

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the three main characters of Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy – Lilith, Akin, and Jodahs, and studies each book in the trilogy in order to trace utopian elements in Butler's writing. It explores different ideas of what utopia and the utopian is, and, through this, proposes that it is the impulse of change, constant becoming, that constitutes utopian writing. The thesis states that even though Butler herself was skeptical towards the concept of utopia, her work is an example of modern utopian writing – a constant striving towards a better future through the creation of worlds that inspire and call for change.

The introduction starts with the main question of the thesis: "Is Butler a utopian writer?" It focuses on the author's own approach towards utopia and her self-distancing from being labelled a utopian writer. The following part is centered on the development of the concept of "utopia" itself. It starts with the first use of the term by Thomas More in 1516, which initiated an understanding of the term as a "better place," then presents different criticisms of utopia, which point to its dystopian nature, and finishes with the modern concepts of utopia that revitalize its potential. The introduction concludes with the brief summary of the planned research on the three parts of the trilogy – *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*.

The first chapter focuses on the dystopian/anti-utopian reality of *Dawn* – the first book of the trilogy. It presents the world that the main character, Lilith, encounters after being awoken from suspended animation that she has been put into by her captors – the aliens called Oankali. The chapter presents different criticisms of the trilogy which claim that the world Butler creates in *Xenogenesis* depicts a colonial world based on slavery, despite the writer's attempt to show the Oankali in a complex, but generally positive light. This chapter also explores Hoda M. Zaki's

criticism of Butler as being a biological essentialist, a writer who sees no hope for humans due to the “human contradiction” – a characteristic that Butler assigns to humankind in the trilogy and which is a mix of intelligence and an innate predisposition for hierarchy, which will always lead humans to their own destruction.

The next chapter focuses on *Adulthood Rites* – the second book in the trilogy – and it investigates ways in which the book undermines the dystopian/anti-utopian totality of the *Xenogenesis* world presented in *Dawn*. It focuses on the character of Akin – Lilith’s son, who, through his hybridity, opens up new possibilities for humans. The chapter explores the idea of a “cyborg” developed by Donna Haraway, and presents its disruptive, revolutionary potential. The chapter closes with the claim that through the cyborg character of Akin, Butler rejects the determinism of *Dawn* and initiates a journey towards manifesting the utopian potential of her work. She also shows the reader the direction of change she believes we as a species should initiate to bring about a better tomorrow.

The third chapter investigates the idea of change that permeates the last book of the trilogy, *Imago*, and examines its potential limitlessness as portrayed by Butler. It argues that the book transforms a post-apocalyptic dystopian reality into a new, unknown future of possibilities through the character of Jodahs – an unexpected outcome of the Oankali’s genetic engineering. The chapter reads *Imago* through the lens of the philosophy of becoming developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and through the practice of deconstruction put forth by Jacques Derrida. It argues that utopian change is decentered, playful, and limitless but not aimless and detached from the world we live in. In order to bring about positive outcomes, it needs to be consciously directed and founded in what surrounds us and in the values that we cherish. The chapter then concludes that

Jodahs is an example of deconstructive becoming – it embodies the constant, limitless change that constitutes Butler’s utopian writing.

The conclusion briefly focuses on her later work – *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* – to show Butler’s further development in her thinking of change as an impulse of utopian hope. It then reiterates the argument that Octavia Butler is a utopian writer because of the way she writes about and embraces change.