of this chapter.

2. Use and Abuse of Technology

While discussing the representation of technologized weaponry in the novels, it is
mentioned, on multiple occasions, that some laws still exist to forbid obtaining certain kinds
of guns, such as machine guns. This leads to the fact that, despite the dominant image of a
civilization in utter disarray, the government and its facilities still stand amid the chaos.

However, the government appears to be deeply immersed in corruption, as it functions, in the overwhelming majority of times, against, rather than for, the common good of the citizens. This corruption is tightly linked with the notion of technology insofar as the latter works as an instrument that aids and protects the corrupt individual as well as institutions. The link between technology and corruption appears in corrupt governmental institutions, debt slavery, and politics.

2.1. Corrupt Governmental Institutions

In tackling the theme of corruption and its relation to technology, it can be observed that the author creates a situational irony. The latter manifests in the fact that she utilizes the most profound and trusted institutions to show the degree to which corruption is engraved. Before diving into this, it is important to remind of the unmentioned fact that the police and fire departments are in possession of highly advanced technological weaponry as well as tools that can, and should, be in the service of the common citizen. Instead, these institutions appear to be too driven toward draining the latter and hoarding as many guns and technological tools to ensure their survival through the Pox and afterward. All of this is indirectly demonstrated through the degree of corruption to which the two departments are depicted.

To begin, the police department can be read in the novels as yet another element of spreading evil and chaos (134). The former is supposed to be a law-enforcing institution, yet despite the apparent presence of some remnants of the law that are scattered here and there throughout the series, the police fail to do their designated job of enforcing it. It is interesting to note that police corruption does not surface in a conventional way common to literary pieces that discuss such a theme. It is rather mostly centered on the idea of their lack of agency.

The police's entire job is constructed upon taking immediate actions to prevent another, mischievous, or simply outlawed one or to punish for one that has already been committed. Their repeated passive attitude in *Parable of the Sower,* hence, speaks of an underlying misfunction in the core mechanism of the institution. Again, this appears more intensively in the first part of the series because of the constructive narrative that endeavors to build an overall image of the dystopian side of the world as a whole. In such a reality, as is the case with any realistic or fictional setting shadowed by the absence of law, law enforcing agents, or both, survival starts to be a gift granted only to the fittest. The definition of the fittest, in this context, equals the ones more capable both of surviving and eliminating –sometimes permanently– any possible threats to their existence. This equation causes *"[p]eople [to] get killed like that all the time"* (*Parable of the Sower* 16). When crimes like this occur, the police play an insignificant role because, conveniently, *"[u]nless it happens in front of a police station, there are never any witnesses"* (16). If a police investigation is as easily thrown away, police protection becomes a myth in Butler's fictional world. Reverend Olamina asserts that when danger reaches the level of a life threat, the police *"may be able to avenge you, but they can't protect you"* (29).

To make things worse, the police start to collect a fee for their passive and irrelevant investigation. A governmental department that is supposed to be funded by taxes charges people fees that the majority cannot afford (50). The police are *"not interested until after a crime has been committed. Even then, if you call them, they won't show up for hours—maybe not for two or three days"* (52). This phenomenon extends outside Robledo as well to cover every town that Lauren visits on her trip north. Words on the freeway also suggest that it covers the entire nation that is falling in disarray. To add to this plight, the police sometimes become a part of the problem:

A few miles later along the highway, we saw some cops in cars, heading south

toward what must now be a burned out hulk of a community with a lot of

corpses. Perhaps the cops would arrest a few late-arriving scavengers.

Perhaps they would scavenge a little themselves. Or perhaps they would just

have a look and drive away. What had cops done for my community when it

was burning? Nothing. (168)

Instead of doing their job, the police *"just add to the death toll"* after arriving a day or two

late (163). This adds to the idea of their malfunction.

Due to the spread of rumors stating that cops have become "*no threat to criminals*"

(102), civilians oftentimes find themselves in situations where they are obliged to assume

the job of the police if they desire survival. To ensure a relatively better security level of

walled communities, influential members of the latter organize capable individuals into

groups to *"patrol the neighborhood in shifts in armed pairs"* (50). To add to the efficiency

of these patrols, the designated guards sometimes have no choice but to use guns to scare

intruders or even commit the first act of attacking them before they manage to take over the

first line of defense of the community, which is, in these cases, the wall. Under this context,

Lauren mentions that it is *"still legal to shot housebreakers"* (52), indicating that amid this

entire anarchy and career betrayal of law enforcing agents, Lauren still thinks about obeying

the law. This may be read as a strong indication that adopting an approach that calls for the

absence of hierarchy does not necessarily mean calling for the absence of laws. This point is

elaborated further ahead.

Along a similar vein, the fire department is represented in the novels as equally corrupt.

When the walled community in Robledo approaches its end, robberies and arson crimes

skyrocket. Among the engines that drive people to rage fire is the effect of the

aforementioned drugs. Another reason is that people exploit the horrifying and

uncontrollable qualities of fire as a means to *"cover crimes"* (102). In an incident where a fire is deliberately set on one of the community houses, the fire department is called, yet no one arrives on time. The neighboring families assume again the rule of what are supposed to be government agents in their attempts to extinguish the fire on their own while *"[f]irefighters arrived in no great hurry"* (104). Because of this delay, no member of the family in question makes it out alive. Furthermore, when fire accidentally spreads in one of the inhabitant's garage, Lauren ironically, yet firmly, states, "*Of course, no one called the fire department. No one would take on fire service fees just to save an unoccupied garage. Most of our households couldn't afford another big bill, anyway*" (25). This statement also addresses the fact that firefighters likewise charge fees for their service that fails even to save lives. At a time when the police and fire departments are needed most, they both seem to fail the quintessential aspect of the very tasks that their jobs dictate.

Despite the unquestionable failure of governmental institutions, many individuals repeatedly seek their help and protection. This appears most strongly when leading characters find themselves in situations as desperate as it leads them nowhere else except seeking governmental help. To illustrate, when Lauren's group reaches Bankole's farm where his sister and her family live, and discover their death, Bankole's immediate instinct is to go to the police in a desperate attempt to discover the individual or individuals responsible for this deed. This drives Lauren to

> wonder what you have to do to become a cop. I wonder what a badge is, other than a license to steal. What did it used to be to make people Bankole's age want to trust it. I know what the old books say, but still, I wonder. (255)

In addition to her initial skepticism toward the police, this passage reveals an engraved level of corruption within the cops, which manifests in comparing their badge to a 'license to steal.' Besides, it also shows that citizens are as detached from the government and the laws

to the point where the process of joining the police force becomes ambiguous even to someone as knowledgeable and eager for learning as Lauren. Nevertheless, when her daughter is kidnapped, and Lauren manages to escape two years of captivity in what came to be known as Camp Christian, Lauren's first instinct is, similarly, to seek the police's help in finding her (*Parable of the Talents* 317).

Such behaviors may be read as a keen human instinct to desire authority when in desperation. It may be read as a counterargument against the overall rejection of hierarchical systems because any sort of authority necessitates the presence of a hierarchy. However, it shows that hierarchal systems are easily corrupted and isolated from the common good of the people. This debate manifests more distinguishably in the context of corporate corruption and the emergence of a new level of debt slavery.

2.2. Corporate Corruption and Debt Slaves

On a slightly larger level, the use of technology for mischievous ends appears with the dominance of capitalist corporations in the novels. This appears more strongly throughout *Parable of the Sower,* as it develops, in its sequel, into a worse level of political corruption. Through contextualizing the novel, again, within the timeframe of its writing, it appears that the nineties was an era where discussions about the underestimation of debt slavery surfaced. The latter is defined as *"a form of bondage resulting from a situation of debt or insolvency"* (Testart 175). Butler presents this social and economic issue in a hyperbolic way to add a cautionary tone against the practices of capitalist corporations. In doing so, another factor to the question of technology is revealed insofar as the latter, once again, is represented as an instrument in the prevailing corruption.

In the world of *Parables, "[a] lot of small businesses are illegal, even though they don't hurt anyone, and they keep a household or two alive"* (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 16). The massive spread of illegality in the complete absence of the law and the extreme

corruption level of law-enforcing facilities and agents have a massive downside. One of the most dominant manifestations of the latter is the empowerment of corporate corruption which appears to stem, mostly, from the widespread practices of debt slavery. In reference to the latter, Lauren notices early in *Parable of the Sower* that "*Something new is beginning— or perhaps something old and nasty is reviving*" (85). Before the fall of the community in Robledo, its members, including Lauren's family, were approached by a *"company called Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton, and Company—KSF"* (85). According to the plot, the KSF is a multi-branches corporation, the business of which is to take over small, mostly coastal, cities and turn them into walled and highly secured private communities. Their inhabitants conduct the work that is assigned to them by the company and receive a fixed salary in the form of bills that can only be used to buy merchandise for the company itself, as they are invalid elsewhere. The antagonistic factor behind this process appears in the fact that the company never pays enough to the inhabitants to lead a decent life. This puts them in a constant debt situation that they find themselves obliged to work harder to get out of. Through this scheme, the inhabitants can never leave the town under the control of the company, nor are they paid enough. Taking away one's freedom and obliging them to work for less than sufficient prices is the definition of servitude, making this situation an epitome representation of debt slavery.

The use of technology as a shield to protect the exploitation business run by KSF appears throughout. Their business, which *"sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction"* (88) appears to be fueled by both the allusion and possession of highly advanced technological protection. For example, when the Garfields, a fellow neighboring family, gets accepted at Olivar, which is a tow bought by KSF, the community gets to witness unprecedented technological tools:

> An armored KSF truck came from Olivar to collect them and their belongings.
> The adults of the community had all they could do to keep the little kids from
> climbing all over the truck and pestering the drivers to death. Most kids my
> brothers' ages have never been close to a truck that runs. Some of the younger
> Moss kids have never seen a truck of any kind. The two guys from KSF were
> patient once they realized the kids weren't thieves or vandals. Those two guys
> with their uniforms, pistols, whips, and clubs, looked more like cops than
> movers. No doubt they had even more substantial weapons in the truck. My
> brother Bennett said he saw bigger guns mounted inside the truck when he
> climbed onto the hood. But when you consider how much a truck that size is
> worth, and how many people might want to relieve them of it and its contents,
> I guess the weaponry isn't surprising. (99)

Despite this, Lauren explicitly demonstrates her mistrust in the ability of technology to provide protection. Reflecting on Kieth's subplot where guns fail to preserve his life, she says, *"[S]ecurity in Olivar isn't much more attractive than the security Keith has finally found in his urn"* (92). This can be read as an argument against the agency of technology itself. It shows that in order for the latter to have a change in providing security, it must fall into the right hands.

Many subplots are scattered throughout the narrative to tell the tales of people who were victims of or managed to survive debt slavery. This narrative technique resembles that of slave narrative, which draws a clear parallel between the past and the future. For example, a character named Emery used to work on a farm that was later sold to a corporation similar to KSF:

> Wages were paid, but in company scrip, not in cash. Rent was charged for the
> workers' shacks. Workers had to pay for food, for clothing—new or used—

for everything they needed, and, of course they could only spend their company notes at the company store. Wages— surprise!—were never quite enough to pay the bills. According to new laws that might or might not exist, people were not permitted to leave an employer to whom they owed money. They were obligated to work off the debt either as quasi-indentured people or as convicts. That is, if they refused to work, they could be arrested, jailed, and in the end, handed over to their employers. (205)

Technology functions here to serve the mischievous end of facilitating the job of corporations in keeping people enslaved. In addition to this, the government also makes it easy to feed such practices by amending the laws and legalizing *"forcing people or their children to work off debt that they can't help running up"* (208) so long as it keeps people off the street.

In *Parable of the Talents,* suspensions grow extremely high, and debt slavery becomes normalized to the point where people start to find the lack of it weird. This appears when a new member of Acorn refuses, for a considerable amount of time, to believe that Lauren and her group take people in for the mere reason of helping them:

> [T]o Michael, this sounded like altruism, and Michael didn't believe in altruism. He kept expecting to catch us selling people into slavery or prostituting them. He didn't begin to relax until he realized that we were, in fact, practicing what we preached. Earthseed was and is the key to us. (*Parable of the Talents* 33)

This speaks of an ugly world that is not getting any better with the years passing by. Debt slavery is normalized even further, and the irrelevancy of laws increases more. Every governmental facility, from the law enforcing officers to lawmakers, is part of allowing this barbaric act to persist:

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Who could little children go to for help, after all? If they had no adult relatives, even the police would either sell them illegally or indenture them legally. Indenturing indigents, young and old, is much in fashion now. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments—the ones abolishing slavery and guaranteeing citizenship rights—still exist, but they've been so weakened by custom, by Congress and the various state legislatures, and by recent Supreme Court decisions that they don't much matter. Indenturing indigents is supposed to keep them employed, teach them a trade, feed them, house them, and keep them out of trouble. In fact, it's just one more way of getting people to work for nothing or almost nothing. Little girls are valued because they can be used in so many ways, and they can be coerced into being quick, docile, disposable labor. (42 - 43)

The relevance of this analysis surfaces in indicating that the posthuman condition does not necessitate a thriving environment. Instead, a dystopian setting may as well pave the way for a drastic change in the perspective with which the world is regarded. This change, if crafted correctly, can, in a way that rejects hierarchy and chaos, be deemed posthumanist.

The corruption that technology is harnessed to protect takes other forms as well. These forms, in addition to debt slavery, appear in what seems to be a revival of the antebellum version of servitude. This reflection can be thought of as a coalition between the past and the future and a factor that allows the reading of the posthumanist shaping throughout various human plights that existed despite the humanist tendencies of the time.

2.3. Politics and the Revival of Slavery

Among the subplots that reveal the epitome of the use of technology in serving evil deeds in that of politics. The weight that the latter generally carries in shaping the pillars of any reality in any given time and place is undeniable. Politicians may be the only individuals

who possess the literal power to change the world. This is one of the reasons that inspired a plethora of science and speculative fiction works to create fictional realms with totalitarian regimes. As for the *Parable* duology, the political sphere is represented in two opposite ways. On the one hand, *Parable of the Sower* displays a passive government that possesses the means to enhance the conditions of the entity of the human race yet refrains from making any action. On the other, *Parable of the Talents* showcases a backward-looking regime that, yet again, is in possession of unprecedented technologies, the whole of which is harnessed to revive slavery.

From the beginning of the works, and despite her young age, Lauren is presented as a character that *"paid attention to the wider world"* (87). She observes the alteration in the world around her enough to conclude that *"Secretaries of Astronautics don't have to know much about science. They have to know about politics"* (*Parable of the Sower* 19). This, along with her attention toward the natural world and the stars, makes her particularly interested in a space program that the government is funding at the beginning of the *Parable of the Sower*.

This is also one of the points that show Lauren's individuality when she interiorly contradicts her father's negative stand concerning this matter:

> "Bread and circuses," my father says when there's space news on the radio. "Politicians and big corporations get the bread, and we get the circuses." "Space could be our future," I say. I believe that. As far as I'm concerned, space exploration and colonization are among the few things left over from the last century that can help us more than they hurt us. It's hard to get anyone to see that, though, when there's so much suffering going on just outside our walls. (17)

Lauren's view indicates her belief in the hopelessness of planet Earth. She refrains from thinking that the destiny of humans is to be stuck on a dying planet, the resources of which have been exhausted. This forward-looking perspective gives rise to all three elements discussed herein. First, it shows that nature is not limited to one planet and that outer space is an area worth exploring as well. Second, the survival of the human race is prioritized here, and the means with which this survival is anticipated necessitates an end of an entire era of human existence and the beginning of another, therefore, posthumanist Age. Finally, it emphasizes that the only way this destiny can be fulfilled is through means of technology, adding, thus, to its significance.

Observing the corrupt political and decaying social systems, Lauren wonders about the future of mankind, questioning whether humans will be stuck between *"President-elect Donner's version of slavery or Richard Moss's"* (28). With the latter, she refers to the increasingly popular practice of polygamy, which was previously analyzed in this study. Comparing the two situations may be an indication that one corrupt aspect of life makes it easy to tolerate corrupt practices in other areas. Moreover, it may be claimed that slavery, in all its forms, is a remnant of the past that may easily be revived at any point in the near or far future if the environment is corrupt enough to allow it. Given the protagonist's posthumanist stand, slavery is, then, regarded as a hierarchy at its finest, which necessitates a total rejection of it if the posthumanist condition is to prevail.

While Lauren's view is targeted toward a novice future, politicians' only endeavor is to return *"to the glory, wealth, and order of the twentieth century"* (17). Despite the eruption of anarchy, remnants of the American political system still exist:

> Starvation, disease, drug damage, and mob rule have only begun. Federal, state, and local governments still exist—in name at least—and sometimes they manage to do something more than collect taxes and send in the military.

And the money is still good. That amazes me. However much more you need

of it to buy anything these days, it is still accepted. That may be a hopeful

sign—or perhaps it's only more evidence of what I said: We haven't hit

bottom yet. (233)

This absence of agency from the side of the government to get out of this plight, along with

their fascination with the past, led them to push the entire country toward an unhumanitarian

past of servitude. After the failure of President Donner to save the country, a new president

with a more severe attitude and immeasurable backwardness is elected. Under the

government of this newly elected president, who appears in *Parable of the Sower* under the

name Andrew Steel Jarret, slavery is revived in its most traditional sense.

Before tackling the revival of slavery under this new American government, it is

important to analyze the presidents' agents and their reliance on technological weaponry to

enforce what seems to be the beginning of a dictatorship. Government agents *"were like*

soldiers" (*Parable of the Talents* 17). Their good training appears efficient and professional

with which they conduct their attacks. This is described by a member of the Dovetrees, a

neighboring community to Acorn, as *"an explosion –maybe twenty or thirty or more guns*

going off all at just the same time" (17). In comparing them with the deeds of gangsters,

Lauren can easily see the difference. She remarks that *"[t]his was something new"* or

"something old" and *"a revival of something nasty out of the past"* (18). Along the same

vein of attempting to accurately describe them, she compares them to the Ku Klux Klan (18)

and the Nazis (19) but also to the Inquisitions and the Crusaders (19).

The encounter between Lauren and these governmental agents occurs when they

invade Acorn in an attempt to eradicate heathenism and turn it into an arrest facility known

as Camp Christian. In this event, a close representation of the electronic collars used to

enslave people surfaces. Prior to this incident, there are a few references to such objects, the

most notable of which is narrated by Lauren's brother, Marcus, after she buys him from slavery:

> My brother said a collar makes you envy the dead. As bad as that sounds, it didn't, couldn't, convey to me, how a collar makes you hate. It teaches you whole new magnitudes of utter hatred. I knew almost nothing about hate until this thing was put around my neck. Now, sometimes it's all I can do to stop myself from trying again to kill one of them and then dying the way Emery did. (251)

According to the plot, the history of the collars begins when *"some fool of a rich boy went adventuring among the free poor of a big squatter settlement. He wound up wearing the latest in electronic convict control devices—also known as slave collars, dog collars, and choke chains"* (90). The collars can be observed to be the highest piece of technology represented in the novel and the only one that has no positive side to the main characters. They are represented as purely antagonistic:

> They delivered shocks and sometimes damaged or killed people. The new collars don't kill, and they can be worn for months or years at a time and used often to deliver punishment. They're programmed to resist being removed or destroyed by delivering jolts of pain severe enough to cause unconsciousness. (90)

The wearer of the collar is at the complete mercy of the person with the control bottom. This provides enormous power over others, leading *"some collared people [to] kill themselves, not because they can't stand the pain, but because they can't stand the degree of slavishness to which they find themselves descending"* (90). This enormous power, along with the increased tolerance of debt slavery and the absence of the law immediately gave rise to slavery in its most conventional form:

> Slavery was discovered in Texas in 2032. Innocent people—not criminals or indigents—were being held against their wills and used for immoral purposes! How about that! What I'd like to see is a state of the union where slavery isn't being practiced. (90 - 91)

The overwhelming level of dominance that the collars implement allows them to be even more severe than conventional servitude. With the latter, slaves had the opportunity, albeit how minimal that was, to try and escape, and slave narratives are the best reference of this. However, with the use of technology in asserting the hierarchy, the slim chances are forever eliminated:

> These are the rules: Once you've got a collar on, you can't run. Get a certain distance from the control unit and the collar chokes you. I mean it gives you so much pain that you can't keep going. You pass out if you try. We called that getting choked. Touch the control unit and the collar chokes you. It won't work for you anyway. It's got a fingerprint lock. And if the fingers trying to use it are wrong or are dead, it chokes you and stays on choke until someone with the right living fingers turns it off. Or until you die. […] "And, of course, if you try to cut, burn, or otherwise damage the collar, it chokes you. (143)

This makes technology almost directly responsible for the recreation of the most severe form of hierarchy.

Following the fall of Acorn, the protagonist is not only put in a direct encounter with the collars but becomes one of their victims as well. The scene of the fall of Acorn differs from that of the community in Robledo inasmuch as the former does not collapse as a result of the spread of anarchy, but rather because of an organized plot to eradicate it:

> They didn't shoot their way in. It seems that they don't intend to kill us. Yet. Since Dovetree, they have changed. Their leader has come to power. They

have acquired... if not legitimacy, at least a shadow of sophistication. Roaring in, shooting everyone, and burning everything is perhaps too crude for them now. Or maybe it's just not as much fun. (201)

Immediately after laying siege on the place, its inhabitants are collared and imprisoned. Lauren's hyperempathy allows her to discover that inflicting pain on slaves can be as pleasurable for some masters as it even leads to orgasms (256). This shows a profound ugly human nature that some people possess, which, it might be claimed, stems from the basic instinct of survival of the fittest. The ability to inflict pain allows the allusion of superiority, which humans innately inherit as was argued in the first chapter. The situational irony presented in this regard is that all the might of the technological advancement that allowed such a level of empowerment is eventually evaporated due to a minor error. During the night that the people enslaved in Camp Christian decided to plot an escape or die trying, a stormy night is able to deactivate the control unit, which allowed a malfunction in the collars. If anything, this shows the unreliability of technology and the randomness of events despite careful consideration.

To conclude, this section provided an overview of the representation of technology in the *Parable* novels along with the associated inferences surrounding it. The analysis shows that the technological presence in the works contributes to the establishment of a hierarchy. That is, it puts enormous power in the hands of the corrupt and messes with the natural level of power that one's body and mind provide. Moreover, technology appears to be an end in itself for some, and a means for others. Although its presence can be harmful, its absence is definitely fatal. Overall, the prominent depiction of technology revolves mostly around technologized weaponry; however, the latter proves the dynamic nature of technology along with its lack of agency. In a few instances, technology saves lives; in others, it threatens them. This means that, quite unlike nature, technology is a controlled rather than a

controlling force. To this end, other minor representations of technology appear to slightly affect this conclusion. These representations are centered upon the sole idea of survival.

3. Technology and Survival

As it was mentioned earlier, technology can be viewed in more than a single sense. This inclusive vision allows for an interpretation that transcends the straightforward denotation of the word and leans more toward various connotations. Each of the latter serves insofar as it permits a focused perspective on the sole idea of survival in a decaying world. The overwhelming passages of the novels at hand narrate the struggle, and often failure, of survival. This final section, hence, attempts a reading of those few aspects of survival that prove successful due to the presence of technology. It is, therefore, divided into three sections, each of which tackles of aspect of the abstract influence that tools have on the human mind to lead it into the posthuman perspective. The final section also presents an inclusive vision that regards the three key notions of the thesis in a parallel, namely, nature, humans, and technology.

3.1. Reading, Writing, and Books: A Mind Outside the Body

Among the notions relevant to the discussion of tools is that of a mind outside the body. Humans' memories, despite their long-lasting features, are easily distorted by feelings, emotions, and/or otherwise outsider factors. To put it in simple terms, the human mind is not to be trusted. For this reason, people rely on writing as a tool to preserve and be able to later restore past observations, inferences, and achievements. This is related to the present discussion in one essential way. It was previously concluded that writing is among the first technologized activities that humans have reached. Additionally, posthumanism can be observed to rely on prior knowledge and past mistakes as well as good-doings to filter the most convenient survival and enhancement mechanisms and methods. These two inferences

accumulate into a discussion of attempting to utilize such an ancient technological tool in preserving the human mind, sanity, and purpose.

To begin, it is important to formulate a comprehension of the protagonist's attitude toward reading and writing. Lauren is a character that reads *"a lot"* (*Parable of the Sower* 13). Her reading aids in a considerable part of her survival. She mentions reading in the context of discussing religion. Because of her reading, her ideological orientation and religious comprehension are established. Reading helps her to understand her father's religion, which is Baptism, and to emerge with her unprecedented conclusions about Earthseed. Given the fact that the latter drives most of her posthumanist existence, as was elaborated in the second and third chapters, it can be claimed that the notion of reading influences a posthumanist existence.

The protagonist's passion for books allows her to gain considerable knowledge of the natural and technological worlds. Her reading varies from

> books on survival in the wilderness, three on guns and shooting, two each on handling medical emergencies, California native and naturalized plants and their uses, and basic living: logcabin-building, livestock raising, plant cultivation, soap making—that kind of thing. (42)

Lauren is interested in educating herself and others about food supplies and guns alike. She demonstrates a level of awareness regarding the necessity of both. Given the importance of this knowledge in assuring the survival of Lauren's group throughout her journey in *Parable of the Sower* and within her newly founded community in *Parable of the Talents,* it is safe to say that books represent a crucial aspect in the survival of mankind in the novels. Her intentions to survive are highly emphasized whenever the context of books is evoked.

Furthermore, the protagonist demonstrates an extended awareness of the relevance of utilizing books as teaching material. On this point, she argues, *"I realize I don't know*

very much. None of us knows very much. But we can all learn more. Then we can teach one another" (43). It can, therefore, be argued that Lauren does not believe in an innate survival mechanism of the human. She is convinced that survival is to be learned and taught instead of submitting to the hierarchy of the survival-for-the-fittest. This point is further supported by her hyperempathy condition, which, as has been discussed, seemingly does not label her the fittest in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, Lauren seems to believe that survival techniques can be recorded in books. It makes the idea of a book itself an extension of countless human minds that had years of training and experience to adjust to survival modes. This supports Stiegler's posthumanist claim that the mind can be restored outside the body using tools. Books, in this case, are the perfect manmade tool to ensure the ultimate goal of survival.

On this note, the presented discussion introduces a point of variation. Despite repeatedly mentioning that posthumanism is a clear distinction from humanist tendencies and, at its core, a correction of many of its proven false conclusions, analyzing the notion of a mind outside the body reveals an aspect of continuation between the two philosophies. To explain, posthumanism is, after all, based on the works of the humanists and the humanist-inspired thinkers, regardless of the nature of that basis, and this area of analysis manifests a relatively clear reference to one of the defining feminist thoughts. It is important to remind here that feminism is a social movement that is based on calling for gender equality and rejecting the patriarchal hierarchy. Still, its methods regarding the human race, in addition to the timeframe of its establishment, render it a legacy of Western thought that is traced back, in its entirety, to the Renaissance and the ensuing humanist philosophy. To dive deeper into this point, it is essential to tackle Lauren's posthumanist ideologies in relation to her choice of diction in this particular context.

To provide a tangible instance for this theoretical dispute, it helps to glance at a reflection that Lauren has as a teenager after a conversation with her closest friend at the time:

> But my room is still mine. It's the one place in the world where I can go and not be followed by anyone I don't invite in. **I'm the only person I know who has a bedroom to herself.** These days, even Dad and Cory knock before they open my door. That's one of the best things about being the only daughter in the family. I have to kick my brothers out of here all the time, but at least I can kick them out. (38; emphasis added)

The emphasized sentence of this passage brings to mind the core feminist belief that in order for a woman to be intellectually active, she requires financial independence and a *"room of one's own"* (Woolf 304). Such conditions, according to Woolf, encourage thinking, which is reflected in *Parables* through the main character's approach.

Lauren's enthusiasm toward reading and writing appears more intensely when she establishes Acorn and is openly designated to be its leader. Lauren ensures that *"[e]very member of Earthseed learned to read and write"* (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 24). Despite the fact that public schools still exist, they *"had become rare in those days"* (24). In a world where *"[e]ducation was no longer free"* yet *"was still mandatory according to the law"* (24), the protagonist seems one of the few remaining people who appreciate the value of education and believe in its usefulness for survival. She also provides education for illiterate adults (*Parable of the Sower* 159). The teaching process of reading and writing that Lauren establishes demonstrates a miniature representation of the development of tools into technologies. Because her *"students can't or won't afford books of any kind"* (*Parable of the Talents* 319), she finds more efficiency in primitive ways:

I've taught them to practice first letters, then words on the ground in a smooth patch of dirt. They write with their fore-fingers to learn to feel the shapes of letters and words. Then I make them write with sharp, slender sticks so they can get used to the feel of using a pencil or pen. (319)

This provides an image of the utilization of tools by humans as a means of easily reaching the intended results. It also shows the possibility of abandoning those tools and being able to reach the same results, albeit the possible long duration.

Besides helping her formulate her thoughts and ideologies, Lauren resorts to writing whenever a negative event arises. When her old community falls, she admits, *"I have to write. I don't know what else to do"* (*Parable of the Sower* 111), and when Acorn falls at the hands of Christian extremists, she confesses:

I write, not knowing how long I will be able to write. I write because they have not yet robbed us of everything. [...] somehow, I still have paper, pens, and pencils. None of our captors values these things, so no one has yet taken them from me. I must keep them hidden or they will be taken. (*Parable of the Talents* 201–02)

Notes from Larkin's journal also confirm this aspect about Lauren when she does not find her record of 2034. Lauren's daughter asserts that the former "*couldn't have gone for a year without writing. [...] No doubt by then, she was writing on whatever scraps of paper she could find*" (260). Lauren explains that her desire for *"writing is a way for [her] to remind [herself] that [she is] human [...] As irrational as the feeling may be, [her] writing still comforts [her]"* (245).

Other tools of writing and communication such as the computer and the phone are used as well at the beginning of the novels (*Parable of the Sower* 104). However, due to the unaffordable price of electricity and the overwhelmingly increasing level of illiteracy, such

tools begin to be marginalized, as the fight for mere survival prevails. In these tense circumstances, the pen and paper are the only tools that persist. Following the climax of the Pox, writing tools become scarce. For this reason, Lauren scavenges books and pens (*Parable of the Talents* 28) as much as she does food and ammunition, which, again, shows the importance of such tools for her mind to remain in survival mode.

3.2.Escapisms: Technological Media and Virtual Utopia

If humans' reliance on technology is represented in a continuum that stretches from external impact to inner and complete influence, the seemingly primitive tools of writing will be on one end. Along the continuum, there appear a varying degree of advanced tools that aid those who can afford them to bear the dystopia of their world. Reflecting on this point provides an analysis of a deeper level of interaction between technology and the possibility of crafting a posthumanist mind.

In the first few pages of *Parable of the Sower*, there is a mention of the television. To discuss this point, it is important to contextualize the novel at the time it was written. In the first half of the nineties, television was among the revolutionary inventions that provided news and entertainment. Therefore, mentioning it in such a brief way can be read as an indication that a major symbol of technological media is beginning to fade. In the entire community where the protagonist lives, there is only one family that owns a television. Lauren mentions that *"[t]he Yannis family has made a business of having people in to look through their Window"* (*Parable of the Sower* 16). Media technology has always been a lucrative business. The commercial behavior of the Yannis is but a small example of the human tendency to seek profit when chance allows. The community is aware that *"that kind of unlicensed business isn't legal"* (16), yet they never report it or even refrain from using it. Even a law-obeying man such as Reverend Olamina allows his family to *"go to watch sometimes because he didn't see any harm in it, and it helped the Yannises"* (16).

To promote their business, the Yannis sell *"fruit, fruit juice, acorn bread, or walnuts. Whatever they had too much of in their garden, they found a way to sell"* (16). This method of advertising is highly visible in the entertainment business. It shows that humanity often moves in circles when it comes to the latter, regardless of the size of the business itself. This point may also be read as an innate human pattern of conducting media technology; nevertheless, it must be remembered that the Yannis are still an extension of what may be referred to as the old world. This remark redirects the reading toward a repetitive behavior. In attempting to trace the posthumanist perspective that the text offers in this regard, it can be noticed that the view of the protagonist, being the most accepted posthuman presence in the novels as previously inferred, is neutral. This is not the only topic upon which Lauren demonstrates neutrality (the discussion of nostalgia comes to mind here). It can be noticed that an impartial tone dominates the passages whenever a pre-Pox discussion is evoked. This may be interpreted as an indication that the posthumanist stand, which the main character represents, is not necessarily a criticism of every aspect and practice of the humanist-driven humans.

The transition of media technology can be observed to go through three stages throughout the duology. Initially, both television and the radio are represented as essential devices for delivering news (16, 39). The former, additionally, seems to be used for entertainment purposes. Lauren says that the Yannis *"showed movies from their library and let [the neighbors] watch news and whatever else was broadcast. They couldn't afford to subscribe to any of the new multisensory stuff, and their old Window couldn't have received most of it, anyway"* (16). Additionally, there are references to more advanced technological entertainment tools such as *"reality vests,"* *"touch-rings,"* and *"headsets"* (16). However, these are only mentioned once, indicating that the world has become too immersed in

anarchy to the point where survival is all that matters, and pleasure and entertainment take a back seat.

Moreover, for characters that are presented as violent-oriented and are analyzed in previous sections as gun-obsessed, technology presents a level of virtual escapism just as fairly. The most vivid example in this context is Lauren's brother, Keith. When he escapes home after having a gun, Keith joins a group of gangsters that allow him access to various technological entertainment tools that he has previously been unaware of their existence. In his last conversation with his sister prior to his death, he boasts:

> It's got stuff like you never saw […] TV windows you go through instead of just sitting and looking at. Headsets, belts, and touchrings … you see and feel everything, do anything. Anything! There's places and things you can get into with that equipment that are insane! You don't ever have to go into the street except to get food. (75)

This reflects two equally strong indications of the displayed reality of the setting. The first is the advanced technologies that the world has come to, and the second is the fact that these technologies fail to make people's lives easier, as the justification behind investing in them often emphasizes. Therefore, the unreliability of technologies resurfaces once more.

As the journey narrative proceeds, references to technological media start to gradually decrease. Along the journey of the protagonist and her companions, the narrative is stripped of the media reference that characterizes the pre-fall of the walled community. However, a few incidents still represent a reference to the technologically advanced past. For example, in an incident where Lauren's small group gets attacked, they kill their attackers in self-defense and take their possessions. Apart from showing the normalization of violence in this dystopian reality, the scene reminds us of the essentiality of technology. Lauren mentions that among the attackers' possessions, there was *"a single earring which turned out to be a*

radio" (168). She emphasizes that they should keep the latter because *"[i]t could give [them] information about the world beyond the highway. It would be good not to be cut off any longer"* (168). This action manages to save the group from potential dangers and possible demise more than once.

The third and final phase can be noticed mostly in *Parable of the Talents,* where references to astonishing media technologies start to appear. As isolated as Acorn is, the news of the latest technologies reaches its members, which shows that the former is widespread:

> Tucked away at Acorn as we are, we have to make a special effort to get news from outside—real news, I mean, not rumors, and not the "news bullets" that purport to tell us all who we need to know in flashy pictures and quick, witty, verbal one-two punches. Twenty-five or thirty words are supposed to be enough in a news bullet to explain either a war or an unusual set of Christmas lights. Bullets are cheap and full of big dramatic pictures. Some bullets are true virtuals that allow people to experience—safely—hurricanes, epidemics, fires, and mass murder—Hell of a kick. Well-made news disks, on the other hand, or good satellite news services cost more. (*Parable of the Talents* 87–88)

This creates a paradox inasmuch as it shows people desperate for mere survival, on the one hand, and others desperate for virtually escaping the chaos of the world, on the other. Interestingly, some people utilize the escapist tools presented to them to recreate a chaotic world all the same. This seems to mess up with the core concepts of utopia and dystopia. To explain, the very existence of virtual reality can instantly be read as a utopia since it meets the literal definition of the latter by being a 'no place.' When this virtual reality presents a pessimistic and violent scenario, it may, as easily, be read as a dystopia. However, a dispute

arises when the viewer rather prefers the bleak scenario; this shifts a seemingly dystopian realm into a utopia for a specific viewer. Consequently, this particular context creates a sense of flexibility around the concepts of utopia and dystopia.

This flexibility surfaces again when a more direct reference to virtual utopia is mentioned. It appears in what is referred to as Dreamasks, which, as the name indicates, are *"big ski-mask-like devices with goggles over the eyes"* (241). The function of the masks is to create *"computer-stimulated and guided dreams available to the public,"* and Larkin comments that *"[w]earing them made people look* **not-quite-human***"* (241; emphasis added). Dreamasks represents the epitome of virtual utopia in a world coming to an end:

> Each one offered wearers a whole series of adventures in which they could identify with any of several characters. They could live their character's fictional life complete with realistic sensation. They could submerge themselves in other, simpler, happier lives. The poor could enjoy the illusion of wealth, the ugly could be beautiful, the sick could be healthy, the timid could be bold (241–42)

Because of their affordable price (241) and people's desperation for an escape, the masks become highly popular. To ensure even wider publicity under the extremist Christian government, and to *"avoid their censure, Dreamasks International made a number of religious programs—programs that particularly featured Christian American characters"* (242). Interestingly, the government banned movie theatres as well as television, yet permits the religious programs that Dreamasks present (305). In addition to proving that the government seizes the chance to immerse citizens in the unreal, this shows a universal human desire for peace and normality.

A closer look at the consumers of Dreamasks is provided through Belen Rose, whose mother is an addict of the former. The mother spends her entire time inside the virtual room,

which Belen Rose describes as *"her own private fantasy universe"* (380). This detachment from reality results in grave consequences for her physical and mental health:

> In that room she could go anywhere, be anyone, be with anyone. It was like a womb with an imagination. […] she could visit her friends, real and imaginary. Her real friends […] were as addicted to their v-rooms as she was to hers. If her real friends didn't indulge her as much as she wanted them to, she just created more obliging versions of them. By the time I was abducted, I didn't know whether she really had contact with any flesh-and-blood people anymore. She couldn't stand real people with real egos of their own. (380–81)

Accordingly, this technology seems to put an end to human contact and communication. Its addiction also resembles that of drugs. The mother gradually and willingly loses contact with other people, then with her own family, as she *"began to have all her meals sent in"* (381).

It is hard to classify such a behavior toward media technology as humanist or posthumanist. Because of its appeal to core human instincts and, simultaneously, taking the human consciousness to a level that transcends the tangible, realistic realm, it may be argued that it is a merger of both. To make the discussion more complicated, creating a virtual utopia may go against the principles of both philosophies. That is, despite their various differences, both trajectories formulate with the sole function of granting the survival of the human race under fine circumstances. However, a virtual utopia would strip the human race from the chance to experience the actuality of the world. This will lead to a large-scale discussion or dominance by destructive powers. Therefore, a balanced description must be tackled between technology's use for utopian ends and its use to realistically survive the surrounding world.

3.3.Outer Space Utopia: Technology and Extraterrestrial Travel

The ultimate goal of this research, which is the investigation of the ways in which homo sapiens can survive a decaying world as posthumans, meet the ultimate utopia that the plot of *Parables* culminates into. This final subsection of the entire thesis brings the triangle of humans, nature, and technology into the discussion to analyze the novel's vision of ultimate survival.

The beginning of *Parable of the Sower* and the end of *Parable of the Talents* share the common thematic concept of the stars and the outer space. What begins as a dream in the first part of the duology ends up as a realization of a mission to escape the decaying planet and save the human race. Throughout *Parable of the Sower,* and due to technological means of communication, Lauren hears about various attempts made by different nations to colonize space:

> There was a long report on the radio today about the findings of the big Anglo-Japanese cosmological station on the moon. The station, with its vast array of telescopes and some of the most sensitive spectroscopic equipment ever made has detected more planets orbiting nearby stars. That station has been detecting new worlds for a dozen years now, and there's even evidence that a few of the discovered worlds may be life-bearing. I've listened to and read every scrap of information I could find on this subject, and I've noticed that there's less and less argument against the likelihood that some of these worlds are alive. The idea is gaining scientific acceptance. Of course, no one has any idea whether the extrasolar life is anything more than a few trillion microbes. People speculate about intelligent life, and it's fun to think about, but no one is claiming to have found anyone to talk to out there. I don't care. **Life alone is enough**. I find it … more exciting and encouraging than I can explain, more

important than I can explain. There *is* life out there. There are living worlds just a few light years away, and the United States is busy drawing back from even our nearby dead worlds, the moon and Mars. I understand why they are, but I wish they weren't. (*Parable of the Sower* 61; emphasis added)

Lauren's inclination toward life for life's sake is apparent in this passage. While other countries appear to be in a neo-space-race, Lauren's purpose is targeted toward seeking a way to maintain the existence of homo sapiens in the universe, proving, thus, another posthumanist tendency.

More importantly, Lauren's view escapes any possible criticism of being romanticized because she presents a studied and thoughtful outline of life on a different planet:

I suspect that a living world might be easier for us to adapt to and live on without a long, expensive umbilical to Earth. *Easier* but not easy. Still, that's something, because I don't think there could be a multi-light-year umbilical. I think people who traveled to extrasolar worlds would be on their own—far from politicians and business people, failing economies and tortured ecologies—and far from help. Well out of the shadow of their parent world. (61)

Her awareness that the journey is not expected to be perfectly enlightened proves her realistic viewpoint that refrains from falling into either extremist end of the continuum by being neither fully optimistic nor utterly pessimistic. Furthermore, Lauren perceives extraterrestrial travel as yet another means to escape the hegemony of hierarchal political, economic, and social systems that overwhelm her reality. Therefore, this shows the significance of technology insofar as the latter is the only thing that can allow such missions to take place. Technology, thus, appears to be the only way to exist.

It has often been thought of utopia as a ready-made place awaiting its inhabitants; however, Lauren's posthumanist perspective appears to be more inclined to the idea that a utopia is something to be made rather than found. Her realistic view supports the claim that the protagonist's *"utopia is then an interior utopia"* (Agustí 358). Throughout the duology, she endeavors to sow the seed of a utopian hope in the hearts and minds of her fellows; then, she attempts to cultivate their individual talents for the sake of the group. This is further supported by the connotation of the titles. In this pursuit, Lauren learns to cohabitate with nature and harness technology and tools for the greater good. She also condemns those who harness science and technology to harm others:

> I wanted us to understand what we could be, what we could do. I wanted to give us a focus, a goal, something big enough, complex enough, difficult enough, and in the end, radical enough to make us become more than we ever have been. We keep falling into the same ditches, you know? I mean, we learn more and more about the physical universe, more about our own bodies, more technology, but somehow, down through history, we go on building empires of one kind or another, then destroying them in one way or another. We go on having stupid wars that we justify and get passionate about, but in the end, all they do is kill huge numbers of people, maim others, impoverish still more, spread disease and hunger, and set the stage for the next war. And when we look at all of that in history, we just shrug our shoulders and say, well, that's the way things are. That's the way things always have been. (Butler, *Parable of the Talents* 394)

She elaborates on the construction of hierarchies that will only culminate in utter destruction and chaos, upon which other hierarchies are to be built. The above extract shows her

complete rejection of this circular, which indicates her inclination toward a flatter human society where peace and harmony are to prevail.

Moreover, Lauren's posthumanist prism appears in her constant reflection on the place of the human in the world and the universe. She does not deny that the human species is biologically and intellectually superior to most beings, yet she expresses her rejection of using such superiority to gain a sense of entitlement:

> There seem to be solid biological reasons why we are the way we are. If there weren't, the cycles wouldn't keep replaying. The human species is a kind of animal, of course. But we can do something no other animal species has ever had the option to do. We can choose: We can go on building and destroying until we either destroy ourselves or destroy the ability of our world to sustain us. Or we can make something more of ourselves. We can grow up. We can leave the nest. We can fulfill the Destiny, **make homes for ourselves among the stars**, and become some combination of what we want to become and whatever our new environments challenge us to become. Our new worlds will remake us as we remake them. And some of the new people who emerge from all this will develop new ways to cope. They'll have to. That will break the old cycle, even if it's only to begin a new one, a different one. (395; emphasis added)

It can be argued here, according to this, that Lauren's interior utopia is a flexible one inasmuch as it permits room to repeat the circle of constructing a hierarchy and then falling down one. Nevertheless, the flexibility resides in the idea that as long as the will and ability to change exist, there is always hope for reaching and realizing a reality where all beings live in harmony. Such a reality can be deemed a posthumanist one.

Consequently, since this study focuses on the view of the dynamic leading character in determining the posthumanist perspective that the novels offer, it can be said that the latter's conception of technology is a constructive one. That is, technology appears to be a necessary means of achieving the ultimate Destiny of the ideological and philosophical movement that Lauren establishes. The question of technology may, therefore, culminate in the inference that the latter is an innocent yet powerful means that can be the solution for the eternal human endeavor of a utopia if fallen into the right, avant-gardist, and posthumanist minds.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to investigate the question of technology in relation to the posthumanist condition to discover its impact on fueling or extinguishing the dystopian factor of the novels. Each section of the chapter attempted to offer a reading of the respective issue that it is concerned with from both parts of the duology. This technique aimed at tracing the development and degradation of the reliance on technology in various aspects of Butler's fictional world. Unlike the first chapter, which was more centered on *Parable of the Sower,* and the second, which offered a relatively balanced glance, this final chapter is slightly more concerned with *Parable of the Talents.* This is due to the fact that the latter offers speculative conclusions regarding technology, which allows for more detailed interpretations that relate the use of technology in relation to the future of mankind. As stated initially, this final chapter covers one of the three pillars upon which the current thesis is constructed. Nature, humans, and technology represent the front line of discussions while tackling the fictional representation of the posthumanist condition in literature. For this reason, the chapter asked questions relating to the issue of technology with protectiveness, corruption, and survival, to test its positive or negative impact. Like nature and humans, this chapter tried also to investigate whether technology can be an active agent, a source of good (or evil), and/or a

necessity for preserving the human race. After an elaborate analysis, it concludes that technological tools are yet another passive agent in the process of preserving or threatening the human race. The associated meaning that appears in the various works of science fiction in regard to technology is, therefore, a mere reflection of the impact and behavior of humans. It remains undeniable that technology is considered, in various contexts, to be the main factor responsible for the birth of the posthuman condition, yet its influence, according to the novels, remains at the mercy of humans themselves. Accordingly, and despite the rejection of any hierarchal system, the human remains the only agent character amid the other two elements that are being studied. This does not make humans any superior because of their inability to control their fates or the fate of their world, nor does it label them at the center of any circle due to the fact that the other elements do not always fall at their service. Hence, the chapter reaches a point of coalition with the posthumanist system of thought with an extra observation asserting the human agency.

General Conclusion

Due to the unpredictable occurrences of contemporary times, today's world presents a bleak and somehow vague image of the human species' future. The latter is surviving amid a triangle of natural inconveniences, technological precedents, and manmade disasters. The ongoing chaos of the world almost always drives humans to the realm of thoughts, which represents an asylum to shield them from the horror of randomness and absurdity. They find solace in religion, philosophy, science, or anything that seems to provide plausible answers. The most remarkable philosophical trajectory that succeeded in gaining tremendous appreciation in the Western world is humanism. In addition to crossing the geographical boundaries, the latter managed to maintain its position as the essence of continental philosophy for about five centuries. However, with the abovementioned chaos of the present world, the answers that humanism used to offer started to be insufficient. As a result of this, and due to the undeniable importance that humanism left on the philosophical sphere, a new trajectory saw the light in recent times and is known as posthumanism. To this end, this study aimed to reflect the doctrines of the posthumanist school of thought onto the futuristic fictional duology of Octavia Butler entitled *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*.

The research's main interest was to investigate the question of the human element in the universe and the ways in which survival and prosperity are possible in this Age. The literary sphere of the thesis guided it to the area of fictional characters and realms. Still, to bring the scope of the study closely to factual dimensions, the case study was carefully selected as a reflection of the precise area during which the thesis was penned. Although the two novels were written in the nineties of the past century, the setting in which the events occur is the twenties of the current one. This made the fictional works highly suitable for the study. The main issue the research aimed to solve concerns the adaptability, harmony, and subjugation, or lack thereof, of the human place in the universal hierarchy. As the title of the

thesis suggests, light was shed on two main pillars that construct this hierarchy besides the human element, which are nature and technology.

The thesis concluded that Octavia Butler's world reflects major posthumanist tendencies that label the human a survivor only when conjoined with the forces of nature and technology. Moreover, it inferred that the human is represented as the sole agent element in this fictional universe, yet the agency of mankind is sometimes challenged by static elements. The overall and most straightforward answer to the research question can be that as long as humans refrain from perceiving their species as superior, they will remain superior since nature and technology can be harnessed to serve mankind's agendas of benign survival. The reverse is naturally true; once human characters in the novels start possessing and acting according to a sense of entitlement for their centrality in the universe, their luck in surviving begins to deteriorate.

To reach this conclusion, the study was divided into four chapters, each with a specific central aim and objectives that served the thesis's main endeavor. More attention was assured to be given to the analytical part due to the literary agendas of the thesis. In some areas, the case study was regarded in parallel with other literary discussions to further locate the discourse within a literary field. This appeared mostly in the introductions of the chapters and sections. Such details were necessary to include as a means of contextualizing the analysis and avoid presenting a study in a vacuum, especially given that one of the objectives of the thesis was to relate the fictional with the factual. Furthermore, analyzing the case study resulted in a pattern that seems to majorly include the first novel, *Parable of the Sower*, in the first analytical chapter while mostly emphasizing the second one, *Parable of the Talents*, in the last. This pattern was initially unplanned. The central notions that each chapter covered, namely nature, human, and technology respectively, drove them to trace the occurrence of such notions within the novels, which resulted in the above-mentioned

scheme. This also explains why the third chapter of the thesis (second analytical chapter) sheds light on both novels since the notion it tackled is that of the human element, and the latter intensively exists in both. This alone can provide one major conclusion of the study: the novels follow the most easily noticeable pattern of human existence, which is their journey from relying on nature to survive to relying on technology.

Other detailed conclusions were reached through a more narrowed lens within each chapter. The first chapter of this thesis provided a theoretical background upon which other chapters were constructed. Not only that, it helped meet one of the core study objectives, which was to crystalize a theoretical dimension out of a philosophical perspective. The chapter walked through the philosophical terrain of humanism, then posthumanism, to reach a theoretical version of the latter, which is still noticeably marginalized despite its increasingly vast spread in the literary sphere. This appears in textbooks and encyclopedias on literary theory that fail to include posthumanism as a literary theory regardless of their novelty. Hence, the theoretical chapter was an imperative part of the thesis, for its conclusions concerning the posthuman characters and the argued-for reliability of speculative fiction to provide a theoretical basis on human survival are vital to the present work.

The second chapter of the thesis started to reflect one major part of the inferences of the first chapter onto the novels. It tackled the notion of nature from a posthumanist perspective while attempting to keep a narrow scope on the protagonist's actions and reactions toward it. The aspects of nature covered in this chapter were carefully selected to avoid an extended discussion that derives from its main argument since analyzing the representation of nature in literature goes a long way back. Change, as a concept and an ideology, was placed in the center of the chapter insofar as it can be regarded as a major engine of the posthumanist tendencies of the novels. The chapter deduced that nature appears

passive in the novels yet not static. It is a dynamic force headed toward the abyss due to human misuse. However, nature appeared to be gentle with characters with progressive perspectives. Such characters were studied in detail as part of analyzing the posthuman element in the following chapter.

The third chapter moved to the next most important notion of the thesis, which is that of the human element and the shift into posthuman existence. The research located this notion in the middle of the analytical chapters to be able to have a glance at the skeptical centralization of mankind which was discussed in the theoretical chapter. All three analytical chapters put a considerable focus on the protagonist's thoughts, attitudes, and actions, but this one paid a greater emphasis on analyzing her behaviors in accordance with the opportunities presented to her. This chapter also assumed a philosophical dimension when tackling her Earthseed ideology, which was inferred, after the reading, to resemble the doctrines of the posthumanist philosophical trajectory inasmuch as human existence is concerned. The overall conclusions of the chapter included confirming that Lauren Oya Olamina is a vivid representation of a posthumanist character in fiction. The interesting part of this conclusion can be argued to be that speculative fiction seldom presents weak, marginalized, and physically inferior characters as leading ones. By breaking this pattern, the chapter concluded that the novels show a possibility for all mankind to shift into posthuman agents. This possibility, according to the analysis, falls, not into physical superiority, but rather an ideological one. The chapter can also be seen as a bridge between the preceding and the following one just as the notion of the human is the bridge between that of nature and technology, for without the former, nature would not have been processed nor technology reached.

The final chapter of the thesis closed by addressing the core notion of technology in relation to posthumanist agency. It inferred that technology appears in the *Parable* duology

as largely harnessed for mischievous deeds. However, it also emphasized the fact that technological tools are crucial for posthuman survival as well as realizing its utopian destiny and hopes. Again, the placement of this chapter parallels with the placement of technology in the timeline of human existence on planet Earth. Although the theoretical chapter argued for the flexibility of the notion of technology, the latter was still regarded in the analysis as manmade and man-developed tools. The conclusions of this chapter, thus, function as a closure to the discussion of the universal hierarchy and the triangle of nature, human, and technology. One of its major deductions was that technology, just like nature, appears dominantly passive in the fictional works at hand. This leaves the human to be the only active element in the novels with the condition of their ability to adopt posthumanist tendencies, which, at the end of the plot, seems to be a crucial aspect of survival.

Additionally, while both nature and technology seem passive, they can be concluded to be dynamic, for their essence shifts in accordance with the perspective of the character that they are regarded through. That is, humans remain the center of the universe on top of the hierarchy as long as they refrain from relying on this mere fact for their survival. The question is never about who is on top; it is rather about who manages to stay there. Furthermore, as it can be remarked, each chapter ended with a vision of a utopian hope or way of existence, which can lead to the conclusion that both posthumanist thought and the genre of speculative fiction aim at providing a sort of paradise for the human species. This also supports and is supported by the human instinct to survive because of, or even despite, all odds.

Like any other research, the one at hand was faced by a few limitations. First, the analysis focused on a single plot instead of a collection of works of speculative fiction. This was due to the time and space limit that guides the thesis writing. Second, the novelty of the theory made it difficult to collect a wider range of literature in the review section. A third

limitation was presented due to the field of study within which this thesis falls, which prevented conducting a comparative reading between or among two or more literary works. Again, the scope of the study and novelty of the theory necessitated the establishment of a solid background in the Western context before diving into an interdisciplinary study. The abovementioned limitations can function as a starting point for future research. A few ideas may include a literary survey that tackles posthumanist survival throughout a multiplicity of speculative works. Besides, a comparative study may be conducted to compare and contrast the representation of nature and technology against the human between or among two or more fictional works.

Most importantly, future studies can skip the trouble of going through the journey from the philosophical to the literary theoretical and rather rely on the conclusion that this thesis provides. This brings the discussion to the most important additions that the current research brings to its field. It can be claimed that on the theoretical part, this thesis theorized the philosophy of posthumanism, adding a newly solid prism through which literature generally, and speculative fiction specifically, can be read. In addition to this, and on the analytical part, the thesis presents a practical example of relying on the concepts and doctrines of the posthumanist theory in reading a work of speculative fiction.

Glossary

1. Acorn: Presented in *Parable of the Talents,* a fictional community that adopts the doctrines of Earthseed.

2. Anthropocene: "*The most recent period in the earth's history, when human activities have a very important effect on the earth's environment and climate*" ("Anthropocene").

3. Anthropocentrism: The belief that humans are "*opposed to and superior to nature, and as free to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purposes*" (Abrams and Harpham 99).

4. Anthropos: A Greek word for the human element or species (Palsson et al. 11).

5. Apocalypse: Greek for "*uncovering a kind of a prophecy about what the future holds in store for men.*" In the Western Christian context, it signifies a "*revelation or revealing the shape of things to come*" which indicates "*the end of the world*" (War 1).

6. Biopolitics: The intersection between biological findings and political agendas and is often hypothesized to serve governmental schemes via scientific discoveries (Campbell and Sitze 14).

7. Biotechnology: The intersection between such scientific fields as biology and genetics to reach a genetically modified species or crops (Bentahar et al. 564).

8. Bioweapons: "*[T]he intentional use of microorganisms or toxins derived from living organisms as an act of war or political violence with the intent to cause death or disease in humans, animals or plants*" (Dudley and Woodford 126).

9. Cogito Theory: the process of rationalizing existence that is famously associated with René Descartes. It can be summarized in the maxim 'I think, therefore I am' (Newman, sec.4).

10. Continental Philosophy: A trajectory "*concerned with synthesis– synthesis of modernity with history, individuals with society, and speculation with application*" (Jones 12).

11. Dreamasks: Presented in *Parable of the Talents,* fictional devices that present a virtual utopia to their users.

12. Dystopia: An "*unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination*" (Abrams and Harpham 414).

13. Earthseed: Presented in the *Parable* duology, a fictional philosophical trajectory and religious-like perspective that promotes Change as its essence.

14. Ecocentrism: "*The view that all living things and their earthly environment, no less than the human species, possess importance, value, and even moral and political rights*" (Abrams and Harpham 100).

15. Humanism: A philosophical trajectory that emerged during the Renaissance to argue for "*the dignity and central position of human beings in the universe*" (Abrams and Harpham 163).

16. Posthumanism: A philosophical trajectory that is based on criticizing some of the doctrines of humanism by arguing against any form of universal hierarchy and revising, thus, the place of the human in the universe (Rugo 2).

17. Robledo: Presented in the *Parable* duology, a fictional town in futuristic California.

18. Technocentrism: "[T]*he excessive reliance on technology*" and "*the widespread belief in technology's ability to produce accurate answers*" (Sirico Jr 106).

19. Technoculture: "*a combination between politics, technology and culture,*" referring to the perception of technology as a cultural phenomenon that affects and is affected by day-to-day activities (Obadia 4).

20. Technology: "*A form of human cultural activity that applies the principles of science and mechanics to the solution of problems.*" This incorporates "*the resources, tools, processes, personnel, and systems developed to perform tasks and create immediate particular, and personal and/or competitive advantages in a given ecological, economic, and social context*" (qtd. in McOmber 138).

21. Utopia: "*[T]he class of fictional writings that represent an ideal, nonexistent political and social way of life.*" It is "*either inordinately superior to the present world or manifest exaggerated versions of some of its unsavory aspects*" (Abrams and Harpham 413).

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ملخص

منذ أن خلق الانسان على وجه الأرض وهو في صراع دائم مع الطبيعة سعيا لترسيخ مكانته في هذا الكون. يتجلى هذا الصراع في أبهى حلله من خلال فلسفة الإنسانية التي تأثرت بها. إذ أنها تعتبر الانسان كمركز للكون، مما أدى إلى نشوب تحديات للتوجه العالمي نحو مركزية الإنسان. وامتدّ هذا الجدل، المتمحور حول الخلاف الكائن بين البشر والطبيعة، في القرون الأخيرة ليشمل عنصرًا ثالثًا، المتمثل في التكنولوجيا. حيث تواصل تسارع التطور التكنولوجي الذي بزغ نوره مع الثورة الصناعية ليغمر الحياة المعاصرة. وفي ضوء هذا التقدم التكنولوجي غير المعهود، أدى قصور فلسفة الإنسانية عن معالجة القضايا الوجودية إلى انبثاق ما بعد الإنسانية كمسار فلسفي. وعليه، ترمي الأطروحة إلى سبر بيان الهرمية العالمية ونجاة الإنسان في الخيال التكهني الأمريكي. وبالأخص من خلال روايتي الكاتبة أوكتافيا بتلر، الموسومتين بـ *"مثل الزارع"* (1993) *و"مثل المواهب"* (1998) ، بحيث تجرى دراسة تحليلية نصية من منظور ما بعد الإنسانية. فمن داخل مستقبل مروع، تصور الروايتان عالمًا تكابد فيه البشرية من أجل النجاة، مثيرة بذلك مواضيع حول العلاقات البشرية والطبيعية والتكنولوجية. تُوضح الدراسة تطبيقا فعليا لنظرية ما بعد الإنسانية كإطار للتحليل الأدبي، كما تعرض وجهات نظر بخصوص مكانة الجنس البشري في عالم غير البشري، إلى جانب تحديها للمفاهيم التقليدية للفوقية والدونية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التكنولوجيا، ثنائية الأمثال، الطبيعة، ما بعد الإنسانية.