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The Captivity Narrative in Octavia E. Butler's *Adulthood Rites*

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Abstract: Octavia E. Butler's novel *Adulthood Rites* incorporates an enduring genre of American literature, the captivity narrative. By drawing on the familiar tale of a civilized protagonist held captive by brutal savages, Butler echoes traditional themes of spiritual growth and identity formation. Manipulating the trope of "going native" allows her hold several opposed values in tension: oppression and protection, appreciation for a native culture and betrayal of it, difference and identification. A hybrid creature, Akin must bridge a variety of opposites as he matures, a theme Butler reinforces by making a hybrid structure of the captivity narrative itself.

American science fiction author Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) had a remarkable skill for manipulating the clichés and conventions of genre. She turned the well-worn time-travel formula into a remarkable exploration of the legacy of slavery in *Kindred*, and used the vampire legend to examine race and family ties in *Fledgling*. But many less obvious examples of this generic manipulation appear throughout her work, as in the middle novel of her *Xenogenesis* trilogy, *Adulthood Rites*. Much of *Adulthood Rites* is a first-person account of the abduction and captivity of its protagonist, the alien hybrid child Akin, by a group of humans. Although firmly grounded in its science-fictional, post-apocalyptic Earth, Akin's story integrates one of the oldest and most enduring American literary genres, the captivity narrative.

The captivity narrative has a long history in American literature, where it formed a distinct category that had enormous popular appeal from the Colonial period onward. As

evidence, we need only point out that *The Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities* includes 311 titles in 111 volumes. The earliest and most famous example of the genre is *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* by Mary Rowlandson, wife of a Puritan cleric. First published in 1682, it recounted her 1676 capture during a raid by Narragansett Indians and subsequent miseries of her 11-week captivity before being ransomed. Rowlandson's text proved immediately and enduringly popular, appearing in 15 editions by 1800. (Pearce 5) It displays many characteristics typical of early narratives, including a female narrator, a stereotypical emphasis on the extreme depravity and cruelty of the Indians, vivid descriptions of the captive's many humiliations, and the captive's complete dependence upon God for solace.

Narratives such as Rowlandson's do include elements of historical chronicle; the taking of captives on both sides of the Indian and Anglo-American conflict was commonplace along the early frontier. But such narratives are also works of literature. Framed by a pious introduction by Cotton Mather and the final sermon of Rowlandson's husband, Rowlandson's journey into the wilderness becomes a metaphorical and explicitly Puritan journey of spiritual redemption, in which the savage and diabolical Indians stand in for fallen humanity, deprived of grace, while they also provide God's means of punishing and correcting the wayward sinner. By casting the Indians as the evil enemy which the early white colonist must overcome, the narrative also helps to justify colonial motives and to define a uniquely white American national identity. Popular demand for such tales ensured that the genre developed consistent, formulaic elements that cannot be solely attributed to historical events. By the late 1700s, fully fictionalized captivities were appearing: Ann Eliza Blecher's *The History of Maria Kittle* (1797) is a novel presented as a captivity narrative. Furthermore, as the moralizing of the Puritan narratives gave way to pot-boiler emphasis on lurid thrills, the lines between historical veracity and literary appeal blurred

even more significantly. (See Sturma 319) As Linda Colley put it, "Captivity texts conspicuously display the sometimes porous boundary between history and imaginative literature." (200)

The North American Indian captivity narrative directly influenced another important branch of the captivity narrative genre, the African-American slave narrative. Indeed, one of the earliest known slave-authored narratives (Sekora 92) is *A Narrative of the Uncommon Suffering and Surprising Delivery of Briton Hammon*, from 1760, an account not of Hammon's experience of slavery, but of his 1748 capture by Indians during a Caribbean sea voyage, escape, and subsequent adventures. Like the Indian captivities, American slave narratives frequently involved a metaphorical spiritual journey. As in the earliest Puritan narratives, this journey might be toward religious realization. But if the writing and circulation of Indian captivities involved the claiming of a new and uniquely American character for their narrators and readers, the same may also be said of the slave narratives, whose authors wrote into being a new African-American identity: "The narrated, descriptive 'eye' was put into service as a literary form to posit both the individual 'I' of the black author, as well as the collective 'I' of the race." (Gates, Jr. xxvi) Like the Indian captivities, published slave narratives were immensely popular and quickly developed generic conventions (see Olney 152-3), eventually reaching fully fictionalized forms. Butler's use of material derived from slave narratives is obvious in *Kindred*, but echoes of the slave narrative also inform Lilith's experience in *Dawn*, the first book of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy.

Although the captivity narrative has frequently been described as a uniquely American genre, neither the historical circumstances which led to captivities nor the genre's intense popular appeal were confined to early America. Colley points to the "Barbary narratives" of Europeans captured by North African corsairs, although Americans too left Barbary narratives, which in turn became popular fictions (see Baepler). The Barbary narratives are notable in that they

usually involved white Westerners held as slaves by Africans, an interesting twist on the African-American slave narrative, and one which sometimes served abolitionist ends. Captivity narratives persist in the modern world, though today the non-fictional variety is most likely to involve Westerners held by non-Western terrorists or revolutionaries, as in the case of Terry Waite in Lebanon or the captives of the 1979 Iran hostage crisis.

Given this variety of historical and rhetorical contexts, it may be unfair to generalize about the features of the "captivity narrative" as if it could be reduced to a single artifact. However, at least one thing seems clear: the classic captivity narrative is the tale of a white, Western, civilized, Christian colonizer fallen among the non-white, non-Western, uncivilized, non-Christian colonized. The obvious exception is the African-American slave narrative, which turned this pattern on its head. But that reversal is no accident, and it only confirms the pervasiveness of the original motif: by adopting the literary identity of the civilized and abused stranger in a strange land, the authors of the slave narratives claimed for themselves a position denied them by American society. Although the historical North American Indian captivity narrative and the African-American slave narrative had largely run their course by the end of the 19th century, when slavery and the conquest of the frontier had both ended, they continue as fictional forms.

One of the most intriguing aspects of these tales of dominated and dominating cultures are the many instances in the captivity genre where the captive representative of the dominating culture elects to "go native," or specifically in the context of the Indian captivities, to become a "white Indian." This motif occurs with such frequency that it elicited comment by no less than Benjamin Franklin as early as 1753: "When white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians...yet in a short time they become disgusted with our manner of

life...and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them." (Quoted by Ebersole 319) Fictions of going native still fascinate contemporary audiences, as evidenced by the success of films such as *Little Big Man* (1970), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *The Last Samurai* (2003). As in many of the historical captivities, the protagonists of these popular fantasies find themselves by embracing, if only temporarily, the purer and truer native/non-Western culture. Though the best elements of the native culture may survive in the protagonist, the native culture is inevitably doomed to destruction by the encroachment of modern civilization. (The mega-hit *Avatar* (2009) is an otherwise familiar tale of going native in which, remarkably, the natives actually win; how and why is beyond the scope of the current discussion.)

Critical opinion is divided on the issue of whether going native is fundamentally repressive or liberatory. In reference to white fantasies of adopting American Indian identity like *Dances with Wolves*, Shari Huhndorf observes: "By adopting Indian ways, the socially alienated character uncovers his own 'true' identity and redeems European-American society," (Huhndorf 5) thus helping to define a specifically white American national character. She continues, "While those who go native frequently claim benevolence toward Native peoples, they reaffirm white dominance by making some (usually distorted) vision of Native life subservient to the needs of the colonizing culture." (5) In contrast, Marianna Torgovnick, writing about the appeal to Westerners of so-called "primitive" indigenous cultures worldwide, asserts that "the primitive is the sign and symbol of desires the West has sought to repress—desires for direct correspondences between bodies and things, direct correspondences between experience and language, direct correspondences between individual beings and the collective life force" (8) and that when not subverted, this desire has the potential for transcendence.

The continuing popularity of captivity narratives, whether historically based or completely fictionalized, suggests that they have crossed a line from genre into mythology: they articulate one archetypal vision of the creation of the American self. The suffering protagonist of the captivity narrative faces the unknown "primitive" and either victoriously endures its barbarism to bring about the triumph of a new civilization or masterfully integrates its better qualities into a nobler civilized self, all the while achieving spiritual enlightenment. Meanwhile, the primitive must disappear, whether justly (as a consequence of its irrationality and violence) or elegiacally (as an innocent victim of the unstoppable march of progress).

Butler first used the captivity narrative in her early novel *Survivor* (Doubleday, 1978), which she refused to allow to be reprinted. *Survivor* suffers from a number of flaws, but Butler explained her dislike of it by invoking popularized versions of the Indian captivity motif. She said, "When I was young, a lot of people wrote about going to another world and finding either little green men or little brown men, and they were always less in some way. They were a little sly, or a little like 'the natives' in a very old, bad movie. And I thought, 'No way. Apart from all these human beings populating the galaxy, this is really offensive garbage.' People ask me why I don't like *Survivor*....And it's because it feels a little bit like that." (Littleton n.p.)

Survivor's protagonist Alanna arrives on an inhabited planet with a group of religiously-motivated colonists from Earth, the Missionaries; they name the planet Canaan, invoking the Puritan project in the American wilderness. Alanna is captured during a raid by a tribe of the native Kohn people, whom the Missionaries consider to be merely intelligent animals. After enduring a variety of trials in the hands of her captors, she eventually adopts the Tekkohn culture and has a child by their leader. When she is "rescued" by the Missionaries in a raid that results in the death of her daughter, she must convince the colonists they are being exploited by their

supposed allies, the Garkohn. Though she succeeds in freeing the colonists from Garkohn control, her colonist foster father condemns her for engaging in miscegenation. When the Missionaries move north to safer territory, Alanna stays behind with Diut, her Tekkohn husband.

Though Alanna's story has obvious similarities to the Puritan Indian captivities, even in this early novel Butler is bending her source material: The Missionaries are so blinded by prejudice that they cannot even recognize they have been dominated by the culture they thought to dominate. Although the novel suffers from an unfortunate clichéd division into "good native" and "bad native" groups, there is at least no sign that the native culture is in danger of disappearing; quite the opposite, in fact. Although Alanna's farewell to her human foster parents is bitter, she and Diut are far likelier to thrive than the Missionaries, whose fanatic devotion to purity of blood will likely lead them to stagnation and decline. A perpetual outsider, Alanna is no Puritan-style true believer, but a clear-eyed pragmatic: once a near-feral orphan, she accepted adoption into the Missionary community only because it was better than living in constant danger, and similar self-interest motivates her to accept Tekkohn culture when it becomes advantageous to do so. But Alanna's ability to adapt to changing circumstances allows her to act as a mediator and save the human culture that eventually rejects her.

In some ways, *Survivor* reads like a dress rehearsal for the more sophisticated *Dawn*, whose protagonist Lilith also saves the human culture that rejects her as a traitor. In looking at gendered aspects of Indian captivity narratives, June Namias identifies three types of women captives: the Survivor, the Amazon, and the Frail Flower. (24) Lilith, like Alanna, is a survivor, "a woman who experiences and feels a wide range of stress in, but ultimately adapts to, tries to make sense of, and comes to terms with her situation." (Namias 29) Lilith's story begins when she is abducted (or saved) from the ruined Earth by the alien Oankali. More than one critic has

noted the resemblance of Indian captivities to modern tales of alien abduction (Panay; Sturma), and Lilith's abduction can also be linked to the accounts of slaves who were abducted from their African homelands. As many critics have noted, Lilith's narrative in *Dawn* includes some incidents common to slave narratives, such as the denial of tools for reading and writing, forced reproductive arrangements (Bonner, Peppers), and even a brief quasi-escape into other portions of the Oankali ship.

However, *Dawn* is not a classic captivity tale, nor is it a classic slave narrative: Lilith neither escapes her captivity nor truly adopts her captors' culture. The analogy she uses most frequently to describe her situation is that of domesticated animal--whether pet or breeding stock or lab rat--rather than slave or prisoner. Unavoidably designated as a teacher and leader of the surviving humans, Lilith does side with her alien abductors/masters/saviors, but reluctantly, without ever losing her own sense of difference from them and her bitterness at the limited choices imposed on her; she describes herself as "co-opted" (Butler, 240) by her attraction to Nikanj, who will become part of her human-alien family unit. At the end of the book, her thought remains "Learn and run!" (Butler 248), her oft-repeated, entirely futile hope for eventual escape. Even years later, at the opening of *Adulthood Rites*, a more sanguine Lilith still thanks Nikanj for making their child Akin "seem Human so I can love him." (Butler, 254) Her spiritual journey does not end in freedom or in full assimilation, but in heroic endurance, what Patricia Melzer terms "survival as resistance." (55)

By the time Butler appropriates the captivity narrative for *Adulthood Rites*, she handles it with considerably more finesse. The narrators of most captivity tales are white Westerners, but the narrator of *Adulthood Rites* is Akin, the first male child of the (largely forced) blending between the humans and their alien rescuers (or dominators). Akin is neither white nor human,

already disrupting the captivity narrative, and unlike the narrators of classic Puritan captivities, Akin is male. It might be more fair to call Akin unmarked for gender, however, because of his physical immaturity; Gregory Hampton describes him as a "child in sexual and gender limbo until puberty." (77) Akin is part of a trader village, a social group in which humans and Oankali form family units and "trade" genetic material; their offspring are "construct" hybrids, neither one species nor the other. As a child, Akin is captured by resister humans, who have refused to join with the Oankali and are therefore rendered sterile by the aliens. Akin's outlaw captors are seeking human-looking children to sell to the childless resisters, echoing a motif of many Indian captivities, in which a white child is taken in order to replace the dead child of a bereaved Indian mother.

Readers will recognize the resisters as members of contemporary industrial society. By casting the resister humans in the role of the primitive social group, Butler calls into question the resisters' image of themselves as representatives of civilization. Obsessed by the pre-war, pre-Oankali period, the resisters are focused on the past, as evidenced by their excavations of pre-war sites for raw materials and everyday mass-produced goods, which they enshrine in a museum to their lost way of life. The resisters strive to retain a pure human culture, untainted by Oankali influence, even though doing so dooms them eventual extinction and drives them to acts of violence and desperation unknown among trader settlements. Their treatment of Akin, who despite his unusual intelligence and abilities is still a child, is frequently cruel and brutal. When two other captured construct children join Akin in the resister settlement of Phoenix, their adoptive human parents are determined to mutilate them in order to make them look more human, by cutting off their sensory tentacles (an act Akin compares to cutting out a human's eyes). Thus the misguided defenders of human civilization are cast into the role of the brutal,

primitive captors, displaying many of the stereotyped tendencies toward inhumanity that early American captivity narratives ascribed to the Indians.

The reversal of roles cuts both ways: By casting the Oankali into the role of the dominating, colonizing social group, Butler also uses the captivity narrative genre to criticize their handling of the otherwise doomed human society they encounter. It is notable that the Oankali themselves do not view themselves as dominators, a situation which has led some readers to conclude that the Oankali are correct. Their appeal is not hard to identify: the harmonious, healthy, and ecologically-focused aliens "represent a state of being that matches point by point many utopian fantasies of a better human future, an improved human type." (Jacobs 100) Their certainty that they are saving the humans from extinction is absolute, based on their embodied knowledge of the genetic "human contradiction," which links intelligence with a drive for hierarchical power relationships. Yet in their attempts to save humanity, the Oankali repeatedly deny the humans choice and self-determination. Though the Oankali domination may be benevolently motivated, it is domination nonetheless. Frances Bonner aptly observed, "Just because the Oankali claim to have avoided hierarchies, it does not mean they have eschewed power. As Haraway says, 'hierarchy is not power's only shape.'" (n.p.)

Given the cruelty and violence of the ostensibly civilized resister humans, it may be all the more surprising that Akin does, in fact, go native: he learns to understand the resister point of view, even to the point of becoming their advocate to Oankali society. After spending time among the resisters, Akin decides that they should have the same option the Oankali have, that of remaining *akjai*, or unaltered. Just as one group of the Oankali will depart from Earth without interbreeding with the humans, a group of the humans should be allowed to depart without interbreeding with the Oankali. The Oankali want to save the remnants of humanity and to join

with them to become a new species, but saving them, in the Oankali view, also requires destroying them as a distinctive group. As Akin observes to his *akjai* Oankali mentor, "We will be Oankali. They will only be...something we consumed." (Butler 443)

Thus it becomes clear that the resisters are, in fact, a marginalized culture, fighting (however misguidedly) for the survival of their way of life against an outside oppressor. Butler's depiction of the Oankali-human power relationship is typically equivocal; neither side gets away clean. The resisters' capacity for prejudice, violence, and self-destruction suggests that the Oankali are right about their eventual doom, while the resisters' forced sterilization suggests that they are indeed cruelly mistreated by their so-called rescuers. And like the Indians of *Dances with Wolves* and other white fantasies of going native, the resisters will be doomed to extinction by the forces of history, whether by their own uncontrolled genetic tendency toward self-destruction (the Oankali view) or by the Oankali refusal to allow them to reproduce (the resisters' view). It is instructive that although the resisters occupy the role of the oppressed minority, they are never romanticized as "noble savages." Although Akin develops deep sympathy with them, even telling his resister friend Tate "I am part of you," (Butler 501) he never adopts elements of their culture or beliefs--except their belief that they should be left to their own devices.

The theme of captivity as spiritual journey, established by the earliest Puritan captivities, also resonates here. Akin explicitly refers to his experience among the resisters as "abduction, captivity, and conversion." (Butler 468) The term "conversion" strongly echoes the earliest Puritan captivities, in which the sinful human narrator must be subject to humiliation and rejection, all in accordance with God's plan for bringing about the narrator's spiritual growth. Akin's conversion is not religious, but does involve a crisis of faith: he comes to believe that the Oankali—up until this point in the narrative, God-like in their complete control over humanity,

and their security in their absolute rightness—have gotten it wrong. Only when he returns to Phoenix to plead with his former captors to accept the new option of resettlement on Mars is Akin's maturation complete, as he undergoes his final metamorphosis to adult physical form.

Butler uses another mythology to underline and reinforce her use of the captivity narrative, weaving several key Biblical myths into the trilogy: Judith Lee goes so far as to identify the books of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy as Creation, Incarnation, and Apocalypse. (175) It soon becomes clear that the Oankali are aware of where Akin is being held, but that they have deliberately chosen to leave him there long enough for him know and understand the resisters. The Oankali refusal to rescue him has serious consequences for Akin and his family: his prolonged absence means that he can never fully bond with his nearest sibling, leaving both of them horribly incomplete and unbalancing the paired relationships on which Oankali family life is predicated. As one of Akin's parents observes, "The [Oankali] people deprived Akin of closeness with his sibling and handed him a compensating obsession. He knows this." (Butler 426) Akin has been offered up as a sacrificial victim for the sake of human-Oankali understanding: he becomes, in a real sense, the intercessor for and redeemer of the resisters, despite their rejection of his difference.

Akin's status as redeemer plays a major structural role in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. Lilith's name associates her with Jewish legends regarding the character who was Adam's first wife, cast out of the Garden of Eden because she refused to submit to Adam's control, and left to become a mother of demons. (The title of the one-volume version of the trilogy is *Lilith's Brood*, a direct reference to this legend.) In *Dawn*, Lilith is an overtly Eve-like figure, placed in a garden setting which the Oankali have fostered first on their spaceship, and then on Earth itself. The old Earth no longer exists but for the Oankali's intervention; creation is starting over again, and Lilith is the

first of its human mothers. If *Dawn* retells the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall from innocence (exemplified by betrayal and murder), by the time of *Adulthood Rites*, Lilith has become the Second Eve, Mary, mother of a Savior who is both fully human and fully God-like alien (a point driven home in Akin's name, which looks like "akin" but is pronounced "ah-keen," a Yoruba word meaning "hero"). Only the captive Akin can, through his sufferings, redeem his lost people, the resister humans, because only he can bridge the differences between them and the Oankali.

Akin's role as redeemer-archetype points to interesting implications of the captivity myth. Akin the brutalized child captive "goes native" in order to become Akin the savior of humanity. Looked at in this way, going native becomes fundamentally transformative and redemptive. But what of the critical view exemplified by Huhndorf's comments, in which going native involves the appropriation of a dominated culture by the dominating culture, to solidify and excuse that domination? Despite the failings of *Survivor*, Butler can hardly be characterized as a culturally insensitive writer. One response is that Butler does not necessarily endorse the inevitability of resisters' demise. Akin stubbornly insists, in the face of the Oankali certainty that the resisters are doomed, that the Oankali have not accounted for chance and for change: "Perhaps this time their intelligence will stop them from destroying themselves." (Butler 470) The fantasy of going native does not involve the ultimate survival of the dominated culture, except in the narrator-captive's memory; in contrast, the resisters are allowed to continue on their own as a separate people, without further interference by the dominant Oankali. More generally, I would suggest that Butler's use of the captivity myth in *Adulthood Rites* serves to underscore a theme pervasive in her work, that of hybridity.

Hybridity has been extensively discussed in relation to Butler's work, generally under two headings: one centered on Donna Haraway's concept of cyborg identity (Federmeier, Holden, Melzer, Ramírez)—indeed, Haraway offers Butler as an example of a cyborg writer in her "Cyborg Manifesto"—and the other on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of becoming and molecular identity (Ackerman, Vint "Becoming," Walker). Critics have focused on Butler's use of hybridity to destabilize notions of personal subjectivity and agency, and to question the boundaries of socially constructed categories such as gender, race, and even the human-animal divide. Akin and his fellow constructs are literal hybrids, the biological product of a cross between two species, but many of Butler's other characters are more metaphorically hybrid, crossing multiple categories; Alanna, an outsider of African-Asian-American heritage who navigates between opposed human and alien groups, is a representative example. Hybridity in this larger sense may encompass variations such as Lilith's genetic enhancement by the Oankali to improve her health, strength, and memory. Human resistance, both individual and social, to any form of hybridizing accounts for much of the conflict in *Survivor*, *Dawn*, and *Adulthood Rites*. Vint observes that Lilith is branded a traitor because "she appears to participate in activities that threaten the constructed boundary between human and non-human," (*Bodies*, 65) or as Amanda Boulter put it, Lilith is part of a "genetic symbiosis that disturbs the relationship between 'self' and 'other.'" (171)

As a critical term, hybridity also has important connotations in post-colonial studies. Because the captivity narrative is specifically a tale of colonialism, those connotations are important here, including the earliest uses of the term as a racist pejorative; racism is clearly a factor in the resisters' response to Akin. Like the fantasy of going native, the significance of hybridity has been contested. Although hybridity is usually held up as a form of resistance to and

subversion of the dominant culture, numerous critics have questioned the concept as implicitly affirming discredited ideas of "purity" and as glossing over a variety of forced conditions that lead to hybridity. (For a helpful summary, see Kraidy, Chapter 3, and Hutnyk.) But at least in Butler's works, no such glossing-over occurs. Instead, the choices, or more often the lack of choices, which result in hybridity are laid out with painful clarity. For Butler, it is not necessarily hybridity itself but a character's reaction to it that defines the character.

Akin's contradictory physical appearance points to one aspect of his hybridity. As a child, he can "pass" for full-human, although his signs of alienness, mainly in the form of his gray sensory-tentacle tongue, deeply disturb his human outlaw captors. When he reaches maturity, his physical form ironically becomes more Oankali, while spiritually he is closer to the humans than any prior Oankali offspring. Gender is another factor in Akin's hybridity; as a child, his gender is indeterminate, and only upon maturity does he acquire a nominally male sexual identity, although he never displays the characteristics associated with human males in *Xenogenesis*, such as a drive to dominate. This establishment of Akin's new identity as a hybrid being links his own captivity narrative strongly to the slave narrative, whose conventions so often centered on the narrator's act of forging a new sense of self out of the pain of slavery and the possibilities of hard-earned freedom. Akin's journey through captivity to self-discovery and self-determination allows him to act as the first of his people with an entirely new identity: he is neither human nor Oankali, though he bears aspects of both. As he comes to realize, "He was Oankali enough to be listened to by other Oankali and Human enough to know that resister Humans were being treated with cruelty and condescension." (Butler 404) Once Akin recognizes his role, he embraces it, eagerly learning all that he can about his resister captors.

But hybridity, for Akin, also involves confronting his Oankali heritage. After the Oankali finally allow his family to redeem him from Phoenix, he is sent, somewhat unwillingly, to spend time in the Oankali spaceship. Accustomed to the individuality and subjectivity of the Humans, Akin must learn to experience the embodied communication and shared knowledge of the Oankali. As he does so, he discovers that he can fully join the Oankali communion without losing his sense of self. He applies a fully human and fully religious metaphor to this new understanding: "He felt as though he were a floating, disembodied mind, like the souls some resisters spoke of in their churches." (Butler 455) Having joined with Oankali, he persuades them to let the resisters remain *akjai* by fully sharing his personal experience among the humans; he makes the collective Oankali experience, exactly as he did, his individual and subjective captivity.

In his spiritual journey to the formation of a new identity, Akin does not get the easy option of adopting the best qualities of his captors and then leaving them behind as he rejoins the dominant culture; his hybrid status forces him to balance their irreconcilable differences in his own character. He participates in Oankali communalism but remains an individual. If the insistent, fractious individuality of his human captors is often selfish, it contrasts with the sometimes monolithic certainty of the Oankali, whose collective knowing threatens to erase difference and dissent. As a full-blown hybrid, Akin can escape being a traitor to categories that, for him, do not apply.

In Butler's fiction, it is always the hybrids, the boundary-crossers, the mediators, who hold the promise of the future. Hold-fasts and purists, like the resisters, fade inevitably into the past. Even in the early, flawed *Survivor*, these themes are already clear. But if *Survivor* takes a relatively direct borrowing of the captivity motif and subverts it by showing that the supposed

dominators are in fact dominated by realities they cannot ideologically acknowledge, *Adulthood Rites* makes a hybrid of the captivity narrative itself, holding opposites together via the narrative: the resisters are both brutal barbarians and a wronged culture; the Oankali are both benevolent protectors and domineering oppressors. Lilith is a collaborator in her people's destruction, but also the mother of a literally new race of beings. Akin is an intelligent and civilized captive fallen among savages, he is an abused and abandoned child, he is a fearsome alien with the power to manipulate life on a genetic level. Like his mother, he is both a savior and a traitor to his people—in this case, a traitor to the Oankali, who are horrified that he can plead for the certain extinction of the *akjai* humans, even as they grant his request. The contradictions of hybridity inform both the characters and the narrative itself, held together in precarious tension and resisting clear resolution.

Butler's stories only rarely end on an uplifting note. Her hard-edged fictional viewpoint informs the conclusion of *Adulthood Rites*, in which once-captive Akin escapes from Phoenix for the last time, accompanied by the resisters he has persuaded to go to Mars. It is clear that the now-burning Phoenix will not rise from its ashes. The resister city continues to destroy even as it is consumed: two humans who had joined Akin turn back to look for loved ones and are not seen again. Akin himself vanishes from the trilogy after the close of the novel.

But in keeping with the work's use of Biblical mythos, the third book of the trilogy, *Imago*, details the coming of the New Heaven and New Earth. In *Imago*, the Oankali/human hybrids become such thorough shapeshifters that they cannot maintain their bodily cohesion without human mates to bond with. Somewhat conveniently, a lost remnant of fertile resisters appears and gives the hybrids their full acceptance. The novel's closing image echoes the founding of the City on a Hill, the New Jerusalem in the wilderness, an image any Puritan writer

would recognize, although in this case the New Jerusalem is a living spaceship "planted" on a riverbank, a symbiont that will eventually devour the earth it grows in and take its residents to a new life among the stars. Captivity in the wilderness has led to growth and redemption, both on a personal level for the characters, and on a societal level, in the creation of a new people with a hybrid identity. Despite its ambivalence, the conclusion of *Imago* is perhaps the happiest among Butler's novels, suggesting that the captivities endured by both Akin and Lilith have not been in vain.

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