

**Science Fiction as Political Texts: Examining How Critical
Dystopian Narratives by Octavia Butler and Eleanor Arnason
Undermine the System**

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Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven undersøker hvordan science-fiction, i tekst form, kan bli brukt til å undergrave seksuell forståelse i amerikansk kultur. Ved å bruke Tom Moylan og Raffaella Baccolini sitt teoritiske arbeid om kritisk dystopi, og Darko Suvin sitt arbeid om *novum* og *cognitive estrangement* som grunnarbeid, har jeg undersøkt Octavia Butler sine romaner *Dawn* (1987) og *Adulthood Rites* (1988), og Eleanor Arnason sin roman *Ring of Swords* (1991). Jeg har undersøkt hvordan de tre romanene er politiske reaksjoner mot den statlig håndhevede forståelsen av heteroseksuell identitet. I oppgaven argumenterer jeg for at Butler og Arnason utforsker den kulturelle forståelse av seksualitet ved å bryte ned trossystemet som holder det på plass. Det første kapittelet utforsker hvordan hver forfatter tolker det statlige trossystemet, og hvilket trossystem de mener ville være en bedre alternativ. Det andre kapittelet er delt i fire deler. Etter en kort gjennomgang, hvor den den første delen beskriver hvordan diskriminerende anti-homoseksuell lovgivning fører til forsterkning av heteroseksuell identitet, undersøker jeg hvordan opprettelsen av alternative seksualiteter og kjønnsforventinger av forfatterne fortsetter å undergrave den etablerte normen. Etter dette, har jeg analysert hvordan hver forfatter utforsker intimitet i hver av sine tekster. Masteroppgaven konkluderer med å undersøke de sosiale forandringer som har skjedd siden romanen ble publisert.

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Introduction

The most astounding fact is the knowledge that the atoms that comprise life on Earth, the atoms that make up the human body are traceable to the crucibles that cooked... under extreme temperatures and pressures. These stars... they collapse and then explode scattering... across the galaxy... [spreading] the fundamental ingredients of life itself. These ingredients then become... those planets [that] now have the ingredients for life itself. So when I look up at the night sky and I know that yes, we are a part of this universe, we are in this universe, but perhaps more important than both those facts is that the universe is in us. When I reflect on that fact... I feel big, because my atoms came from those stars. There's a level of connectivity. That's what you want in life, you want to feel connected, you want to feel relevant, you want to feel like you're a participant in the goings on of activities and events around you. That's precisely what we are, just by being alive. (Neil DeGrasse Tyson 2012)

In 2012, *Time Magazine* asked Neil DeGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist and current director of the Hayden Planetarium to share his opinion concerning the most astounding fact in the universe (Orwig). Tyson's answer, a succinct version which is quoted above, was one he had clearly thought about in depth. His answer has since been made into a YouTube video, created by Max Schilkenmeyer, complete with computer-generated images of exploding nebulas, exotic creatures feeding in an ocean of life, panoramic mountainous views, and dotted with silhouetted human figures – all of which are set to ethereal music. This video currently has almost 12 million views, a popularity that rivals many celebrities. I argue that the popularity of “The Most Astounding Fact,” as it has now become known, is that Tyson's contemplative words, combined with the said images and music, present a new and attractive way of looking at reality. By using science to examine the environment that surrounds humans, constructed narratives of understanding begin to lose credibility. “The Most Astounding Fact” displays for its audience varieties of physical life forms, existing together in no particular hierarchy. The cultural narratives, created by society, which objectify life, also place humans into hierarchies based on the categories of, for example, sexuality and gender. These cultural narratives do not exist in “The Most Astounding Fact.” Instead, Tyson

tells every member of his audience that she or he has a right to be relevant within her or his own environment.

The same message is carried forward by some subgenres of science fiction (henceforth SF). But whereas “The Most Astound Fact” simply represents an inspirational idea, well written SF novels display possible environments in which all humans are relevant. They do this through the techniques of *novum* and *cognitive estrangement*. These techniques are especially effective when combined with *critical dystopia*, a literary genre that allows authors to examine their observable environment and presents new frameworks of how society could function better.

Darko Suvin’s *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is one of the most important theoretical studies of SF to date and defines *novum* and *cognitive estrangement* and how they work together. A narrative *novum* can be a character, the setting, and/or the context that surrounds that character. Within SF, the *novum* will be significantly different from the norm in “naturalistic” or empiricist fiction (Suvin 2). Suvin uses the term “empiricist fiction” to describe fiction that is, or is close to, “an ideal extreme of exact replication of the authors’ empirical environment” (Suvin 4). I too will be adopting this definition of the word *empirical* to refer to the observable, historical environment that was experienced by the author. Suvin explains that the author’s use of *novums* in their work causes estrangement in the readers: new characters/ideas/environments confront the set of norms that have already accepted. Suvin maintains that *cognitive estrangement* is found in SF. It differs from the estrangement created by *novums* found in the narratives of myths or fantasy; they introduce *novums* that are anti-cognitive and do not abide the cognitive laws of the empirical environment. Dilemmas in myths and fantasy narratives are solved through the introduction of *novums* based on magic or supernatural forces that cannot be cognitively understood by the reader. These narratives present environments which are “closed and collateral world[s] indifferent

to cognitive possibilities” (Suvin 7-8). Narratives of myths and fantasy do not offer environments that can change and cannot be used as a literary force for change. In contrast to these narratives, Suvin notes, “SF sees the norms of any age, including... its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a cognitive view... [Whereas] myth [and fantasy explains] once and for all the essence of phenomena, SF... posits them as problems and explores where they might lead” (Suvin 7). Supposing that phenomena are problems as opposed to states of being insinuates that solutions can be found.

SF, a literature whose narrative takes place in the future, when combined with literary utopia, a genre which criticizes the empirical environment, creates political texts. This is the genre I use to examine my chosen texts and therefore some terms must be defined, namely *dystopia*, *anti-utopia*, and *critical dystopia*. I have chosen Tom Moylan’s *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* as well as Raffaella Baccolini’s and Tom Moylan’s collaborative publication *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* as a theoretical basis for these terms. Dystopia is often conflated with anti-utopia, the opposite of utopia. Both genres are similar in that they describe dismal worlds where characters have lost, at least to some extent, agency over their environment. For Tom Moylan, the most important characteristic that separates dystopian from anti-utopian literature is hope: the promise of a positive future for that fictional society. A dystopian text, despite the settings and the plotlines that force contemporary readers to view fictitious worlds as considerably worse off than their own, will still hold out hope for the future. A dystopian text may be characterised by *militant pessimism*, yet still provide an opening for positive change. By contrast, an anti-utopian text presents a closed system that offers only despair with no hope for change (Moylan 157). Critical dystopia differs slightly from dystopia in the same fashion that critical utopia differs from utopia. The descriptor “critical’ incorporates an Enlightened sense of the word *critique*, a postmodern attitude of self-reflexivity, and the

political implication of ‘critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction’” (Baccolini and Moylan 2). Critical dystopia criticizes political realities existing within the empirical environment. The author and her or his readers reflect over these critiques using the cognitive novums as frameworks to understand which changes should be made, and what the ultimate goal of these changes should be. Critical dystopias do not claim to have the solutions to create a perfect society. Instead they “forge better but open futures” (Baccolini and Moylan 2).

Critical dystopias made an appearance in the 1980s as a response to the economic restructuring in America, right wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism. Seen from a socialist point of view, these changes were detrimental to many minority groups in society. Like the authors who wrote critical utopias a couple decades earlier, authors of critical dystopias partook in “social dreaming... a designation that included the dreams and nightmares... which usually envision a radically different society than the one the dreamers live” (Baccolini and Moylan 5). These social-dreaming-authors envisioned a radically different society where those who could not participate in the dominant culture found openings to do so. Their dystopian texts took alternative viewpoints than those expressed by the most privileged and powerful members of society:

[Not] only does a dystopia present “a community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and relationships between its individuals are organized in a significantly less perfect way than in the author’s community,” but it does so, and is so judged, from the explicitly oppositional standpoint of “a representative of a discontented social class or fraction.” (Moylan 155)

In critical dystopian texts, the social infrastructures that exist in the empirical environment, which serve the dominant culture and not the social-dreaming-individual, are found in a radically altered way or are not found at all. The (im)balance of power that occurs between the dominant culture and the author's marginalised culture in the empirical world is leveled in some way. From this new environment inequalities or political problems that exist in the empirical environment can be rewritten and corrected according to the author's view. Thus, as Moylan so aptly states, dystopia "negotiates the social terrain [between] utopia and anti-utopia in a... contentious fashion" (Moylan 147). Dystopian fiction by its very existence rubs uncomfortably against utopia; critical dystopia rubs uncomfortably against both literary utopia as well as the empirical culture's 'utopia,' pointing out that 'utopia' may not be utopia for all. This is not to say that critical dystopia wishes to destroy all aspects of utopian/empirical society. In pointing out what is wrong with empirical reality, yet still holding out hope for a positive change, dystopias "[stimulate] the potential for an effective challenge and possibly change by virtue of human efforts" (Moylan 156).

Critical dystopias "negate static ideals, preserve radical action and create a space in which opposition can be articulated and received" (Moylan 188). The reading of critical dystopias is equally didactic as it is entertaining. Feminists and minorities have taken advantage of this genre and as Baccolini noted, "by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, critical dystopia opens a space for contestation and opposition for those groups... for whom subjectivity has not yet been attained (Moylan 189). By working within this genre, disempowered fractions can put descriptions to injustices experienced, while still allowing for an open and hopeful change in cultural activities.

The future historical narrative placement of dystopian SF is what allows for the texts to be considered politicised. Because the novum and the cognitive estrangement are placed in future time frames, imitations of these environments and events in the empirical world

become a possibility to work towards. Additionally, due to the scientific basis of the SF narratives, the avid readers of SF already have engrained within them the ability to take the cognitive novum absorbed through curious intellect and apply that novum to a separate intellectual sphere, their own empirical world:

As a fictive mode that not only mirrors but actively... intervenes with the process of history, SF offers more than a pleasurable trip through its pages. When the book is closed and the reader looks out at the world, the even more satisfying experience... of investigative reading so privileged by SF lingers as one more skill, one more intellectual habit, by which to make sense of social reality itself. (Moylan 27)

SF readers have a set of well-honed intellectual skills that make them particularly adept at using cognitive novums to make sense of the empirical environment. SF broadly appeals to readers with a wide range of backgrounds and interests, including the natural and cultural sciences. Suvin maintains that it is the “*sciences humaines*, or historically-culture sciences like anthropology-ethnology, sociology or linguistics... equally based on scientific methods... [that] probably better serve as a basis for SF than the... natural sciences” (Suvin 67-68). These are the sciences that are most capable of effecting social change. It is the cultural sciences that form the basis for the novels I will be examining. Not only do the protagonists in the novels of this study have backgrounds in anthropology, linguistics, or defining ‘intelligence,’ but my thesis will revolve around the idea of how humans, both within and outside of these texts, interpret and understand their environment through the invisible structures of belief systems and the cultural narratives that hold societies together.

The three critical dystopian SF works I am examining in this project are: *Ring of Swords* (henceforth *Ring*) by Eleanor Arnason, published in 1993, as well as *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites* (henceforth *Rites*), the first two narratives of the *Lilith's Brood* trilogy, written by Octavia Butler, originally published in 1987 and 1988. Butler's third novel, *Imago* will not be examined. It is the first-person narrative of the character of Jodahs, an 'accidental' ooloi creation in a search for its place in the community, as well as its own identity and does not fit into the parameters of this study. The works of Butler and Arnason are dystopian in nature. Both the authors present Earth as having either reached a final point of sustainability or having passed this point, and the only viable choice for further long-term survival is either working with or learning from alien cultures.

Butler's human characters in *Dawn* have destroyed Earth and most living organisms through a global nuclear war. The protagonist, Lilith, wakes up 250 years later to discover she is living on Chkahichdahk, a large biologically constructed spaceship, and her life has been preserved by the Oankali. The Oankali are a species of aliens that have travelled the universe for an unknown amount of time. As I shall later discuss, the Oankali have changed physical form many times, but at the time of the narration, male and female Oankali have two arm, two legs, a torso and head. The ooloi, the third neutered gender, gain an extra set of sensory arms that emerge from their torso when they pass through metamorphosis. This is where the similarities between the Oankali and humans end. Most Oankali don't have the same facial sensory organs that humans have, namely eyes, ears, and noses. Instead they have various patterns of hair-like tentacles that cover their bodies, through which they receive all outside stimuli, including stimuli outside of human range (Butler *Dawn* 13, 36). They view themselves as "gene-traders" and for every time they encounter a new species with 'valuable' DNA, they hybridize with that species. During the 250 years that Lilith and other captured humans have been sleeping, the Oankali have repaired and enhanced Earth, making it livable

again. They have chosen Lilith to assist them in waking more humans and in addition, they want Lilith to act as a leader, organising humans into groups that can be taught survival skills to live on a 'primitive' Earth again. Once humans are equipped with survival knowledge, the Oankali will be relocated with humans back to Earth, and the hybridization program will start again.

Rites is narrated from the third person viewpoint of Akin, the hybridized or *construct* child born to Lilith and her Oankali family. In the time between the closing of *Dawn* and the opening of *Rites*, humans and Oankali have resettled Earth. The majority of humans have refused to live with the Oankali and as Resisters, they have left to form their own villages and societies. The Oankali assume that humans will eventually return to Oankali/human villages; human bodies have been altered so that their lifespans are drastically increased, but procreation only becomes possible through hybridization between the two species. But most humans remain stubborn in their refusal, which results in the widespread kidnapping of construct children, one of which is Akin.

Arnason's *Ring* is a narrative that is made up from the points of view of the two human protagonists: Anna Perez and Nicholas Sanders. Approximately two thirds of the novel are the third-person narration of events from Anna's perspective, and one third of the novel consists of Nicholas's first-person journal entries. It is the year 2135 and Anna is a xenobiologist, working with a scientific team on planet Reed 1935-C, searching for alien intelligence. Nicholas is a linguist who was captured by the Hwarhath twenty years previously, and now lives quite freely in alien society. Humans share Reed 1935-C with the Hwarhath, bipedal aliens who look remarkably like humans, except for that they are covered with fur, not hair, giving them the appearance of bears rather than apes (Arnason 34). Though physically similar, these aliens are culturally different. They exist in a homonormative paradigm, and the biological sexes live in physically separated spheres of influence. The

Hwarhath and humans are the only intelligent species that have acquired faster-than-light travel. While both species have engaged in open military skirmishes, they now agree to begin negotiations to return captured prisoners as well as to find a way to coexist in the universe. As an unwilling participant, Anna is forced to spy on Nicholas, whom she has become friendly with, and is then later used as a pawn in a horribly planned military maneuver. During the first round of negotiations, the human military intelligence attempts to kidnap Nicholas to gain information. In an attempt to save Nicholas's life, Anna sends a warning signal to the Hwarhath, an act that indebts the aliens to her. Despite the lack of faith shown by humans towards their alien counterparts, the Hwarhath decide to continue negotiations, but this time at a secret location in Hwarhath interstellar territory. In addition, Anna has been especially requested to negotiate on behalf of humans with the female Hwarhath.

Much of the scholarly criticism that surrounds Butler's work revolves around the broad themes of race and violence. Yet when I originally read *Dawn* and *Rites*, I was taken by the difference between a stifling cultural existence found in the Resister communities as compared to the Oankali/human communities which are more relaxed and come closer to being utopian in nature. This is especially true when the sexual and intimate relationships between individuals are examined. I was also disappointed to discover that the small amount of scholarly criticism that I did discover concerning sexual relationships with the Oankali was in my opinion, narrow-minded and outdated. Finally, became apparent that when *Dawn* and *Rites* were *not* examined with the theme of race in mind, the Oankali were removed from their roles of "slave traders" and "masters" they are so often placed into. This allows for a more sympathetic view of them. In comparison to Butler, there is little scholarly criticism that reflects on Arnason's work. While much of that criticism does examine the homonormative Hwarhath society, the examinations are not broad or detailed enough to do justice to the entire novel. Yet both authors do speak of many of the same issues, though through different

techniques. Therefore, I will be examining these three novels through the lenses of novum and cognitive estrangement.

The texts in this project are *critically* dystopian in nature. Both authors present narratives of social and political critique of the empirical American environment. They critique the enforced cultural narrative of American heterosexual identity upheld by the political and religious structures of the America environment.¹ That the Christian evangelical supported Republican party (and the Conservative Right who supports them) is targeted by Butler is not difficult to see. Most humans in her novels are Resisters, community groups that appear to be Christian but instead are deeply invested in capitalistic beliefs. Arnason focuses more on the social issues she wishes to discuss than on the targets she wishes to blame. Even so, this critique of conservatism and free-market ideals seeps through the text. The Hwarhath phrase the “eaters of one another” is translated as “capitalists,” and the protagonist Anna warns First-Defender Ettin Gawrha that Earth has “a lot of right-winged assholes” (Arnason 310, 26). Though *Ring* may not be as blatant as *Dawn* or *Rites*, the disapproval of the political environment emanating from both authors is evident in their work.

The aim of this study is to examine how Arnason and Butler write critically dystopian texts, using novums to create cognitive estrangement, which allow their readers to see the empirical system under which they exist in a new light. Both authors do this by presenting two fictional systems as novums – one novum that reflects the empirical system which is resistant to change, and another that is a novum representing a framework that will accommodate change. Within these systems, I will explore the subject of sexual identity, as well as the gender expectations that form under that sexual identity. Finally, I will examine how the authors write about intimacy on a broad scale, which characters they allow to be intimate, and the intentions behind these decisions. Finally, I will conclude by examining the

¹ The term ‘American’ will always refer to the United States of America, or its culture in this project.

recent political changes in empirical society and the alignment of these changes with the authors' visions.

Chapter One

Systems of Belief that Shape Reality

Dear Readers, I ask that you accept as a premise that Margaret Atwood's nation of Gilead, described in her book *The Handmaid's Tale*, exists today in the United States of America – not in the hear future as the author proposes. (Armbruster 146)

Introduction

Systems of Belief, regardless of whether they are religious, philosophical or scientific in nature, contribute to a person's understanding of herself or himself as well as her or his relationship to the surrounding environment. These systems by and large account for an individual's (in)ability to adapt to a changing environment (Moore 1236). Communities and societies "[are] founded, cohere, develop, degenerate and die based on their belief system" (Nescolarde-Selva and Usó-Doménech 46). It is not the political/economic/membership strength of a system of belief that signifies its success in a community. Instead it is a system's ability to adapt to an uncertain environment – which may include environmental changes, changes in social structure, or radically new knowledge – that is proof of its endurance and its ability to meet the needs of all its members. The ability to adapt and adjust to a changing environment is based on the capability to use reason. This capability, combined with the talent to integrate previous knowledge and experience, allows individuals or groups of individuals to mentally navigate the changing structures surrounding them. *Reason, belief and experience* must work together to allow the belief system to adjust to environmental shifts caused by outside forces. Reason itself can neither prove or disprove the beliefs that the system is based on; beliefs themselves are based on experience of individuals over time and

new experience needs both previous beliefs and reason in order to become understandable (Nescolarde-Selva and Usó-Doménech 46-47). All three must work together for a community to adapt to change. Should belief or experience take precedence over the ability to reason, the belief system – while perhaps appearing to be strong over the short term – instead becomes quite fragile and unstable.

New Systems of Belief

The above description of belief systems is important because it provides a framework to examine Butler's and Arnason's dystopian response to the growing emergence and power of the Conservative Right in the United States. Before embarking on this task, it is important to underline that a system of belief is not required to be religious in nature, though these systems are often most recognisable. They can have a scientific basis or result from a political response or protest. Carole M. Cusack's *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* discusses the emergence of alternative systems of belief that have (mostly) arisen from literature. The most recognisable examples are: The Church of All Worlds, created by Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Jediism, which is found in the *Star Wars* series, as well as Matrixism, created by the Wachowskis for the *Matrix Series*. All three are legal entities or religious organisations in the United States and boast an international membership. Cusack also discusses The Church of the Flying Spagetti Monster, a belief system created as a protest against the Kansas School Board's decision to allow Creationism to be taught in high school science classes (Cusack 2-3). Cusack has received criticism for not examining belief systems on an even broader scale. Teemu Taira pointed out that systems of belief do not need to originate from literature or be a political response to existing narrative-based systems. He cited the "Swedish-based Missionary Church of Kopismism... which was 'deliberately invented' by stating that file sharing is a sacred act" (Taira 480). Taira's point

does not negate Cusack's work and in fact provides a stronger platform to my own argument: all of these examples of 'invented religions' are either ontological or science-based responses to the overlapping systems of power found under the labels of *Conservatism*, *Far-Right Christianity* and *Capitalism*. Both Butler and Arnason have understood this and each present two different belief systems in their narratives: one that readers can understand through scientific methodology, and another that has been based on ontological events. It is equally important to underline that a scientifically-based system does not necessarily guarantee a 'reasonable' system having the ability to adapt to change. As we will see in Arnason's narrative, systems understood through science can lack the ability to reason effectively and seem incapable of adapting to a changing environment.

An Overview of Growth of the Conservative Right

The search for alternative systems of belief in the United States began, for the sake of my argument, in the 1940s. Many Americans left mainstream Christianity and found either more liberal or more conservative belief systems. Though Cusack documents the shift to liberal ideologies, she highlights that better education, increased incomes, as well as a growing belief in an individual's right to choose their identity were elements that lead to the shift away from mainstream Christianity (Cusack 16-17). Buddhism became known to many Americans through poets and writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg. This was followed by other liberal belief systems such as Yoga and the New Age movement (Cusack 13-14; Stephens 526; Dochuk 16). As liberal systems of belief were gaining popularity, the growth of the Conservative Christian Right also expanded. The history of the Christian Right is important to summarise because it is this rise in popularity and political power that Butler and Arnason are critically examining in their dystopian narratives. For the sake of this project, the systems of belief that Butler and Arnason build on and critique can be described

by the same labels mentioned already: *conservatism, the Christian Right* as well as *capitalism*. Though both authors highlight different areas of this system, it is this system as a whole which is the authors' focus.

Evangelism became an ideology that grew in popularity from the 1930s and was always politically active. From this earliest point in history, "taxation and employment practices, labor rights, and government spending" became moral issues. In opposition to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal welfare programs, Christian economics was born (Dochuk 16). Christian economics valued "individual responsibility to family, church, community, commerce and... God" over state controlled social structures which would be sure to dismantle this system (Dochuk 16). The Republican party changed some of their policies to meet this voter base, including its pro-Equal Rights Amendment stances as well as its support for female rights which had included contraception and abortion (Williams 514). In the 1950s conservative Christian Americans grew frustrated with the growing demand for equality for minorities and fought to maintain segregation between the races in schools as well as communities (Stephens 565-66). The fear of Communism of the 1950s allowed Christian leaders such as Billy Graham to build their careers fighting against "Godless" political ideologies while calling for "a return to America's founding principles," which were again, believed to be capitalism and individual responsibility (Stephens 562). During the 1960s and 1970s, politically active and well funded think tanks became vital players at both the state and federal levels. They opposed the Civil Rights Bill on religious grounds and rallied to have the United States removed from the United Nations (Stephens 564, 66-67). Aggressive pro-business politics were enacted sanctifying "tax inducements, lower-wage scales, deregulation, and anti-unionism" (Dochuk 18). Though the Conservative Right claimed to be Christian, a religious group known to use the phrase "love thy neighbour as thyself," they had divorced themselves from a broad interpretation of Mark 12:31. During the

civil rights struggle, “White Christian duty... was to convert and befriend... ‘not to consider altering the social traditions and arrangements which govern his... life to a significant degree’” (Stephens 568). Though this quotation referred to the relationship between Caucasian and African Americans, the same principle was applied to homosexuals and women. The Conservative Right consistently sought to create isolationist policies which would separate themselves away from others, be this in a local or international arena. They also held firm to their belief in ‘individual responsibility’ and shied away from policies that could be interpreted as ‘socialist’ in any way. Such a system of belief allowed for the unfair treatment of others, be they African Americans, immigrants, women, or homosexuals, just to name a few.

Scholarly Response to the Growth of Conservatism

Scholars and writers wrote in response to this religious, capitalistic environment. In the 1980s, with the emergence of dystopian literature, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* was published. This novel is perhaps one of the most significant works of the critical dystopia genre and is still popular at the time of this writing. A tale of a violent, far right Christian theocracy, narrated by one of the lowest members of society, *The Handmaid’s Tale* has crossed over from merely printed words on the page to the world of theater, film, and most recently a television series. Atwood herself described her work as a “tale that warns of the possible rise of totalitarianism in the United States through right wing Christian fundamentalism” (Christou 410). She presents one system of belief resulting in an unchecked theocracy spelled out in one horrifying vision, a vision that can only be escaped from and not reasoned with. But Atwood is not the only author who has responded to the political power of the Conservative Right in the United States. Octavia Butler and Eleanor Arnason instead present two examples of systems of belief. One system is unyielding to change and has a high

probability of failure given time; this is the system that can be compared to the Conservative, Republican Right. In response to this unyielding system, a system which is flexible and accommodating of environmental change is introduced. These secondary systems present frameworks that can guide social and political change. In contrast to the political reality faced by many American readers, these flexible systems represent stronger balances between belief, experience and reason. While they may not have the instant appeal of Jediism or Matrixism, they give insights into what the internal structures of systems capable of endurance must have.

Systems of Belief in *Dawn and Adulthood Rites*

The Resisters/The Conservative Right

The system of belief created by Octavia Butler mirrors the Conservative Right: it appears to be Christian based but instead is based upon a free-market economy. The people in this system are known as the Resisters. The Resisters refuse contact the Oankali community and instead, like the Conservative Right of empirical America, retreat into their own ‘Christian’ communities. They have reconstructed and printed ‘Christian’ Bibles and have built a “nice church” in the large village of Phoenix. Great energy is spent digging through salvage sites – pre-war cities destroyed by the Oankali – and the most highly prized finds are not the building materials of glass and metal, but Christian religious artifacts (Butler *Rites* 280, 345, 69, 87-90). Yet despite these visual cues, religious activity is absent in the narrative. Tino, a young Resister who joins the Oankali, does claim that the residents of Phoenix “pray in their... church,” (Butler *Rites* 280). Akin, the kidnapped construct child protagonist in *Rites*, remembers Tino teaching him to pray when he first notices the Phoenix church (Butler

Rites 347). However, these are the only examples of circumstantial evidence found in the novel. Active religious worship is otherwise not documented.

Instead, the belief system that forms the basis for the Resister culture is a capitalistic, free-market system that is able to disguise itself as Christianity, due to the tireless work ethic of the Resister inhabitants. This mirrors in some ways America's Conservative Right. Within American society, many different Christian denominations exist, disagreeing on many issues. However, when examining the beliefs and teachings of ethicists and theologians who follow the magisterial Catholic, main line Protestant, and Evangelical doctrines, one general agreement can be found amongst them. The three share a view that work is an ontological necessity, and that intrinsic goodness can be found in work (Posadas 332). The evidence of ardent physical labour is evident in *Rites*. The villages of Hillman, Siwatu and Phoenix are surrounded by well attended fields, boasting a variety of produce. All houses are built from manufactured planks; the Resisters do not live in huts (Butler *Rites* 336-42). Phoenix is the wealthiest of these villages, due to its proximity to a salvage site. Metals and glass have been collected which allows Phoenix to engage in industry, which also allows the Resisters to develop a free-market network of bartering and trade. Goods provided by Phoenix to the outlying villages include tools, canoes, gold, and printed material such as reconstructed bibles, how-to/survival books, and anti-Oankali propaganda (Butler *Rites* 367-69).

The object of trade that the residents of Phoenix value most is stolen construct children. As mentioned previously, unable to procreate successfully on their own, the Resisters resort to kidnapping (Butler *Rites* 276, 365). The value of construct children is so high that without a monetary system in place, sexual access to females – either voluntary or forced – become a commodity in itself that can be traded with the male kidnappers (Butler *Rites* 321, 48). In addition to the means taken to acquire construct children, the desperation for them is great enough that tensions emerges between individual Resisters as to who has the

right to raise the newly acquired possessions (Butler *Rites* 369-72). It is here that the capitalistic nature of the Resister belief system becomes fully visible. A system that is based entirely on an understanding of free-market exchange eventually commodifies all objects within its environment, including people. The Resisters' need to have and raise children is so strong that they are willing to ignore what has been traditionally accepted as a Christian narrative concerning the value of life and souls: children are taken from their families and women are used as monetary units.

Capitalism disguised as Christianity within *Rites* is symbolised in the production of a coin that embodies the vision the Resisters have for their future. Though this coin is only symbolic in nature within the narrative, it symbolises the capitalist, monetary system that the Resister culture would probably evolve to, given enough time. The coin is golden. On one side is stamped the image of a cross with the words, "He is risen. We shall rise." On the other side is stamped a picture of a phoenix rising from the flames (Butler *Rites* 368). The golden nature of the coin, the industrious Resister production of trade goods and an extensive trade network harkens back to the pre-war era where capitalism had authority. It is the gold coin that holds symbolic power, not the cross nor the words "He has risen." The Resisters do not wish to rise into a heavenly kingdom, or even to a better version of humanity. Instead they wish to rise out of what they interpret as 'primitive' living standards into a 'modern' pre-war civilization (Butler *Rites* 279-80). The Resisters are not resisting their enemy, the Oankali. They are resisting the change in their environment that the Oankali symbolise.

Though it is already apparent that there are correlations between the Resisters and the Conservative Right in America, it is important to examine the individual personality traits of Butler's characters that create such a society, traits that are found in *Dawn*, before analysing how this novum is used by the author with political intention. In *Dawn* it is Lilith who has been given the assignment of waking a group of humans from their induced comas. She must

establish leadership over them, after which she will then train them how to survive on the new Earth. Most humans, including Curt, Derrick, Jean, Peter and Gregory are resistant to this idea and share many of the same personality traits. These personality traits are visible in Tate, the first woman Lilith awakens. Tate's world view is so engrained in her pre-war understanding of life that she is unable to reasonably process new information, and accept the new environment she finds herself in. Lilith lives with Tate for three days before additional humans are reanimated. She uses this time to explain the circumstances of their new reality, allowing Tate to observe as she manipulates the floor and walls of the spaceship to create new rooms, or open spaces in walls to retrieve stored food (Butler *Dawn* 133). When the time arrives to awaken additional humans, Lilith again runs her hands along the walls, this time to open and remove sleeping pods of humans. While undertaking this procedure, Tate literally cannot grasp what she sees. She interferes with Lilith's work, shouting, "There's nothing there!" (Butler *Dawn* 135). Despite having seen the abilities Lilith has to manipulate the ship, Tate cannot recognise it. Instead, she continues to rely on the pre-war belief system in which such phenomena did not exist. This pattern repeats itself with other characters throughout *Dawn*, each of them declaring "this is all bullshit" to what they see, or otherwise assuming that Lilith is lying or has been duped, despite evidence to the contrary (Butler *Dawn* 143, 67).

Tate also represents the characteristic traits found in Resister communities by displaying the view of her own of superiority in herself. She shows a lack of interest in other cultures and communities. During the three days when Lilith and Tate are alone, the two speak of their pre-war lives. Lilith mentions that before the war, she had returned to college and was studying anthropology. "'Anthropology,' Tate [answers] disparagingly. 'Why did you want to snoop in other people's cultures? Couldn't you find what you wanted in your own?'" (Butler *Dawn* 132). Tate, whose pre-war, white, upper-class existence defines her, sees nothing beneficial from interacting with cultures that do not reflect her own culture's

standards and virtues. ‘Studying’ a culture is equated to ‘snooping,’ a semi-taboo act that should be avoided. Similarly, the phrase, “Couldn’t you find what you wanted in your own [culture]” reinstates her arrogance and belief that there is nothing to be gained in cross-cultural interaction. Information that does not reflect Tate’s already established knowledge and beliefs of her own environment is not worth learning. This mirrors most of the other humans’ attitudes. As Tate disparages Lilith and the decisions she made, other human characters who emerge from their sleep-induced states, and realise their situation, also act with hostility towards Lilith. These acts range from a simple denial of Lilith’s capabilities to outright attacks upon her (Butler *Dawn* 143, 46, 221). The denial and attacks are based upon the humans’ unwillingness to change in accordance to the new reality. Despite multiple observations that they no longer live in a pre-war environment, this group of humans repeatedly refuse to use reason and instead cling to the old belief system that formed their previous understanding of life. With a worldview such as this, it does not come as a surprise that during the time span between the conclusion of *Dawn* and the opening of *Rites*, many humans who have been reintroduced to Earth have left the Oankali to form their own communities.

This inability of the Resister community to accept change allows them to believe in the illusion that the gold coin mentioned earlier represents. Though the Resisters work tirelessly to produce an environment that simulates their pre-war existence, they are unable to ignore the reality that these efforts are in vain. Given an extended lifespan, but without the possibility to produce children, many Resisters grapple with existential doubt. Young Resisters, like Tino, who leave their communities to investigate the human/Oankali villages tell of a darker side:

We built like crazy. If you were really busy, you didn’t have to think that maybe you were doing it all for nothing. Maybe all we were going to do was sit in our

handsome houses and pray in our nice church and watch everybody not get old... Then in one week, two guys and a woman hung themselves. Four others just disappeared. It would hit us like that – like a disease that one person caught and spread. (Butler *Rites* 279-80)

Without a viable future to work towards, it becomes unreasonable for the Resisters to believe in the tenets of their belief system. The production of great quantities of material goods is meaningless when there are literally not enough people to purchase/acquire them, and there is no chance of producing future consumers. Though the Resisters try to ignore it, their subconscious brings to the surface the undeniable reality of the life they were living; without children or a future, there is literally no reason for the tenets of their capitalistic belief system. Though the Resisters attempt to build meaningful lives, in reality their existence echoes the words of Neil Degrasse Tyson: the Resisters are not truly participating or connecting to the events that surround them.

The Resisters are a novum that Butler uses for political purposes. As an author, she describes a group of people that mirrors the Conservative Right in the United States but brings only to light, the negative features of that group. Butler highlights the hypocrisy of a community that appears to be based on one set of principles, but instead practice another. The Resisters and the Conservative Right are groups which claim to be based in Christianity, a belief that often speaks about reaching out and helping others. In reality, neither one of these groups follows the tenets of ‘Christian’ belief. Both instead have systems of belief in which commodify all things in an environment. Construct children can be purchased, and women’s bodies can be used as a means for that exchange; in America, governmental forces driven by the Republicans have fought for low taxes and low wages, resulting in legislation that is harmful to both the community as well as individuals. Butler states through her narrative that

in both Resister and Conservative Right society, those with the least amount of agency are used by the system to the benefit of those with agency.

Butler's Resister novum also begins to address the type of individual characteristics which are needed to sustain such a system of belief. Resisters are hostile, self-absorbed, and lack empathy. They are also unwilling to consider communicating with and exchanging information with non-Resisters, believing that nothing of value could come from such an exchange. By presenting the Resisters in such a negative light, Butler suggests to her readers that negative aspects of the Conservative Right community should be focussed on in greater detail.

Oankali Evolutionism

In contrast to the Resister belief system, the Oankali system of belief does have the ability to adapt to change, though it may take time to do so. The Oankali belief system is not religious in nature, which allows for the possibility that it may be overlooked. Instead, this system is based in science, specifically in the understandings of biology and genetics. Because of this, the Oankali do not identify with or recognise the importance of physical or mental cultural constructions such as architecture, clothing, literature or music (Butler *Dawn* 34, 37). The Oankali have no name for their system of belief, but I will refer to it as *Evolutionism*.

Evolutionism as a system regards all life as unequivocally valuable. All genetic material found in living matter are the sacred texts of Evolutionism and these texts can be explored and manipulated in a way that is only accomplished by the Oankali. They have an extra organelle located in "every cell of [their] bodies," that allows them to connect with and explore other cells in all other living entities (Butler *Dawn* 41). This extra organelle also allows the ooloi, the neuter gendered Oankali responsible for procreation, to "perceive DNA and manipulate it precisely" (Butler *Dawn* 21, 41). This organelle is "the essence of [the

Oankali], the origin of [the Oankali]” and because of this cellular structure, the Oankali are driven to “acquire new life – seek it, investigate it, manipulate it, sort it, use it” (Butler *Dawn* 37).

This perception of life on a cellular level is accomplished through extreme intimacy: the insertion of either Oankali tentacles or sensory arms into the bodies of the living entities they wish to explore or perceive. This verb, *to perceive* is the description that the Oankali use when trying to explain in human language what it is they do intuitively at a biological level:

Now he perceived through a tendril of flesh he had extended into Lilith, expanses of living cells. He focused on a few cells, on a single cell, on parts of that cell, on its nucleus, on chromosomes within the nucleus, on genes along the chromosomes. He investigated the DNA that made up the genes, the nucleotides of the DNA. There was something beyond the nucleotides of the DNA that he could not perceive... It frustrated him that anything was beyond his perception. (Butler *Rites* 257)

Humans examine cells and DNA through microscopes. Though microscopes can enlarge the smallest of particles so that they can be examined, there will always be a distance, a space that cannot be crossed, between humans and the living cells they study. The Oankali, on the other hand, physically enter other bodies at a cellular level, and can perceive the cells as they exist in their natural environment. During this procedure, the Oankali are, literally speaking, surrounded by cells and interact with life in ways humans can never hope to achieve.

This obsessive drive to find new life, to fetishize it, is what drives the Oankali to travel through the universe. They left their home planet “so long ago... [they] doubt that it does still exist” (Butler *Dawn* 37). By adding to and altering their own DNA structure, the

Oankali have acquired new traits which are beneficial to the survival of their species and have achieved this without losing intelligence or reasoning abilities. Each acquisition of DNA involves the drastic change in physical form of the Oankali as a species. Two generations previous to the present time in the narrative, the physical form of the Oankali resembled large caterpillars; they were unable to speak but nonetheless able to directly transmit information in “images, in tactile bioluminescent signals, in pheromones and in gestures” (Butler *Rites* 262). Before this, they inhabited a planet with great shallow oceans. There “[they] were many-bodied and spoke with body lights and body patterns” (Butler *Dawn* 63). Still before that, one of the Oankali ancestors “subdued prey by stinging” (Butler *Dawn* 28). With every hybridization that occurs, the Oankali undergo profound change to their outer appearance. This, however, does not alter their inner identity. The biological drive within the Oankali that forces them to search for new life, forces them to accept change as a matter of course. In their system of belief, change and evolution are signs of success.

Yet it appears that before encountering humans, the Oankali had never encountered intelligent creatures with established systems of belief that would challenge their own. Creatures that use bioluminescence and tactility for communication have no need for a verbal language which can be coded into signs for future generations. A species which uses the ability to sting to capture prey does not invest thousands of years of intellectual energy improving offensive and defensive tools. Meeting humans and their cultural constructions test the Oankali. Just as the Resister belief system is pushed to a point where many of its members are experiencing an existential crisis, meeting a comparably intelligent species forces the Oankali to re-evaluate their tenets.

Culture and its constructions are unintelligible to the Oankali because they cannot be located in the cells or DNA structures. The Oankali only become aware of the existence of culture by discovering how the absence of it negatively affects the rescued humans. At first,

the Oankali cannot understand the human despair caused by the destruction of all physical forms of culture including cities and infrastructures. Similarly, they do not understand the frustrations humans feel at being denied paper and pens, the most basic utensils needed for cultural creation (Butler *Dawn* 62, 72-73)

This unintelligibility of a reality existing outside of biology causes the Oankali to repeatedly miscalculate decisions they make with humans. The most obvious result of a miscalculation concerns the isolation of Paul Titus. Paul, as a young child, was the only member of his family to survive the nuclear war. Collected by the Oankali, his body was altered, his aging process decelerated, and he lived with an Oankali family for many decades. Though the Oankali family treated him with their form of kindness, his isolation from other humans as well as the physical manifestations of culture made him unstable and dangerous to people he was later introduced to. This dangerous behaviour is recognized immediately by Lilith. The meeting between the two escalates into a violent attack upon Lilith because she rejects him sexually. His violent outburst astonishes the Oankali as there was no detectable genetic information suggesting that this was a possibility. In *Dawn*, while the Oankali are able to perceive deep into the physical structure of humans, they cannot perceive that much of a human's sense of self identity is culturally based. Without access to culture to help him form his identity, Paul creates his own identities, namely identities of loss, including a loss of agency over his own body as well as losing what he remembers as the 'normal' life as a young man. In his rage at Lilith's unwillingness to have sex with him he states, "They say [to me] 'Your genetic material has been used in over seventy children.' And I've never even seen a woman in all the time I've been here... Never once with a woman... They said I could do it with you... And you had to go and mess it up!" (Butler *Dawn* 96). The removal of human culture results in social actions losing context. From this, frustration develops over the lack of knowledge of how to conduct one's self.

The Oankali often miscalculate; they are unable to foresee the reactionary male violence caused by forced dispossession from environments that are understandable and meaningful to them. Incidences of violence occur repeatedly, culminating in the murder of Joseph Shing and a violent attack against the Oankali lead by Curt (Butler *Dawn* 171-72, 76-77, 93, 224, 30). Culture as both a foundation for and a result of human systems of belief takes the Oankali an agonizingly long time to accept. “I never believed they would try to kill us,” says one injured Oankali at the final battle. “You should have known... You’ve had plenty of time to study us,” is the answer Lilith returns to him (Butler *Dawn* 230-31).

Yet despite its initial resistance to accept change, Evolutionism has this ability. As is true in empirical reality, change occurs when the younger generation accepts new ideas that the older generation resists. In Evolutionism, Kahguyaht represents this older generation, and Nikanj the younger. Kahguyaht is the ooloi of the family that adopts Lilith. Nikanj is the oolio child of this same family. Lilith has been adopted by this family so that Nikanj can grow and learn from her, after which they will bond and begin their own family (Butler *Dawn* 74). As an Oankali adult, Kahguyaht has an already established view of Evolutionism in place before the interaction with humans begins. This includes the belief that “humans – any new species – can’t be treated the way [the Oankali] treat each other” (Butler *Dawn* 81). Kahguyaht believes that the hybridization of species and the passing onwards of beneficial genetics is what is to be valued most. Profound interaction and communication with the chosen species of hybridization is of less importance. With this viewpoint, Kahguyaht is short tempered, condescending and unkind to Lilith during her initial stay with the family (Butler *Dawn* 49, 50, 69). Lilith asks questions Kahguyaht cannot make sense of and it therefore refuses to answer them. Secure in its own knowledge of humans, Kahguyaht is unwilling to extend the same courtesy to Lilith; it will not teach Lilith more than what is necessary,

saying, “we know you, Lilith. And, within reason, we want you to know us” (Butler *Dawn* 50).

In contrast to Kahguyaht, Nikanj is a child when it first meets Lilith and immediately sees her as an equal. Her feelings and experiences are accepted as important from the moment their relationship is established. At their first interaction, it takes Lilith out to meet its friends. She is upset when poked and prodded by Nikanj’s friends, and while it does not understand her anger, it accepts it as real and leaves with Lilith when she demands to return to the living quarters (Butler *Dawn* 57). Their relationship develops throughout *Dawn*, and though Nikanj never understands Lilith’s inner turmoil, it accepts the turmoil as real. It allows her some privacy and allows her to wander and discover the spaceship on her own. This is in stark contrast to the Oankali culture, which has no notion of privacy, and in which every individual Oankali experience is shared with every other individual on the ship, which acts like a large database (Butler *Dawn* 59-70). This alternative viewpoint of how humans should be treated causes conflict between Kahguyaht and Nikanj. Nikanj must chemically bond with Lilith by inserting itself into her nervous system and altering her body so that Lilith’s body only responds to its. This must be done before Nikanj’s metamorphosis. Kahguyaht believes that Lilith’s response or opinion of the matter is unimportant and feels that bonding should be done immediately and without explanation. Nikanj wants her consent (Butler *Dawn* 78-79). Instead of ‘surprising’ Lilith and connecting to her unawares, it instead speaks with Lilith, using her cultural tool of language. Nikanj explains the situation as tactfully as it can, using a communication tool that does not come naturally to it. It also explains the consequences for both itself and Lilith should they not complete the bonding process. Though Lilith is not happy with the choice asked of her, Nikanj is able to convince her to complete the process by using reason based on its past experiences with her. Reason combined with experience has given Nikanj a more evolved system of belief than Kahguyaht.

Nikanj demonstrates to Kahguyaht that an expanded outlook beyond what one individual already understands has benefits for the community. After this demonstration, a shift within Kahguyaht is observed. Before, Kahguyaht only condescends to Lilith, and is unwilling to see its own environment from Lilith's point of view. After the pair bonding is complete, and after Paul Titus' violent attack on Lilith, Kahguyaht acts differently. As Nikanj is attending to Lilith's injuries, Kahguyaht speaks softly, "Perhaps she's good for you after all" (Butler *Dawn* 97). The sharp tone of voice, the authoritative way Kahguyaht normally speaks has disappeared. After Lilith's recovery, though there is never any admission of wrongdoing on the part of the Oankali, Kahguyaht appears with reconstructed pens and paper, and a selection of books that have not yet been destroyed by the Oankali as a peace offering. In addition, when Nikanj has entered its metamorphic hibernation and it is Lilith's duty to attend to it, Kahguyaht visits her. It gently teaches her about the changes that will occur to Nikanj and the new family group that Lilith is now bonded with. "Your body will tell you what to do. Don't worry," Kahguyaht tells Lilith. It attempts to treat Lilith as its equal, informing her that she can trust her own instincts with confidence (Butler *Dawn* 108-11). Though it is difficult for some Oankali to perceive and understand culture, they learn to accept that culture exists and must be a part of the human understanding of life as well as the lives of future hybridized generations. While Kahguyaht has been able to use reason, and changes its belief system to accommodate new information, other individual Oankali take longer to do so. Even at the closing of *Dawn*, certain Oankali are still grappling with their inability to form relationships with humans (Butler *Dawn* 229-31, 39).

At the beginning of *Rites* the Oankali acceptance of human culture is complete, even if it remains unintelligible to them. While the Oankali refuse to, or are unable to participate in culture activities, humans and constructs are active in culture building. Storytelling is popular, and permanent stories have been written down and stored in a library. The Oankali

refuse to participate in the act of writing but allow their stories to be transcribed. Though the village of Lo is a miniature spaceship transplanted on Earth and produces food for its inhabitants, food cultures such as gardening, fish farming, and the scientific modification of insects and animals as future food sources is what keeps many humans and constructs busy. Finally, the creation of music is popular with humans and constructs; many male constructs live productive lives as travelling musicians. However, full blooded Oankali claim that music hurts their ears and remove themselves from gatherings where music is present (Butler *Rites* 303, 05, 437, 39). This is probably a polite way of saying that the Oankali do not like or understand this cultural creation.

The Oankali, and their system of belief that is able to accommodate change, is a novum used by Butler to enable her readers to envision a society that is more inclusive and willing to adapt to meet others. They are unattractive aliens and their physical appearance evokes little sympathy from humans both within the narrative as well as outside of it. Yet this physical appearance contrasts with the fundamental beliefs that guide them in navigating their environment. The Oankali expect change, indeed in the novel they are constantly on the search for physical change in order to better equip themselves for the future. Butler does not present them to her readers as ‘finished products’ having reached the pinnacle of evolution. Instead, they are imperfect dystopian novums. But they are also humble enough to learn from their mistakes and are willing to make permanent changes to correct their behaviour when necessary.

When these two novums are viewed side by side within the same text, the result is cognitive estrangement within the reader. Humans, which are physically recognisable to the reader, suddenly cannot be identified with because they only exhibit negative personality traits: contempt, violence, immoral criminal activity, and the objectification of each other. The Oankali, who are repulsively hideous and are difficult to identify with, only display

recognisable human characteristics: compassion, patience, and both the willingness to admit when they are wrong and the willingness to change to make things right. By creating this juxtaposition, Butler encourages her readers to truly examine the political environment they live in. Are individuals being commodified? Are those whom the readers have most in common with trustworthy? Is there a willingness to acknowledge moral wrongs as well as the desire to change to avoid future mistakes? Is the room for compassion found within this system? Butler's novels encourage her readers to think openly about the environment they find themselves in, and to examine the intentions behind human activities.

Systems of Belief in *Ring of Swords*

Pseudosophophores/ The Conservative Right

In *Ring*, Eleanor Arnason also presents two systems of belief. One belief system is unaccommodating to a changing environment and another system is. Unlike Butler, Arnason does this with little mention of human based religions. Though there are three brief mentions of human religions in *Ring*, all examples are used for character description or metaphorical comparison (Arnason 70, 229, 83). The documentation of the practice of human religions is non-existent in the novel.

The humans in Arnason's narrative are comparable to the fictional humans created by Butler. They have commodified all things within the environment in relation to the value of what can be extracted from that object. But whereas a capitalist society is difficult to reconstruct in interstellar space, especially with only a handful of human characters, the most valued commodity in *Ring* seems to be information and knowledge. Despite this desire for the acquisition of knowledge, humans are unwilling or unable to communicate effectively with each other to obtain it. The results of non-effective communication is a home planet that is on the brink of environmental collapse. As individual nation states, humans have been

unable to curb population growth or maintain their own national environments: nine billion people inhabit the planet, cities like New York are “huge, dirty and run down,” and Kansas may have returned to being a ‘dust bowl’ (Arnason 30, 67-68). As nation states on a global scale, they have been unable to reasonably cooperate to slow down or stop global warming. In 2135 environmental crises appear one after the other so that it is “hard to get upset or angry” about the situation (Arnason 341). An global government has been established, but with no history of cooperation or long term cognitive planning, difficulties arise in unifying “many different societies and nations... [into] a single culture or government” (Arnason 250-51). The actions of the different branches of this new government will be examined in the next chapter. But suffice it to say, the situation seems hopeless.

Choosing not to use a human religion as a system of belief to display the humans’ inability to accommodate change, Arnason instead chooses a biological system for this purpose. Arnason introduces her readers to the pseudosiphonophores, a biological system of marine animals that have evolved to a pinnacle, reaching the point of evolution where culture might emerge given the right circumstances. These are the creatures studied by the protagonist Anna Perez, a xenobiologist in search for non-human intelligence. Pseudosiphonophores live in the oceans of the planet Reed 1935-C. They grow to well over three meters in width, are jellyfish-like in appearance, equipped with three types of tentacles, and are highly aggressive, attacking and consuming all living creatures including each other. The only period of time in which they are less aggressive is during mating season: the medium sized pseudosiphonophores migrate to a large bay where they tentatively come together with other medium sized pseudosiphonophores, balancing the act of mating while being wary of the dangerous nature of the potential mates. The smaller pseudosiphonophores do not dare to enter the bay but the desire to mate causes them to gather just outside the bay’s

mouth. The largest pseudosiphonophores are known to humans, but it is assumed they are located in the deep oceans of the planet (Arnason 26-33, 208).

In darkness or low light, pseudosiphonophores can communicate with each other and other creatures through a bioluminescence of flashing lights, altering in colours. During daylight hours, chemical signals are used for communication (Arnason 31, 35, 87). The question that is most important to Anna and her fellow scientists is whether or not pseudosiphonophores can be considered intelligent. They certainly have intelligent features. They have names for their individual selves, indicated by combinations of color flashes, confirming that these creatures do have a consciousness. They know that their individual selves are separate from the environment. The smallest of them are intelligent enough to reason at a certain level, overriding their mating instincts; they understand their size will make them a meal and not a mate. Pseudosiphonophores do communicate, though as Anna's fellow scientists have made clear, this communication cannot be construed as 'talking.' No grammar or cause-and-effect statements are shared between themselves or other species. While Anna and her colleagues study their communication, they note that these sea creatures have learned to communicate with humans. They will flash aggressive warnings to humans who may approach them on boats. These flashes of warnings indicate they learn and adapt to small changes in their environment. Despite the daylight, they have learned to flash messages, understanding that humans cannot read chemical signals (Arnason 30-31).

This type of learning illustrates that pseudosiphonophores can learn new information that will affect them as individuals, aiding in the defense of their territories. But judging from their language/communication, they only understand the environment in relation to how that environment extends from themselves. Their communication is egocentric in nature. All communication begins with each individual pseudosiphonophore stating its own name or identity before relaying the message. The first time the narrative introduces

pseudosiphonophore messages to its readers, it translates the message directly from the pseudosiphonophore language to English: “I am Red-red-blue... I don’t like what you’re doing” (Arnason 31). After this, the narrative shifts to interpreting the beginning of all messages to be “I am me.” “I am me. I intend no harm” or “I am me. Danger” (Arnason 53, 92). An egocentric understanding of one’s self in comparison to its environment creates a hierarchy of separation, placing one’s self as the central and most important point in that environment.

The narrowness of their communication skills is not the only aspect of this biological creature that leaves Anna’s co-scientists in doubt as to whether or not these creatures can be categorised as ‘truly intelligent.’ The inability to share information with other members of its species seems to be the decisive factor as to why the scientific community feels it cannot use this label when describing these creatures. The exchange of information between pseudosiphonophores involves the destruction/recombination of individuals within their species. During the non-mating season, if two pseudosiphonophores meet, the larger of the two will eject chemicals “to paralyze the animal that has been captured” and “tell the parts [of the captured animal] to separate from one another and join the new animal” (Arnason 91). The ‘victims’ memories and experiences are then absorbed by the larger creature and incorporated into the ‘new’ pseudosiphonophore’s understanding of the environment. Arnason presents creatures that do not have a culture for sharing information which would benefit all individuals. Instead, the gathering of knowledge in the pseudosiphonophore biological system is based on the gathering of individual experiences, which is then known by only a precious few. One consequence of this is that, in a stable and relatively unchanging environment, much of the same information is gathered by individuals who attain a certain size. Additionally, without a complex language enabling them to contemplate cause-and-

effect situations, reason can never be used to contemplate or build upon existing information, even within individual pseudosiphonophores.

It is clear that the biological system of the pseudosiphonophores does not quite qualify as a true system of belief as described in the beginning of this chapter. It does however come close to achieving this status, a topic which is discussed between Anna and Nicholas, the two human protagonists of *Ring*. During an emotional conversation, Nicholas claims that the pseudosiphonophores can not be seen as intelligent because they are “not sufficiently interested in sex” (Arnason 210). He states:

I figure there is an evolutionary benefit to being horny all the time. It keeps you intensely interested in one another, gives you a reason to stay on good terms. It holds us together. We have to get along with one another if we are going to get laid... if [the pseudosiphonophores] lost their mating season, if they became interested in one another all the time... the maybe they'd be forced to start creating a culture. Maybe they'd start to develop a genuine language. Maybe they'd be forced to become intelligent. (Arnason 210-11)

The pseudosiphonophores, according to the scientific standards of the narrative, cannot be labelled intelligent because, being creatures of egocentric nature, they will not or cannot communicate with one another for any reason other than reasons concerning territorial or pairing issues. Until such time that the pseudosiphonophores evolve to develop even the simplest of cultures, they will remain creatures that only see other living entities, including their own kind, as others to be consumed.

Before I discuss why this is an effective novum used by Arnason, I must bring up a final point concerning pseudosiphonophores and siphonophores. It has been mentioned to me

twice by different members of the university faculty that perhaps Arnason's creatures are metaphors for many individuals working together, or that perhaps they are working towards some sort of cosmic consciousness. After much contemplation, and several close readings of *Ring*, I cannot find evidence for these possibilities. While it is true that siphonophores are colonial organisms and are "polymorphic individuals composed of a number of polypoid and medusoid zooids which function together as an integrated organism," Arnason's creatures, even if they are comprised of individual organisms working together, are represented as individual entities (Mapstone 8). They each have an identity and understand its own organism as something that is separate from the surrounding environment. Similarly, I cannot make a connection between Arnason's marine creatures' cannibalism of each other to the metaphor of obtaining a cosmic consciousness. Cosmic Consciousness refers to the third level of consciousness that is "an awareness of the life and order of the universe. [It] is associated with intellectual enlightenment, moral exaltation, and a sense of immortality" (Walter 263). An aggressive, egocentric animal which is unable to leave its environment and is also unable to contemplate cognitive cause-and-effect relationships can achieve none of these requirements.

In addition to my inability to correlate the pseudosiphonophores with complex and enlightened individuals, or groups of individuals working together, it is important to point out this is not the first time that Arnason has made such a comparison. In a speech given in 2005, subsequently published as "Writing Science Fiction During the Third World War," Arnason spoke of capitalism, nation states, and her predictions for the near future. When speaking of capitalism, she stated: "My own private image of capitalism and capitalists is the great white shark – a primitive animal, in many ways limited, but very good at what it does. One cannot build a humane society on the base of great white sharks" (Arnason "Writing").

Pseudosiphonophores, like great white sharks – and according to Arnason, right-winged

capitalists – exist in an environment of self interest with a single goal of consumption. While there may be some communication with others, this communication is simple in nature and serves only to enhance the individual pseudosiphonophore’s or shark’s place in the environment.

By using the pseudosiphonophores as a novum, Arnason shows little mercy when establishing her distaste for capitalists and the Conservative Right that supports them: she clearly views them as less than human, selfish, and unable or unwilling to reflect over existing or new knowledge. The pseudosiphonophores represent individual responsibility taken to an extreme. What the pseudosiphonophores cannot do, and what the Conservative Right appears unwilling to do, is to communicate with large groups of others in a way that shows interest in what the other *is*, not just simply how the other might affect the self. With a history of supporting segregation and not supporting socialist concepts, the Conservative Right has from the 1950s up to the publication of *Ring* repeatedly shown their lack of interest for humans on a large scale. Arnason’s wish is to have her readers view capitalists as less than human. Her novum is blatant and cannot be unseen after the novel has been read.

The Goddess System Religion

Arnason’s secondary system of belief, which is flexible and allows for a changing environment, is the Goddess religion of the Hwarhath. Most of the planet of Hearth believes in the existence of one female deity, which is the creator of the universe (Arnason 377). This religion is a prominent fixture in the Hwarhath culture; Goddess statues are found in government offices, every Hwarhath community has a temple of worship, and the divine is present enough in the daily lives of individuals that interjectional phrases such as “the Goddess only know” and “Goddess, it’s tempting” are commonplace (Arnason 125, 221, 28,

32). However, though Hearth is monotheistic, the Goddess system of belief is ‘weak’ in nature. This belief system does not dictate absolutely over Hwarhath society. Mentions or documentation of religious ritualistic activities or holy days are not found in *Ring*. It’s a paradox of both being prominent and absent in the Hwarhath culture that makes the Goddess religion interesting to the narrative.

Instead of religious activities, most of the narrative deals with solving problems through reason, without the mention of divine forces. The characters of First-Defender Ettin Gwarha, the highest-ranking official in the Hwarhath military, and Nicholas Sanders, a former prisoner-of-war, now (mostly) accepted into alien society, constantly use reason to justify their twenty-year relationship as lovers and partners. The Hwarhath women, who have political and economic control over Hearth, use reason to come to terms with humans as not only a dangerous military force, but also as potential allies. The women use more than a year interviewing Anna and Nicholas on at least a weekly basis, and analysing new data, after which they engage in long political discussions, weighing the pros and cons of an intergalactic, interspecies relationship. The use of reason to this extent would not be possible if the religious tenets of the Goddess were inflexible.

This ‘weakness’ in the Goddess belief system exists because of two reasons. The first is that each Hwarhath regional community of Hearth has its own traditional and religious stories. Therefore, official sacred texts that can claim authority over the population are nonexistent. Tsai Ama shares a creation myth with Anna during one of the negotiation meetings. Not every Hwarhath woman present has heard this particular myth. None of the men Anna later recites the story to knows of its existence. Before telling the myth, Tsai Ama makes it quite clear that “[everyone] agrees that it isn’t literally true, but it is very old... [and] it does tell you something about our world” (Arnason 262-63).

According to the myth, at the beginning, there only existed the Goddess and a monster. The Goddess battles with and kills the monster, before cutting the monster open and fertilising the monster's eggs with her own semen. The monster's body is then used to form the mountains and plains of Hearth, as well as the stars, planets and sun. From the fertilised eggs emerge all the living creatures found on Hearth, including the ancestors of the Hwarhath people, whom the Goddess loves dearly. Before finishing her tale, Tsai Ama says, "[as] the woman of Ettin said, the Goddess is not simple" (Arnason 262-63).

This is the second reason why this religion is 'weak' in nature: the Goddess is difficult to define and is made up of a chaos of universal forces. The deity is both female and male, she is both a destroyer and a creator of life, and she is capable of both vengeance and love. Similar to the implications of "The Most Astounding Fact," this myth states that all physical objects originate from the same place and point in time. Furthermore, the Goddess religion takes this one step further stating that all consciousness contains good and evil, monsters and the divine, violence and love. Viewing this myth metaphorically, the people of Hearth are forced to reconcile that all things, be they physical or emotional, are connected and intertwined.

The Hwarhath system of belief forces its members to acknowledge that there are no simple viewpoints when it comes to solving problems and contemplation is needed. Viewing dilemmas from alternative viewpoints forces an engagement of reason. This is not to say that all Hwarhath are able to reason well. The Hwarhath do not have a utopian society and egocentric individuals exist who use their own culture as a standard by which all other cultures should be judged. The egocentric people of Hearth are represented by Lugala Minti. She is the first politician to question Anna and only moments after their introduction to each other, the judgemental queries erupt forth:

The woman of Lugala wants to know how you have gotten so mixed together. Surely you understand how dangerous it is to have men in the house, except for a brief visit. How can you let people trained in violence near your children? How can you let people capable of murder and rape live in your houses day after day and year after year?... [Lugala Minti] says that humans are horrible and perverse, a shame to any other intelligent species and an insult to the Goddess. (Arnason 169-70)

Lugala Minti is immediately reminded that her behaviour “is not courteous... and does not lead to knowledge” signifying that the broader cultural norms of the Hwarhath expect the use of reason to interpret new experiences (Arnason 171). In the end, the political women of Lugala are humiliated by the government of Hwarhath for their narrow mindedness (Arnason 345). This is an example of critical dystopias that do not show perfect cultures, but rather functioning frameworks which can be worked towards. Not only does the weight of importance which is placed on reason open a door for the Hwarhath to study alien-humans, it also serves as a device for self-reflexivity in which individuals can compare their own social behaviour in accordance to the system’s tenets.

The absence of the Goddess in the Hwarhath daily life, becomes visible when contrasted with the Christian deity found in American evangelicalism. First, the Goddess has not given her people a set of rules or instructions which morally guide them. Without ancient scriptures by which the Hwarhath feel they must abide by, the Hwarhath themselves are not locked in time. As the environment changes, they are not restricted from adapting to meet these needs. This separation from the past is evident in the broader Hwarhath culture. Gwarha is troubled by a dream of one of his ancestors violently judging his relationship with Nicholas, slicing open Nicholas’s throat while condemning Gwarha for loving him. Seeking

guidance from a diviner, Gwarha is told, “[there] is a gap between [the spirit world] and [our world] that cannot be crossed... Let the old ones be dead... Their way of life is over”

(Arnason 220-22). A general understanding exists within the Hwarhath culture that individuals can only live according to the customs of the present time. Second, the people of Hwarhath have no concept of heaven or hell in their understanding of the universe (Arnason 334). They will never meet the Goddess one day in the future, nor will they be punished for displeasing her. Instead, they are left to use some type of reason to make sense of their environment, as well as their own value systems. This necessity to take responsibility for one’s own actions is expressed by Gwarha towards the end of the novel, when the Hwarhath finally decide to enter into peaceful negotiations with humans:

[We] ought to be careful with our actions, especially when we do something new... The Goddess has given us the intelligence we need to think about what we are doing, and she has given us the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. We can’t expect anything more from her. She will not rescue us from our own folly. (Arnason 311)

These ‘weaknesses’ concerning the lack of guidance given from the Goddess to the Hwarhath people are actually strengths. They allow the system of belief to adapt over time to new and changing environments. These ‘weaknesses’ force the Hwarhath to contemplate their actions and possible consequences. With no divine reward or punishment to be expected for their actions, individuals can only make decisions based on the type of future they hope to create for themselves or the next generation.

Arnason’s use of the Goddess religion as a second novum functions as a double critique of the Conservative Right of the United States. First, the flexible Goddess system of

belief offers what the closed biological system could not: a large accommodating space where all thoughts and ideas can be discussed and reflected upon. The Hwarhath do not simply seek facts that can give a quick overview of the topic being examined. Instead, they seek new information in its reference to a grander context, with the knowledge there may be more than one way of viewing it. They wish to learn more about humans by interviewing them over time, not simply by watching them from afar. Second, Arnason presents her readers with a religion that does not hinder the flow of information. Unlike the America's Christian Right, which has at times tried to impede the flow of information through government institutions – hence the creation of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster – the Goddess religion insists upon information gathering.

The two novums placed together create a sense of cognitive estrangement in Arnason's readers. Whereas Butler's novums are more recognisable to the readers, the Resisters mirror in many ways the Conservative Right and Evolutionism is an obvious scientific choice to counter this closed system of belief, Arnason's novums are direct challenges. She is not benevolent when she compares the capitalistic Conservative Right to a lower life organism made of translucent cells. Nor is she gracious when she presents her version of a religion that allows a society to function at its best. By creating extreme novums, she forces the readers to view the Conservative Right through these filters, breaking down their complex structures into simple and distasteful forms.

The second chapter will continue this discussion. It will briefly examine the emergence of American heterosexual identity and the repercussions that this identity had on homosexuals as well as women. Then the authors' responses to this cultural narrative will be examined in two areas. Finally, who the authors allow to display intimacy, one of the most important of human traits, will be analysed.

Chapter Two

Narratives Found in Systems of Belief

By successfully framing the debate as virtue versus sin, and not the laws versus your freedoms, the virtuecrats have succeeded in silencing their political foes and the sinners who enjoy the happy pursuits virtucats seek to ban... That "pursuit of happiness" stuff? That's just poetry. Americans should not be free. (Savage, excerpt from "Well Endowed")

Introduction

Each system of belief, regardless of whether or not it adapts to change or is resistant to it, creates cultural narratives of understanding concerning human relations. Exclusionary systems have narratives that are fixed. Individuals living according to those systems must adjust their behaviour to comply to its tenets. Inclusive systems are able to shift their tenets slightly in order to integrate individuals who may not be a perfect fit at first. This chapter will explore one American cultural narrative, as well as the authors' responses to it in the three novels. The chapter will be divided into four parts. First, the history of American sexual identity and the gender expectations that resulted from this history will be briefly recounted. Second, Arnason's and Butler's responses to this sexual narrative, how they describe the human as well as the alien sexual narratives they create to counter the empirical narrative, will be analysed. After this, how the authors problematize gender expectations will be discussed. And finally, how the authors allow or refuse their characters to perform acts of intimacy will be investigated.

Constructed Sexual Identity in the United States

Homophobia and heteronormativity have been politically imposed into the definition of what it is to be 'American,' and thus has shaped much of American sexual culture and cultural gender expectations. Broadly defined, homophobia is characterised by hatred or dislike of homosexuals, including cultural or personal biases against them. Institutionalised, homophobia becomes a form for social control that serves psychologically and physically to intimidate minorities and to validate heterosexuality (Sullivan 2). Politically imposed homophobia emerged as an issue in American politics during the mid 1940s, through the actions of the American Armed Forces during WWII. By the 1950s homosexuality became a central issue in American politics. Before this time, homosexuality had not been a governmental issue, but a social issue vilified by the church. Most scholars agree that present day homophobic attitudes and behaviours are supported by Christian doctrine (Sullivan 4). Yet gay culture existed in the United States prior to WWII and several areas of New York had commercial businesses catering exclusively to gay communities as far back as 1890. In the 1920s American gay life flourished with establishments catering exclusively to gay individuals, which included speak-easies, restaurants, saloons, and bathhouses (Sullivan 5). It was the arrival of WWII that had lasting political effects upon the culture of the United States, including its sexual culture:

[The war] disrupted familiar long-held social patterns for both men and women and for homosexual as well as heterosexual citizens. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women were given their first taste of freedom from parental supervision and from... social norms... The frequent anonymity and psychological pressures inherent in war-time allowed, at times even encouraged,

sexual experimentation and made it easier for some to discover their sexuality.

(Licata 166)

This freedom for the younger generation was found within and outside the military. However, it was the military that took the most noticeable actions against this new-found sexual freedom. Military officials discovered that large numbers of recruits were engaging in homosexual behaviour. This resulted in the discharge of thousands of soldiers during the war years. A 'yellow' undesirable discharge was first given to soldiers, which later became a 'blue' general discharge for homosexual soldiers who had fought in the war effort. These discharges created a community of individuals with two identities: homosexual men and women "became a statistically and socially designated minority" recognised by the United States government and, because of this recognition, these individuals found it difficult or impossible to return home. Many immigrated to large cities, formed open nonconformist communities next to heterosexual residents who "felt threatened by the new life-styles and new faces... [Their] resentment often stimulated police harassment" (Licata 166). Government actions had officially categorised a group of people as 'undesirable' within society, placing a dark political label on an already existing social taboo.

By the 1950s, the social unrest created by officially documented, undesirable individuals culminated in Senator Joseph McCarthy's conflation of homosexuality and Communism (Sullivan 5; Charles 256; Pearson 78). "Patriotism and anticommunism became issues of public morality, dominating the American consciousness and tyrannizing many independent thinkers and reformers. Deviation, whether sexual or political, was a cardinal sin" (Licata 167). By 1953, the State Department had fired 531 'perverts,' and Eisenhower signed Executive Order 10450 – excluding government employment of persons guilty of "sexual perversion." Homosexual Americans were now classified as security risks (Licata

168). It is at this point a shift of American identity occurs, legitimised by both the government and the church, two institutions with authority over American society.

It must be noted that there was an intellectual push against these political actions. At the same time as institutionalised homophobia was occurring, the early science of sexuality was emerging, which objectively undermined the validity of the beliefs behind these new laws. In 1948 and in 1953, Kinsey published the results of a scientific analysis of human sexuality. One of the findings shocked many Americans: the prevalence of homosexuality. In the late 1950s, Evelyn Hooker pioneered a study comparing homosexual and heterosexual men. No significant differences could be found between the two groups (Licata 167; Sullivan 5-6). Despite the evidence that homosexuality was more widespread than previously believed, despite the evidence that there was little or no difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals, and despite the scientific methods used to obtain this data, American conservatives refused to accept its validity (Licata 167; Sullivan 6). With its rising political power, the growing conservative and evangelistic groups were able to maintain the narrative of what was deemed ‘normal’ concerning sexuality, morality, and patriotism: Americans were Christian and heterosexual.

This newly constructed narrative of what was ‘normal’ and ‘moral’ allowed both state and federal government agencies as well as the public to discriminate against homosexuals. Where and how they could be served and what types of art and literature could be displayed or published – either by homosexual authors or containing homosexual themes – was brought under government control. Homosexuals were discriminated against in the workforce, as well as in obtaining housing (Bonaventura and Biondo 1116). Homosexuality was deemed threatening to the nations’ children. With the assumption that “gay men were child molesters,” local police were instructed to act accordingly (Sullivan 5). This religiously based, institutionalised denial of civil rights for homosexuals prevented them living as openly

and freely as heterosexuals. This is a topic that Dan Savage has written about often, and which he has spoken about in his novel *Skipping Towards Gomorrah*, an excerpt of which is used as an epigraph for this chapter. American identity became regulated through gender identity, sexual orientation, and governmental and religiously re-enforced institutions such as the nuclear family (Ashley 29). In the American narrative of identity from the 1950s until close to the end of the century, men were straight, they held leadership positions and were the head of the household. Women were mothers and homemakers and were subordinate to men.

This constructed cultural narrative described above, held up by the conservative political powers, is the narrative that both Butler and Arnason write against. Both authors problematize American notions of homosexuality differently. In Arnason's work, humans, while having evolved to become a community that accepts equality between the sexes and minorities in the workplace, still live in a heteronormative environment. Their world remains homophobic and misogynistic. The Hwarhath on the other hand, have consciously chosen a homonormative culture as well as physically separated environments that create independent gender cultures. Butler problematizes notions of homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. She presents both sexualities as 'realities' within the texts, yet at the same time there is no objective documentation of either sexual activity. Homosexuality as well as heterosexuality both exist and are invisible with *Dawn* and *Rites*. Disagreeing with what some scholars have previously stated, I see no evidence that the Oankali are a heteronormative culture. I will be presenting the argument that sexuality in the Oankali culture cannot be defined and would include all forms of human sexuality. In addition, I suggest that though biological sexes exist for procreative purposes, there are very few gender roles to be found within the Oankali society.

The Constructed Narratives of Sexuality in *Ring of Swords*

As stated in this chapter's introduction, not all Americans believed in the politically-generated narrative defining a 'real American' as a Caucasian heterosexual. Arnason's American culture of 2135 has already shifted away from this identity and is instead multicultural. Though Nicholas Sanders is white male, his sexual identity is difficult to pin down, an issue I will examine shortly. It is also important to note that Nicholas does not identify as 'American.' Despite being born and raised in Kansas, his 'home' is now within the Hwarhath culture, and he has no wishes to return to Earth (Arnason 137, 226). Anna Perez is born in Chicago, the edge of the *Heartland of America*. Yet Anna is of Mayan descent, with black eyes, broad cheekbones and a curved nose (Arnason 245). Though she identifies herself as 'American,' many readers at the time of *Ring's* publication would not. Already with this gesture, Arnason has turned the objects of American identity upside down. Though the rest of Arnason's human characters represent Earth as a single global unit, this is downplayed in the narrative. Most of the human dialogue and action takes place between Anna and Nicholas. English is the language of humans, and the geographical regions mentioned within *Ring* are found within the continental United States. An American (yanqui) culture magazine is the only representation of human popular culture found within the narrative, and even Shakespeare's plays are experienced only through American theaters (Arnason 68-70). Arnason's depiction of humanity is Americanised.

Feminism has gained ground by the year 2135. Both women and men equally occupy positions of power or professional intellect. Anna occupies a high status in the scientific community; Major Ndo is a military leader located on the alien planet. Though the human negotiation team does only consist of men, with Anna as the only exception, this is due to Hwarhath demands. Anna negotiates only with the female Hwarhath. It is noted that the male human negotiating team has attempted to include Anna in the male negotiations, though the

Hwarhath have refused. However, concerning the misogyny that also exists within the narrative of *Ring*, which I will discuss later, it is difficult to know how insistent the male negotiation team was when making its demand (Arnason 154).

Though Arnason's 'America' has evolved to be inclusive of minorities and women, the fictional world of humans continues to be heteronormative and heterocentric in nature. This fictional human culture meets an alien culture that is homonormative and homocentric in nature. Both cultures have difficulty digesting this one obvious difference between themselves. It is here that Arnason begins her work to present two cultures, as well as the anomalies within these cultures, to show that ideas concerning sexuality are socially constructed. In doing so, she presents to her readers the notion that perhaps their own social beliefs concerning sexuality are not as natural as once believed.

Arnason's heteronormative human culture is accepting of different types of heterosexual relationships, varying from casual to celibate in nature. References are made to traditional American nuclear families. Therefore religious or secular marriages between men and women are still common (Arnason 165, 71). A fellow researcher of Anna's is involved in a casual affair with one of the human diplomats. No judgement is passed upon this woman; on the contrary, Anna and her coworkers rely on her to gather gossip that might make their days interesting. On the opposite end of the spectrum of heterosexual activity, towards the end of *Ring*, Anna decides to remain celibate despite the sexual invitations from at least one human male. She determines her career is more interesting and more important than even a casual relationship (Arnason 28, 339-40)

Though heterosexuality in many forms is accepted by humans, it is difficult to decide how much acceptance homosexuality has within the human world of *Ring* (Pearson 85). The narrative suggests that verbal acts of homophobia are not tolerated. There is never a single instance of homosexual behaviour being described as 'disgusting' or 'sinful.' Nor do

characters use homophobic terms in a derogatory manner. Though acts of homophobia might be intolerable in the human culture, this does not mean that homosexuality has been accepted on the same terms as heterosexuality. A tone is set early in the novel that humans still assume homosexuality is a deviation from normal behaviour. This tone is set by the military and later re-enforced by the social science ‘experts’ from Earth – both organisations representing different arms of human authority. The military intelligence (MI) has the ill-conceived plan to create the illusion that Nicholas and Anna have run away on a romantic tryst. Once Nicholas is secured at a secret location, MI will torture and drug him to obtain the information they wish to learn about the Hwarhath. Anna confronts Ndo, pointing out that it was MI that had confirmed the long-standing partnered relationship between Nicholas and Gwarha and declares that this illusion is destined to fail. She exclaims, “They aren’t going to believe he ran off on his own!” Remarkably, Ndo is confident of her plans, responding “[a]ccording to our records, he was a perfectly ordinary heterosexual male twenty years ago. Maybe he’s reverted. How would the aliens know?” (Arnason 79). Ndo refers to the lack of information concerning Nicholas’s romantic or sexual past (Arnason 61). Because there is no evidence, and because Nicholas had never stood out in obvious way, MI uses this lack of information to make heteronormative assumptions about Nicholas’s person.

If homosexuality is not accepted by humans because it does not align with a cultural narrative of heterosexuality, it is because humans, like the pseudosiphonophores, are unable to contemplate ideas that are outside of the range of their own knowledge. All humans are not valued for who they are as people, but for the knowledge they might have which is useful to others. Anna’s coworker who is having sex with a diplomat provides ‘top secret’ gossip. Major Ndo only values Anna because she has established friendly contact with Nicholas, who holds twenty years of knowledge about the Hwarhath. Aside from their value as ‘knowledge holders,’ humans are otherwise treated as objects. Anna’s colleague is “screwing a dip,” I

phrase I will examine later (Arnason 28). For now it is enough to note that this phrase transforms both parties involved in the relationship from three-dimensional persons into two-dimensional commodities. When Anna questions the need for her involvement in military surveillance, Major Ndo dismisses her concerns and forces Anna's participation. Ndo tells Anna coldly, "Your problem isn't that life is unfair. Your problem is that *I'm* unfair" (Arnason 39). For Major Ndo, Anna is simply an object with only one practical purpose, a pawn used to capture Nicholas.

The fact that humans already view each other merely as objects combined with the fact that homosexuals are deemed to be "unnatural" explains why MI is so quick in their wish to procure any information they can receive from Nicholas, in the same way pseudosiphonophores receive their information: through chemicals and disassembling of another's self. MI intends to inject drugs into Nicholas and torture him to obtain knowledge. Like the primitive sea creatures which only see others as consumable objects, Nicholas is seen in the same fashion. MI also does not have the cognitive ability to contemplate that Nicholas may be of worth to others. "General Ettin is not going to risk ending the negotiations because of one man," is one of the last lines heard from Major Ndo before she permanently disappears from the narrative.

As it turns out, Nicholas is not viewed as a person of lesser value to the Hwarhath. They destroy the human base on Reed 1935-C looking for him. Because Anna sent a warning message to the Hwarhath, she is now involved on both sides of the military conflict. In a meeting with Gwarha, who must decide her fate, Gwarha is surprised to hear that Major Ndo assumed Nicholas would be left to die. "It is not easy to for us to lose our relatives and friends, and I would never use the word 'expendable,' for Nicky. The people one loves are never expendable" (Arnason 123). Already Arnason has presented her readers with a

description of homosexuals that is not found within the American social narrative:

homosexuals are both valued, loved and capable of love.

Disappointingly, the experts on Earth make the same mistake the military makes. In the midst of the female negotiations, Anna explains honestly about the confusion in academic circles on her home planet concerning the Hwarhath culture:

When we [humans] met [the Hwarhath], we had a reaction similar to yours. I've talked with a number of experts in the past year. Most of them say your society makes no sense at all. It shouldn't exist. A number of them think it does not exist: there's something wrong with our information. The prisoners we've taken have lied to us or belong to an aberrant subculture. Something is getting lost in translation. Maybe the translators are lying. (Arnason 250)

This statement combined with the actions of the military allow the reader to assume what narrative does not explicitly say: humans continue to live with a cultural narrative in which homosexuality is outside of the norm. Individual homosexuals might be tolerated, but a functioning homosexual culture is unintelligible. These statements also give clues to the cognitive capabilities of humans, which correlate with the pseudosiphonophore system of communication. Just as the pseudosiphonophores are unable to engage in cause-and-effect scenarios, either as individuals or with each other, humans seem unable to contemplate "what-if" scenarios. Both scenarios establish relationships between two events or ideas which need to be creatively speculated about. The pseudosiphonophores cannot cognitively speculate about their individual relationship to events that occur in present time. Any thinking that may occur in that species is relegated to the most primitive of questions: "Can I consume it?" or "Will it harm me?" Arnason's humans are unable to cognitively speculate on an

abstract level. “What if a homonormative world could exist?” is a question that never occurs to them, despite repeatedly receiving the same information from different sources concerning the homonormativity of Hwarhath society.

Arnason presents her humans as a novum through which empirical humans can be compared to in a new light. Once again, she highlights the only the worst of human characteristics and portrays them as cold and heartless to varying degrees. Standing alone, this novum may not call into question the constructed nature of the American narrative of sexual identity, but it certainly calls into question the human behaviour that results from it. As will be discussed, when this novum is compared to the other novums Arnason creates regarding sexual identity, cognitive estrangement is created.

How the homonormative Hwarhath view heterosexuality, and how they treat heterosexuals is comparable to how empirical heteronormative American culture treated homosexuals or their culture from the 1950s until the publication of *Ring*. Heterophobia exists in Hwarhath society. Heterophobic phrases are common in private conversations in the male sphere, phrases that usually refer to another Hwarhath male as being the “product of an ill-considered insemination” (Arnason 177). All literature is read through homonormative lenses, including human heteronormative literature. *Huckleberry Finn* is not understood as a novel that speaks about slavery, but instead is understood as a relationship between two men of inappropriate ages (Arnason 187, 214). A translation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is met with great popularity on Hearth, but only after Lady Macbeth is rewritten as Macbeth’s mother (Arnason 157, 332).

The basis for this homonormative discrimination comes by way of the cognitive processes used by the Hwarhath to explain their place in their environment. The Hwarhath female politicians use intellectual reasoning to justify the morality of homosexuality. Tsai Ama Ul explains to Anna:

It's hard to describe how disturbing your behavior is to us. We have always thought that sex was one of the most important differences between people and animals. Animals have mating seasons. People do not. Among animals sex and reproduction are almost the same. Among people they are almost entirely separate... We have thought this was natural and inevitable. Once an animal has intelligence and is able to make choices, it will not continue to live as its ancestors did. (Arnason 249)

This quote is an example of how, as was mentioned in the first chapter, the Hwarhath have a system of belief that separates themselves from their past. Because of this acknowledgement, the Hwarhath openly admit that their cultural sexual norm is a narrative construct, one that allows them to separate themselves from less evolved animals. They have reasoned that the consequence of attaining intelligence is a marked difference in all areas between themselves and the rest of the animal kingdom. The Hwarhath have developed language, technology, and homonormativity. The development of language and technology have obvious benefits. The development of homonormativity also has benefits, one of which includes a controlled population in relation to an environment that can support it. This is an argument that is repeatedly used against humans, an argument which humans are unable to defend themselves against (Arnason 171, 374). Arnason presents logical explanations as to why a homonormative culture could evolve, and presents her readers with a well functioning, if not perfect society, where most inhabitants appear to be happy and well adjusted. This in turn forces her readers to contemplate their own cultural norms.

Once Arnason has presented a homonormative culture to her readers, placing it within a cognitive framework that allows it to be considered as a normality, she problematizes her

own social creation through the character of Matsehar. It is here she strengthens her argument that sexual norms are cultural constructs. Matsehar is a Hwarhath heterosexual character trapped in a homonormative world. As one scholar has noted, this character represents the social and psychological anguish felt by homosexuals trapped in a heteronormative America (McCabe 174). Not only does Matsehar have to live within the constructed narrative of homonormativity, his anguish is compounded by the fact that due to the physically separated spheres of the male and female sexes, Matsehar will never have contact with a female Hwarhath individual, aside from his own family members. With no access to females at all, he and other heterosexual men can only meet at the Arts Corp theater, taking turns pretending to be female to pleasure others. Otherwise they are forced to masturbate, alone with their fantasies. Neither solution satisfies (Arnason 202, 03). In drunken despair, after having confessed to Nicholas his true identity and his inner turmoil, Matsehar pleads with Nicholas, "Is there nothing you know, nothing you can say, that will make this bearable?" (Arnason 204). There is little comfort Nicholas can give.

Arnason has created two novums in her depiction of the Hwarhath: the homonormative society as well as the character of Matsehar. When viewed alongside the author's depiction of humanity, cognitive estrangement is once again created in the reader. Only negative characteristics of humanity are brought forth: egocentric greed, disdain and the absence of cognitive abilities beyond a certain intellectual level. The Hwarhath community displays the opposite characteristics. The structure of their society is based on high levels of cognitive reason, which benefits most members. Whereas humans have seemingly never attempted to change their behaviour, which has led to overpopulation and the destruction of the planet, the Hwarhath assume this is why their behaviour changed: to protect the environment and the people living in it. Faced with these two images of society, the reader cannot ignore the possibility that sexual identities may also be constructed, nor can they

ignore the possibility that the empirical heterosexual narrative of the United States was constructed by individuals who did not have the best of intentions for society at large.

Added into this established cognitive estrangement is the character of Matsehar. He is a powerful use of a cognitive novum for political purposes. First, this character displays the flaws in the Hwarhath cultural narrative, presenting the culture as less than perfect and therefore believable. Second, Matsehar highlights for readers what often remains invisible or overlooked in the empirical world. Since the American culture is heteronormative, homosexuals have had to hide their identities. By reversing these norms, Arnason familiarises homosexuals for her readers. The pain that radiates from the character of Matsehar, caused by the constructed sexual narrative of the Hwarhath culture is effective. Personal pain that results from unfair circumstances is recognised by almost everyone and forces the readers to consider the importance of a cultural narrative that causes the pain, both within *Ring* and in empirical America. For those who already engage in activism for change, Matsehar's story reinforces what is already believed. For others who have never contemplated the personal suffering of homosexuals, living in an environment that does not give them equal access to all resources available to heterosexuals, Matsehar's story is a novum that leads them to a place where contemplation can begin.

Finally, Arnason finishes her argument that sexualities are narrative constructions by presenting Nicholas, a character who literally constructs his own sexuality. As mentioned, Nicholas's romantic past is unknown. MI finds no evidence of his romantic past or sexual life, in either his academic or military life (Arnason 61, 223). While MI makes a default assumption that Nicholas is therefore heterosexual, this lack of evidence could mean anything, including long standing virginity, discreet sexual encounters, or celibacy. What is evident, however, is that Nicholas keeps his sexual history to himself and avoids all

conversations that approach the subject. After his lovemaking with Gwarha, Gwarha ponders what it must be like for people without fur to have intimate contact with each other:

“I look at humans and I think, What is it like when two people make love? Both of them unprotected. Both of them are sensitive. Everything is exposed and erotically accessible. Nothing – no body part – is safe.”

Jesus H. Christ [thinks Nicholas]. I looked at the rest of my clothing, folded over the clothing rack next to Gwarha’s, and tried to figure out how to get out of this conversation. (Arnason 235)

Less than a minute later the conversation continues:

“Why don’t you tell me what it feels like to make love with another human?”

“I don’t remember.”

“You are lying,” [Gwarha] said after a moment. “It’s not the kind of thing a person forgets.”

“We don’t belong to the same species, First-Defender. We have not had the same kind of sexual experience... And I have told you over and over, humans need more privacy than the [Hwarhath] do.” (Arnason 235)

Nicholas refuses to define himself for even his most trusted companion and will go to extremes to avoid the discussion. He looks for a way out of the conversation, which could have include getting dressed and leaving. Instead he feigns ignorance. Unsuccessful with this strategy, Nicholas pushes Gwarha away by inserting their public life into their private quarters and then places his ‘alien authority card’ on the table. Though they are in Gwarha’s

apartment, and though Nicholas has been known to call Gwarha by terms of endearment, he suddenly refers to Gwarha by his military rank, inserting a public space between himself and his lover, erasing the intimacy between them. He then intellectually retreats to the realm of human intelligence, where Gwarha cannot follow him. Though Gwarha can imagine it, he can never really *know* how two humans experience sexual relations with each other. Nicholas draws upon his own human expertise to meet Gwarha's political expertise, placing the two of them in a position of impasse. The only escape for either of them is to leave the conversation. Nicholas's actions are his refusal to identify with the human narrative of sexuality.

Speculations can be made concerning why Nicholas chooses to hide his sexual past. But what is important to note is that Nicholas has chosen to separate himself from his past and instead wishes to construct his own future. As he has chosen an alien environment to live in, Nicholas chooses an 'alien' sexual identity. He accepts that other humans might label him as a homosexual, but he himself does not accept that category:

“[The] best choice is homosexual... [But there] are problems with it. I don't like the fact that it has an irregular formation, and it always seems to me to have faintly antiseptic aroma, the stink of science and the intellect. I'd prefer a word that smelled of normal life... The root words come from two different languages. 'Homo' from the Greek for 'same' and 'sexual' from the Latin for sex. Someone in the nineteenth century coined it, and I can't imagine what he was thinking of... I've thought from time to time that it isn't the right word for me and Gwarha. We don't belong to the same evolutionary line. It could be argued – hell, I will argue – that we are members of similar or analogous sexes. In that case, the correct word would be 'homeosexual' from the Latin for sex and the Greek for

‘similar’... There’s something pleasant about the idea of inventing a new form of sexual activity *and* the word for it.” (Arnason 252-53)

Here Nicholas refers to the fact that homosexuality as an idea was constructed in 1869, and is “historically contingent, coming to prominence [in the nineteenth century] when detailed attention was increasingly turned to classifying, determining, and even producing assorted sexual desires” (McCabe 169). Before this time, “homosexuality was not thought to be a separate orientation” (Sullivan 4). Following the customs of scientific culture, the term *homosexual* is constructed from languages that hold authority in academia. As a linguist, Nicholas is reminded that the word is an arbitrarily constructed label for an idea created by one scholar. The word smells of “science and intellect.” It does not smell like emotions, trust, hard work, and heartbreak – the smells of ‘normal’ life. Instead, Nicholas is willing to accept the word *homosexual*, a word he has constructed himself to describe sexual relations between creatures that have evolved along corresponding pathways, whereby the similarities between such creatures are far greater than their differences.

This final novum concerning sexual identity is especially effective when placed in the cognitive estrangement already created by the other novums. Already readers should be acknowledging the negative aspects of humanity and how those aspects create non-inclusive beliefs that can be damaging to members within society. Similarly, they have been introduced to a society that has chosen to make the drastic decision to create a new sexual narrative which will be more beneficial to society. Unfortunately, some individuals suffer because of the politically enforced sexual narrative, reminding Arnason’s readers of those who suffer in their own society. Finally, the character of Nicholas serves to enforce the author’s claim that all sexuality is constructed. Nicholas has severed himself from American culture as well as the cultural understandings found there. With all these different novums, some based in

human society and others based in alien society, but all of which reflect on the empirical human culture, Arnason has recreated a discussion of knowledge which might be similar to discussions found in a society based upon the Goddess religion. The different viewpoints and examples of sexualities create a chaos of information of which it is impossible to find an authoritative narrative. Without a solid base to stand on, it would seem logical that most readers would use their emotions to guide them, leading them towards siding with a society that benefits almost everyone, but wishing for a community that is even more inclusive than then Hwarhath.

The Constructed Narratives of Sexuality in *Dawn and Adulthood Rites*

Octavia Butler also presents arguments that human sexualities are narrative constructions. Butler represents homosexuality as a false narrative not based on evidence and uses the conflicting Resister and Oankali cultures to achieve this. As is deemed 'normal' in the empirical American construction of sexual identity, Resisters are heterosexual and form single male/female pair-bonds that imitate Christian marriages. Most human characters within Butler's novels accept this heterosexual narrative, allowing that 'norm' to remain almost invisible to the reader. It is only resistance against this established narrative that brings the constructed nature of the norm out into the open:

The woman, Allison Zeigler, had not yet found a man she liked, but she had chosen Lilith's side over Peter's. She screamed Lilith's name when Peter and the new man, Gregory Sebases... decided to drag her off to Gregory's room... The trio was prevented from reaching any of the bedrooms by Lilith's people who stood blocking the way. And Lilith's people were prevented from reaching the trio by several of Peter's people... "What the hell is she saving herself for?" Jean

was demanding. “It’s her duty to get together with someone...” “We pair off!”

Curt bellowed... “One man, one woman...” (Butler *Dawn* 176)

Allison is heterosexual and does not oppose the Resister sexual norm – she has not *yet* found a man she likes, indicating that she in fact likes men. However, the speed of which Allison embraces the cultural norm is distressing to some impatient men. Because of this, the constructed heterosexual system of “pairing off” is forced onto Allison before she is ready; if asexuality or celibacy were recognised and accepted within the Resister community, Allison might have been left alone.

The irony of this heterosexual norm is that most human characters, even the ones most invested in the heterosexual narrative, will admit that it is a constructed narrative when forced to do so:

“Look at this from Curt’s point of view,” Gabriel said. “He’s not in control even of what his own body does and feels. He’s taken like a woman and... No, don’t explain!” He held up his hand to stop [Lilith] from interrupting. “He knows the ooloi aren’t male. He knows all the sex that goes on is in his head. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can’t let the [Oankali] get away with that.” (Butler *Dawn* 203)

Even Curt, the human character who later organises a rebellion against the Oankali, knows that the Oankali have not forced homosexuality upon him. Both Curt and Gabriel understand that interpretations of sexuality are created in their minds. Still, their identity is so heavily invested in the by-product of this heterosexual narrative – male political and social power – that they are unwilling to disengage from it. This constructed heterosexual norm adopted by the Resisters is further established in their communities. They follow the pre-war patterns of

living in individual houses for each male/female couple, which they hope to fill with children (Butler *Rites* 336-45). In their desire to form an identity of who they are – non-hybridized humans who wish solely to create pure humans – they also establish labels of what they are not: *homosexual*. This homosexual identity revolves around the idea, not of same sex romance, but of being penetrated, which symbolises an unequal balance of physical and social power. Traditional heterosexual activities often place women in physically submissive positions to men. Homosexual sex, which carries with it the assumption that men must be penetrated, is emasculating for heterosexually identified males who receive their social status from being the penetrator. By false deduction, Resisters have come to assume that any male who is penetrated anywhere sexually, by anyone or anything, can be labelled a ‘homosexual.’ Instead, what Resister men react to is their loss of perceived power during the sexual act, power to produce pleasure, or simply the physical power men may have over women at that time. During Oankali sex, there is no touching of the bodies and erogenous zones, and the ooloi is responsible for much of the pleasure. It is anger at this symbolic loss of power, that someone else is “pushing all the buttons,” and the loss of control over their sexual environment that is one of the reasons humans rebel against the Oankali/human communities with homophobic comments.

The homosexual slurs used by the Resisters are specifically targeted against human males that join the Oankali community. Men are called *faggots* and women are assumed not to like men at all, but are otherwise given no label (Butler *Dawn* 160; Butler *Rites* 299). Males are given a derogatory name which removes all masculinity from their identity. Females are not given any name at all, making them and their actions submissive or invisible. Ignoring that they themselves acknowledge that their heterosexual identity is a construct, the Resisters insist on creating a new definition and narrative for the term *homosexuality*. A word

that was used to mean ‘same-sex’ now has come to mean ‘extraterrestrial-sex’ as well as ‘traitor’ (Butler *Rites* 303; Pearson 78).

This is where irony lies in Butler’s texts. Homosexual acts can not be documented within her novels. There is no evidence of two male or two female characters expressing any passionate interest in each other. Additionally, heterosexual sex is only alluded to but never documented in *Dawn*. Each allusion to heterosexual sex, of which there are only three examples, instead describes the struggle to enforce power balances within the group of humans living on Chkakhichdahk. “We pair off!” Curt yells when Allison will not willingly have sex with Gregory (Butler *Dawn* 176). This example has little to do with desire and intimacy and everything to do with social control in which males are dominant over females. “There’ll be no rape here!” Lilith exclaims when rescuing Allison (Butler *Dawn* 178). Again, this is said to establish social control where males do not dominate females. Finally, this next example has been used by other scholars to speak of male violence: “Leah’s charge... grabbed her... might have raped her... but Gabriel had to help her get him off... a few days after his Awakening, [Wray Ordway] was sleeping with Leah with her full consent” (Butler *Dawn* 171). Scholars have either referred to the first part of this statement, or the general threat of rape in *Dawn* in their arguments regarding the portrayal of male violence in Butler’s work (Stickgold-Sarah 421; Braid 53; Mann and Nash 71). The passage in its entirety, that includes both the attempted rape as well as the reconciliation, is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the male desire to establish control over his environment. Secondly, and this is the part not spoken about by the scholars I’ve encountered, it demonstrates a shift in understanding in some humans as they move from using one belief system to guide them to a second belief system. I will return to the character of Wray shortly, to examine his shift in perspective concerning the role sex plays in society. For now, it is enough to acknowledge that in the beginning, the character of Wray also attempted to use sex as means to control his

place in his environment. Aside from these instances, there is no evidence of sexual interaction between humans. Instead it would appear that the narrative allows the readers, who themselves have identities formed by a heteronormative culture, to *assume* that the male/female pairs are intimate. I will return to this issue again when I discuss desire and intimacy. The fact is that evidence of human sexuality is downplayed, which allows the readers to focus upon Oankali sexuality.

Butler, like Arnason, presents her aliens as a non-heterosexual species. Some scholars have argued that Butler has *failed* to present the Oankali as a species that is *not* heterosexual in nature. Donna Haraway seems unimpressed with Butler's attempts to display an alternative sexuality arguing that, "[heterosexuality] remains unquestioned, if more complexly mediated. The different... genders that could emerge [as] another embodiment of resistance to compulsory heterosexual reproductive politics do not inhabit *Dawn*" (Haraway 380). Another scholar states that the "five-partnered coupling *requires* a previously developed heterosexual couple from each species to join together with the ooloi" (Vint 72; her italics). These explanations might have been made because the four known human characters, Lilith, Wray, Leah and Tino, who permanently join Oankali communities are heterosexual. Similarly, the theme of procreation, or the prevention of procreation, assumes heteronormativity by the readers especially at the time of the novels' publication. Homosexuals were not granted marriage rights and could not enter into nuclear family formations during the 1980s. However, the development of both legislation and technology since the publication of Butler's narratives allows for Oankali sexuality to be seen in a new light.

This assumption of a heteronormative community that is needed to create children seems to be the basis of Haraway's and Vint's comments. Yet nothing prevents homosexuals from performing heterosexual acts for the purpose of producing offspring. Throughout history, homosexuals have married members of the opposite sex and produced offspring.

Oankali sexuality is not necessarily heterosexual even though children are sporadically produced (Butler *Rites* 262-63). Instead, Oankali sex is technological in nature. The partners lie near each other, but do not touch each other (Butler *Dawn* 162). There is no kissing, no caressing of erogenous zones. From a biological perspective, Oankali sex can be compared to invitro fertilisation, as suggested by Sherry Vint. The ooloi collect female ovum, male sperm, and store them inside their own bodies, keeping them viable for decades (Butler *Rites* 295). While Oankali procreative sex can be compared to invitro fertilisation, pleasurable sex can be compared to cyber sex: fiber optic cables, the swift transfer of information, and individual interpretations of that information. An ooloi connects its arms(s) to the back of the neck of its intimate partner(s) and inserts a biological filament into the nervous system of that/those partner(s). The pleasure created/felt by the ooloi during lovemaking passes back and forth between the ooloi and the partner(s), creating ever-increasing levels of pleasure, which is intellectual and neurosensory in nature for all members involved. Though the ooloi is responsible for the neurosensory pleasure, it is not responsible for the interpretation of this experience by the partner(s). The ooloi cannot read or control its partners thoughts or intellectual experiences; the ooloi's partners are free to make their own interpretation of the encounter (Butler *Dawn* 76, 161-63, 68-69). Similarly, in cybersex, individuals are unable to touch each other; information is sent quickly between people in real time; and each individual interprets that information as he or she wishes. While the computer network, which the ooloi can be metaphorically compared to, may not be entirely responsible for the pleasure felt by the participating individuals, it certainly facilitates the pleasure. The mechanism of sex therefore does not rely on a specific sexuality and can be considered 'open and fluid.' It is the individuals who partner with the ooloi that bring their own sexuality to play when interpreting this information. The character of Joseph learns of the new form for sexuality when he struggles to make sense of his own experience of it. Joseph calls his sexual

experience an “illusion.” Nikanj offers an Oankali understanding of sexual experiences: “Interpretation. Electrochemical stimulation of certain nerves, certain parts of your brain... I can offer a oneness that your people strive for, dream for, but can never truly attain alone” (Butler *Dawn* 188-89). Not only is each individual in control of the understanding of their own sexual experiences, Nikanj suggests that true sexual fulfillment can only be achieved by approaching sexuality differently than what humans have previously done. This involves letting go of human cognitive understandings of sexuality.

Because of this, I maintain that Oankali sexuality is not a for-heterosexuals-only club and disagree with Haraway who claims that heterosexuality remains unquestioned in Butler’s narratives; the sexualities of the participants are irrelevant. What the ooloi is most interested in, dare I say what it is that turns the ooloi on, is complex genetic information in individuals. Characters with genetic predispositions for diseases such as cancer or Huntington’s disease are the most exciting for the ooloi (Butler *Rites* 294-95, 491). The first time Nikanj is allowed to physically bond with Lilith, it experiences Lilith’s genetic disposition for cancer. After the bonding is complete, Nikanj’s first words are “You’re so complex,” uttered in the same tone that humans are accustomed to hearing “You’re so hot” or “You’re amazing” (Butler *Dawn* 80). Should it be true that DNA plays a role in homosexuality, this would in theory make that person more exciting for the Oankali, which would increase the pleasure for all sexual partners involved. If DNA does not play a role in forming sexualities, then the sexuality of participants may be unimportant. In theory, as long as two biological males and two biological females are present, any combination of hetero/homo/bisexual consenting adults would suffice.

Finally, I would like to end this argument for the labelling of Oankali sexuality as open and fluid, by admitting that there is no evidence within the narrative that any of the human characters who live with the Oankali are anything but heterosexual. There are

however, enough anomalies within the text concerning the Oankali social and cultural structure that would allow for the inclusion of homosexuals. Oankali male and female parents are supposed to be siblings. Yet Jdahya and his wife Tedjin are cousins; neither one of them had a positive relationship with their own siblings, something the narrative describes as “unusual.” Ooloi are required to have their ooloi parent teach and guide them through childhood. However, Nikanj and Lilith are left to teach themselves. Oankali families are supposed to be chemically bonded for life, but Lilith’s second human partner, Vidor Domonkos, was only temporarily part of the family before he left to live in a separate village (Butler *Dawn* 71, 106, 10; Butler *Rites* 265). It would seem that Oankali society resembles present-day human society: there is a general narrative of what should be expected, and there are many exceptions to the rule.

These two novums of sexuality create a comparable type of cognitive estrangement that is found in Arnason’s work. Like Arnason, Butler displays only the worst of human characteristics. Human sexuality is not seen in a context that offers connection and comfort created between two people. Instead, human sexuality is used for social identity and social control. Derogatory homosexual terms are used, not to acknowledge that homosexuality exists, but to reduce the value of human men who have decided to live in Oankali communities and increase the value of ‘pure’ heterosexuals who do not wish to hybridize with the aliens. Heterosexuality is alluded to, but always in terms of how it is used for social control. The Oankali on the other hand, are uninterested in sexual identities. Instead, they are literally only interested, not in the social context of the unions, but of what lies inside humans. They are interested in understanding humans on an intimate, biological level and have little interest of how any social human identities might reflect upon them. Butler has enhanced this ‘lack’ of sexual identity found in the Oankali community by describing sexual activities in a manner that mirrors modern technology. Whereas Arnason’s novums created a

chaos of information that was difficult to categorise, Butler's novums almost seem to negate each other. The negative presentation of human heterosexuality is a view that most readers would want to distance themselves from. The Oankali understanding of sexuality seems to infer that sexual definitions are unimportant, that the other components that make up a person are more interesting. Both of these novums question the validity of the American heterosexual narrative.

Just as Arnason ends her argument that sexual labels are cultural constructs through the creation of Nicholas, the character that defies sexual norms, Butler creates a similar character in Wray Ordway. Wray takes up much less space in *Dawn* and *Rites* than Nicholas does in *Ring*. One of the last characters to be awoken by Lilith, he plays a minor role in both novels. Whereas Nicholas flat out refuses to be defined by a sexual label, Wray changes his opinion concerning the role of sex in society. As mentioned earlier, the character of Wray is often examined in relation to the attempted rape of Leah upon his awakening. What is has not been examined to my knowledge, is the shift in his opinion concerning the matter. He moves from believing that sex can be used to establish a heteronormative hierarchy where he will have a dominant place over females to adopting the Oankali position concerning sex in society where individuals are equally valued. Though rape and sexual assault are serious subject matters, in this one instance the narrative suggests we look at the attack upon Leah in a new light: “[n]othing the [newly awoken] people did for the first few minutes was taken seriously or held against them” (Butler *Dawn* 171). The confusion of waking up in a new environment is enough for Resister humans to allow them to forgive any actions that may occur at this point. It is more important to follow the patterns of behaviour in the characters after their awakening. Some characters, such as Curt, continue to be violent towards women and the Oankali. Wray on the other hand, chooses to use reason in order to make the best of his new circumstances. When awoken, he does attempt to rape Leah to establish control over

his environment; shortly afterwards, when he is later able to reason, and acts reasonably, he gains Leah's trust to pair with her.

Wray continues to grow and change his behaviour. When the group of humans are learning survival skills in the reconstructed Amazon jungle training grounds of Chkahichdahk, Wray asserts his dominance in the group, "Tomorrow, while the rest of you look for the others, I'll start learning to fish.' 'We'll fish,' Leah said. He smiled and took her hand" (Butler *Dawn* 219). Perhaps out of habit, Wray acts in a dominant fashion towards Leah, assuming responsibility for providing for her and the other humans in general. Leah responds with her own authority, demanding politely to be treated as an equal; if there are skills to learn, they will learn them together. Wray responds positively and accepts Leah's wishes, indicating that his cultural beliefs are shifting.

Wray's final appearance in *Rites* shows that he has completely changed in his opinion of what is considered sexually and socially 'natural.' He and Leah and their Oankali partners have produced nine children. Two of Wray's construct daughters catch the eye of Tino, the young Resister who appears at the village of Lo:

"Do you like them?" [asked Wray]

Tino glanced at him and smiled.

"They're my daughters."

Tino froze, then shifted his gaze from the girls uneasily....

Some seconds later, the conversation ends as such:

“Listen, I wouldn’t want you to get the wrong idea. Those girls wear more clothing than most constructs because they have concealable differences. Neither of them is as Human as she looks. Let them alone if you can’t accept that.”

Tino looked [at Wray]. “What if I can accept it?”

Wray looked at the two girls, his expression gentling. “That’s between you and them.” (Butler *Rites* 286-87)

Tino shifts his eyes uneasily away from the girls because he expects Wray to feel some sort of dominance over his daughters and their life choices, including who they are intimate with. Instead, Wray has evolved to understand that all mature individuals regardless of sex, independently make their own decisions. Wray is as equally protective of Tino as he might be of his daughters and explains to him the expectations of the community. If Tino accepts this, Wray understands it is not his right to interfere in any relationships that might evolve from their meeting.

Wray, like Nicholas, is novum that displays to the readers that change is possible, and that individuals benefit from it. Wray has evolved, like the Oankali, and has shed the cultural constructs of his pre-war life that used to define him. He is happy to redefine himself, evolving to a new understanding of sexuality, allowing himself to find a place in a new environment. Combined with the novums that have already been discussed, the author presents to her readers an argument outlining the detrimental effects of a narrow sexual narrative created in a rigid system of belief. She expands on this argument by ensuring her audience that fully functional communities can exist in open systems of belief which do not have such constraining narratives. Sexual activities need not equate to social control and by allowing her reader intimate glimpses into Oankali life, Butler demonstrates that true sexual

satisfaction is derived from affectionate, inner connections with other individuals. This idea will be expanded upon in the examination of gender expectations.

Gender Expectations

Recapping the introduction to this chapter, a narrative of sexual identity was created in the United States after WWII: men were strong, leaders and breadwinners, stoic and masculine; women were subordinate and submissive to men – they became caretakers, homemakers and nurturers of children. Changes have occurred from the 1950s until the present day, and these gender expectations have shifted somewhat. Yet at the time of writing, public questions are still discussed as to what men and women are allowed to be and how they are allowed to behave. Opinions about the gender wage gap, rights to birth control and abortion as well as public outcry against sexual harassment in the workplace are examples of publicly political reactions against the American narrative of gender identity backed by a governmental and religious system of belief established in decades previous. This part of the chapter will not examine the American narrative of gender identity; instead it will acknowledge that it exists and will examine how both Butler and Arnason create alternative cognitive novums that allow readers to imagine alternative, future realities. As they did when presenting their readers with systems of belief and alternative sexualities, the authors present two conflicting narratives concerning expectations of gender. The fictional humans exhibit gender expectations that correlate to what the authors have chosen to highlight as negative aspects of empirical America: gender expectations that reflect social control or the unwillingness to communicate fairly. Butler presents physical representations of women as submissive beings. Arnason displays social interactions between men and women that still resonate with

misogyny. Both authors use the alien gender expectations as positive novums which allow for the creative exploration by the readers as to how society could be changed.

Gender Expectations in *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*

There are very few physical descriptions of human characters in *Dawn* and *Rites*. Butler is elusive in that sense and instead describes her characters through personality traits, their former careers, or the character's dialogue. Gabriel is simply described as having a "blue-black beard" in *Dawn*. Wray Ordway is not described at all in *Dawn*, but in *Rites* Tino sees him as a "small, blond man with colorless eyes" (Butler *Dawn* 166; Butler *Rites* 285-86). Despite this illusiveness, enough descriptions of body types exist to allow readers to understand that the Resister community has adopted the pre-war narrative of how human females should be, and appear to be, submissive in nature. This pre-war narrative description of females is personified in Tate. She too is not described in *Dawn*, but later when she and Gabriel purchase Akin, Tate described briefly: she has pink skin, blond hair, is short in stature and small boned (Butler *Rites* 360). Tate easily finds a role in Resister society because she looks submissive in nature. She is physically unassuming and unimposing because of her small frame. Her skin tone and hair are "light" in colour, making her less significant in the environment.

Not only do the female Resisters look physically submissive, they are socially submissive as well. They do not have an active voice within the community and do not speak publicly. Instead they work privately to push their agendas forward. The character of Neci works tirelessly to surgically remove the tentacles from captured construct children, against the wishes of the majority of Resisters. When proclaiming her beliefs to a small group of Resisters only results in her social dismissal, she begins to speak secretively to individuals and over time manages to sway public opinion (Butler *Rites* 375, 76, 81). Akin speaks with

Tate to inform her of the situation. Upon discovering the nature of the conversation, she must move with Akin to the most private place available: a fast moving, noisy stream away from the others (Butler *Rites* 380). Like women in empirical America who have been discouraged from taking leadership positions and being politically active, Phoenix women cannot take part in discussions that will change the social dynamics of the community. Tate, when informed by Akin about the threat of Neci, can only then work with her husband Gabriel to effect change (Butler *Rites* 384).

Resister women also do not take part in public business. They instead have responsibilities as homemakers. Upon arrival to Phoenix with his kidnappers, Akin notices that the men are working in the fields, but he can smell that the women are inside their houses. After Akin and his kidnappers enter Gabriel and Tate's house, Tate prepares drinks for Gabriel and the men who are sitting in the living room, and then leaves them (Butler *Dawn* 350). It is also interesting to note that Tate's first words to Akin after taking him to the kitchen are, "I hope you won't wet the floor" (Butler *Rites* 345-48). The labour responsibilities between men and women are clearly divided. Tate does not involve herself in official business. Nor can she expect Gabriel to help with domestic duties.

Butler balances this submissive character of Tate, as well as the pre-war narrative calling for submissive women, with the main protagonist of Lilith. Lilith is also not described in detail. But when Tino sees her for the first time, he notices everything about her which is not celebrated in his community: [Lilith] was an amazon of a woman, tall and strong, but with no look of hardness to her. Fine, dark skin. Breasts high in spite of all the children – breasts full of milk... The woman was not beautiful. Her broad, smooth face was usually set in an expression of solemnity, even sadness" (Butler *Rites* 285). Lilith is not beautiful to Tino because her outer appearance is the opposite of what is valued in Resister cultures. She is not Caucasian and is not submissive. Lilith displays her own strength and maintains her place in

the environment, which are traditionally masculine traits. At the same time, she wears her ethnicity, sexuality as well as her pride, neither hiding or downplaying who she is. Her solemnness displays that she is not emotionally submissive: she is an individual with a past, who has had to make difficult choices. Lilith is not a figure who is able to slip into the established Resister cultural narrative.

Not only is Lilith a physically dominant part of the landscape, she publicly speaks with authority, both for the Oankali community as well as her immediate family. At the meeting of Tino in the Amazon jungle, he attempts to establish male social dominance over Lilith:

[Tino] took a final step toward Lilith and was abruptly too close. He stood very straight and tried to intimidate her with his stiff, angry posture and his staring eyes... Akin had never seen [this behavior] work with Lilith... Lilith reached out, snatched the man's bow, and broke it over her knee before the man was fully aware what happened... "You're welcome to food and shelter for as long as you like," she said. (Butler *Rites* 269)

Lilith refuses to engage in the pre-war narrative gender role of the submissive female. Those that enter her physical space, enter as equals and abide by her community rules. Though she is female, she has the authority to speak for her community.

Unlike Tate, Lilith actively engages in conversations that will affect her immediate family. Whereas only Gabriel spoke with Akin's kidnappers, Lilith initiates the conversation that will introduce Tino into her family. Both Lilith and Nikanj are equal participants in the discussion with Tino, until Nikanj becomes too excited at the prospect of intimate relations with the new comer. It is at this point that Lilith says to Nikanj, "[s]low... Give him a moment... Don't defeat your own purpose by hurrying" before sending him away so that she

may continue to speak to Tino alone (Butler *Rites* 288, 91, 93). Lilith experiences roles of authority that are non-existent for women in the Resister community.

The Oankali community counters the Resister, pre-war narrative and offers an alternative narrative for the expression of gender expectations. The Oankali have almost no gender expectations at all. Here it is necessary to separate cultural gender expectations from biological necessities. In both empirical human and Oankali communities, it is necessary for females to incubate and give birth to children; there is no biological or mechanical way to avoid this. Children born from Oankali mothers eat solid foods immediately; human born children must nurse for a short period of time. Otherwise, all construct babies are intelligent, understand language as newborns and can speak in simple sentences at the age of two months (Butler *Rites* 255-56, 72, 303). Though construct babies are incapable of caring for themselves, they are more independent than human newborns. Aside from the biological expectation that human mothers will nurse, all five adults otherwise share equally the labour of raising children, taking equal responsibility for bonding with and instructing the child. If there are older siblings, they too take part in the process of raising children (Butler *Rites* 261-66).

The Oankali community is able to have a cultural narrative advocating the expectation that all family members will participate equally in child rearing due to the advent of Oankali technology. In *Rites* the village of Lo is a larval version of Chkahichdahk, the biological mother ship where all humans and Oankali were located in *Dawn*. Like Chkahichdahk, in Lo housing structures can be built at will, food is produced for Lo's inhabitants, and the ship/village will absorb garbage, dust and human waste (Butler *Rites* 282-83, 303). The lack of daily work that is usually required to ensure both short-term and long-term survival allows for a great deal of free time. With this free time, many inhabitants of Lo follow their own inclinations of work. Lilith and others have planted vegetable gardens which they attend to.

Wray enjoys building and maintaining a guest house supplied with food. Fish farms have been built, some individuals are involved with the biological engineering of insects and small animals that might produce food in the future. Others enjoy building boats and travelling to other trading villages. For those with intellectual inclinations, Lo has a library to which individuals can add their pre-war knowledge. Finally, there is an community of artists and musicians (Butler *Rites* 266, 81, 303-05, 47, 439). While I do not deny the irony that Lilith has chosen to garden in her spare time, a hobby that might be considered ‘feminine’ in nature, and that Wray enjoys building structures, a hobby that might be considered ‘masculine’ in nature, neither character is expected to do so. Examining the statistics given to the readers, only five human males live in the village of Lo and many construct males have become travelling musicians between Oankali/human villages (Butler *Rites* 281, 439). If this is true, it leaves the readers to wonder who is participating in scientific research, boat building and the transcribing of past events. Statistically speaking, many females must fill these roles.

Butler has created many different novums to explore the American narrative of gender expectations. She describes two different types of women. One of them, Tate, can almost not be described as a novum because she replicates exactly the description of a female according to the American cultural narrative. She is a homemaker and does not interfere with her husband’s responsibilities. Tate also takes up little physical space: not only is she a small person, she disappears from public life when its culturally appropriate. Though Tate represents the cultural norm which has often gone unquestioned, Butler highlights how insignificant Tate is in her community. Though she may be valued by Gabriel, she is replaceable in a larger context. Lilith as a novum is the exact opposite of the cultural norm: she is not Caucasian, she takes up space physically as well as publicly, and she has a personality and identity that cannot be substituted. Lilith plays an important role in her community. Lilith represents her community, welcoming new humans but also explaining

firmly to them the social rules that must be obeyed. In this respect, she is as equally valued as Wray, who also spoke for the community when he discussed sexual conduct with Tino.

Butler also creates two separate communities, each a novum that conflicts with the other, demonstrating two alternatives concerning the division of labour. The Resister community represents the traditional American narrative expectations: men and women each have their realms of influence which do not overlap. In addition, it does not appear that humans are able to consider that the lines that separate these spheres of influence can be blurred. In contrast to the Resisters, the Oankali have a society with little labour division. It must be acknowledged that the lack of labour division exists because of alien technology: Lo feeds and cleans up after its inhabitants. Still, childrearing is equally shared by all family members. It is not expected to be a female duty. Similarly, individual interests, be they intellectual or practical in nature, are not conformed by gender. This division of labour is a theme that is written about by Arnason, and I will return to Butler when discussing Arnason's novums.

Gender Expectations in *Ring of Swords*

In Arnason's work, there is little evidence of gender expectations in human society, but this is due to the fact there are few humans to study within *Ring*, and political negotiations that occur in interstellar space do not represent social reality as it occurs on Earth. Instead, other aspects of Arnason's novel must be studied to interpret how the sexes might relate. Both males and females are equally represented in military and academic fields. Evidence suggests that Arnason's humans live in a culture that assumes at least some masculine dominance: only masculine traits are viewed as symbols of strength and authority, and misogyny still exists. Because only masculine symbols are used as symbols of strength, women who have careers in typically 'masculine' fields don symbols of masculinity as a costume. Major Ndo

wears the regulatory, masculine hairstyle of her subordinates: a shaved head with a short-clipped, bleached mohawk extending from forehead to nape. However, not every male military leader does the same (Arnason 38, 166). Ndo is also forceful in nature, speaks in tones that make others uneasy, commands people to do as she requests, expects that her commands will be followed, and will use her authority to coerce those who resist her (Arnason 38-39). These are traditionally masculine characteristics.

Nicholas too, understands that his human culture associates strength with masculinity. As the Hwarhath army first emerges to begin introductory negotiations, humans see a masculine image:

[The Hwarhath] were broad and solid-looking, humanoid, as grey as the sky and the mist... the aliens wore close-fitting uniforms the same color as their fur... They moved into the rain as easily – as casually – as if the weather did not matter... the first ones out carried rifles, a strap over one shoulder, one arm resting on the barrel, keeping the muzzle pointed down. (Arnason 22)

The Hwarhath military look as humans might expect them to look: uniformed, monotone in appearance with masculine colouration, unemotional and stoic, and comfortable with their weapons. It is not until later in the narrative the readers discover that what was seen was not the Hwarhath uniforms. The Hwarhath usually wear shorts, due to their warm fur. The emergence of the Hwarhath from the aircraft was a display choreographed by Nicholas to allow the Hwarhath to meet the expectations of humans (Arnason 139). Nicholas's illusion works. When meeting the Hwarhath for the second round of negotiations, and seeing the shorts the Hwarhath normally wear, one human male responds, "I don't understand the costume" (Arnason 136). In human empirical culture, and presumably in Arnason's human

culture, topless, fit males in shorts are ‘masculine’ in nature but are not always seen as imposing or authoritative. Instead, this type of costume is typically used by groups of heterosexual men who have homosocial relations to each other in casual settings: sports teams in the locker room or perhaps summer gatherings by the pool. Though this type of dress does reflect an overt ‘manliness’ onto its participants, it is never appropriate in political or military settings. Wendy Pearson reflected over the fact that Arnason’s readers cannot find recognisable signs of ‘manliness’ or the stereotypical ‘signs of homosexuality’ when viewing the Hwarhath men. “The homosexuality of the Hwarhath males, who are so clearly ‘men’... serves to deconstruct human cultural assumptions that gay men are not ‘real’ men” (Pearson 88). Not only do the Hwarhath deconstruct the cultural assumptions of gay men, they also question the cultural assumptions of straight men. The symbols of heterosexual, masculine identity are questioned when homosexuals, who have already a stereotypical cultural narrative describing them, begin to adopt them. The Hwarhath have adopted both public, military symbols and private, casual symbols of heterosexual masculinity, neither of which are necessarily associated with homosexuals in empirical America. The use of these symbols unsettles Arnason’s humans.

Masculine authority masked in misogyny also exists within *Ring*. Anna experiences it on several occasions when she is spoken to, and the human negotiating team performs it. Upon arrival to the second round of negotiations, Anna speaks about the aesthetics of the soup-can shaped Hwarhath space station with one of the diplomats, Etienne Corbeau:

“Maybe they see [structures] differently. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

Etienne shook his head. “I believe in aesthetic absolutes...”

“Bullshit,” [said Anna.]

“You are going to have to learn a new language, dear Anna.”

Why? [Anna thinks.] She was on this trip for one reason only. The enemy had asked for her by name. (Arnason 134)

Etienne speaks pejoratively to Anna to which he receives no response. He ignores her suggestion of a different beauty-paradigm and is unable to imagine something beyond his own (male) point of view: he believes in his authority, forgetting or disavowing that Anna has already met with First-Defender Ettin Gwarha, and that her presence was specifically requested.

Nicholas is usually a character that exudes diplomatic reason, but even he is misogynistic on one occasion. Though Nicholas has acceptably remarked on Anna's choice of clothing previously – his tone and comment informs Anna she is presenting herself appropriately to the Hwarhath women – he slips up, making his remark personal instead of professional: “‘Very nice...’ Anna felt a brief irritation. The look and comment were absolutely typical of a human male. [Nicholas] ought to have learned better manners after spending twenty years with the Hwarhath” (Arnason 245). His remark is noticed by Anna, though she decides to ignore it. Nicholas never repeats this mistake despite not receiving a lecture from her. However, it is interesting that Nicholas has made this mistake, suggesting that when he is surrounded by other humans he begins to trust, he seems to begin to behave unconsciously in ‘earthly’ social norms.

The male negotiating team is also guilty of a misogynistic blunder when attempting to solve a logistics problem. The leader, Charlie, asks to send part of the team back to Earth, with the wish to bring aboard new humans with different qualifications. Due to the secrecy of the location, as well as the presence of women aboard the space station, the Hwarhath are unwilling to do this. “‘Very well,’ said Charlie. ‘End the discussions between Anna and the women...’ Lugala Tsu leaned forward and spoke in his deep harsh voice... ‘There are things

you don't understand Khamvonasa Charlie. We do not tell the women what to do... What they are doing is important” (Arnason 337-38). The undermining of – the pseudosiphonophore willingness to destroy – the female half of the negotiation team is seen as the most expedient solution to a logistical problem experienced by the men. Unlike the Hwarhath, who accept that the female work is important even if it may be inconvenient, the same thought does not occur to the human negotiating team. Charlie only looks “puzzled, and Anna [gets] the impression he didn't really understand what Lugala Tsu was telling him” (Arnason 338).

Arnason has presented four different novums that represent male masculinity and strength. She writes about a woman who wears masculine apparel and acts in a masculine manner to maintain her military authority, homosexual aliens who don two different sets of traditionally heterosexual masculine costumes, and the use of misogynistic speech. Each of these instances is problematized in some way. Major Ndo chooses to wear masculine fashion when other military leaders don't, making her identity constructed in nature. When the Hwarhath wear military uniforms in a culturally appropriate situation for humans, they give the humans false information concerning who they are. When they again meet humans in traditional Hwarhath clothing, it only serves to confuse humans because of the inappropriateness of wearing only shorts to meet political envoys. Finally, the repeated examples of human misogyny exist without confrontation by other humans but is finally put to a stop by homonormative aliens. Once again Arnason presents novums that are intellectually unsettling and chaotic, create an environment where no right or wrong narrative can be deduced, and serve to undermine the stereotypes that surround empirical heterosexual male identity.

Neither misogyny nor misandry are represented in the Hwarhath culture, where women have a high status. The female lineages politically control land and economic

resources on Hwarth. Since the advent of space travelling technology, Hwarhath males have lived entirely in space from young adulthood (Arnason 355-56, 81). In 2135, the alien female and male spheres of existence are economically independent from each other. Though all men are trained in warfare, very few of them work as soldiers. Most males are educated in exploration, mining, building, farming, research, transportation and manufacturing in an interstellar environment. In addition, there is the Arts Corps, the prime source of cultural information and entertainment for the Hwarhath society (Arnason 380). This absolute separation of sexes erases many gender stereotypes in both grand and common ways. Both men and women are responsible for the innovation of technology that will assist them in the industries that pertain to their environment. Both men and women are responsible for the physical labour of their industries as well. Themes of this nature are displayed in the artwork that decorates the personal living spaces of the Hwarhath: “The tapestries showed people on the home world, engaged in various kinds of agricultural labor... There was one in particular: a woman fixing a tractor... The tractor was burgundy red. The woman was large and stoic and grave, with pale fur, dressed in a bright blue tunic” (Arnason 298). This tapestry hangs in the women’s quarters in the space station. Nicholas views it while waiting permission to join a meeting with the Hwarhath women. The tapestry can be compared to the shifting holograms Gwarha displays in his office: “[The hologram] replaced the wall opposite his worktable... greenish waves broke against a beach of grey-green sand. The sky was stormy and almost the same color as the water. In the distance, cliffs rose and flying creatures soared. The creatures did not look familiar” (Arnason 149). A second hologram is described later in the narrative:

[A] plain covered with snow. In the distance was a line of sharp mountains, most likely the wall of a crater. The sky above the mountains was almost entirely filled by a planet: a yellow gas giant with rings and half a dozen moons, made visible

by the shadows they cast on the planet. The sky – what little I could see – was dark blue, which meant some kind of atmosphere. (Arnason 174)

The three examples are visual representations which contain, according to American/human standards, a combination of stereotypically masculine and feminine traits, both in physical construction and subject matter. The first image is ‘feminine’ in form; it is a woven tapestry, a typically female art form throughout history. Yet, the images on that tapestry are ‘unfeminine.’ The image alludes to the theme of independent agriculture, which is economic in nature. The woman is “large and stoic and grave,” synonyms that can be used to replace the descriptive word *proud* and is an image that resonates with the description of a proud and solemn Lilith. The woman herself is repairing a tractor and therefore the image acknowledges female mechanical knowledge. The colors of the tractor and the tunic stand out from the rest of the image, enhancing the importance of both the industry and possibly a particular person and/or lineage. This contrasts the human world and the understanding that strength and prestige are not traditionally documented with females. Gwarha’s holograms also allow Arnason to problematize the American narrative of gender expectations. The holograms are technical in construction, a trait thought to be typically masculine. They also document the interstellar exploratory achievements that only Hwarhath men are capable of. What is missing from these landscapes, yet present in the woven tapestry created by women, is the stereotypical masculine marking of ‘proof’ that the Hwarhath men have in fact established themselves at that spot. The landscapes lack a flag, a boot print, or a small Hwarhath-made mechanical device that would signify their accomplishment. Instead, they are left ‘untouched.’ The viewer of the hologram, because of the hologram’s expansive size, becomes a part of the landscape without interfering with it. In short, the Hwarhath men have remained

submissive to the worlds they have encountered. They do not display signs that these worlds have been conquered; they are not acting ‘misogynistic’ towards the worlds they’ve visited.

The fact that both female and male sexes in the Hwarhath culture display masculine and feminine traits, as represented by their artwork, is due to the fact that they live in physically separated communities. Neither community uses the other as a means of defining what they are and what they are not. Women are not required to project submissiveness to be accepted as ‘feminine.’ Men are not required to display proofs of strength and aggression to be accepted as men. Both sexes are free to independently explore their likes and dislikes.

Children are not found in *Ring*. Even so, enough information is documented that allows the reader to receive a general overview of the childrearing practices in Hwarhath society. The Hwarhath culture does have gender expectations that women will raise children. In this regard, the Hwarhath are similar to empirical American culture.² Yet like the Oankali culture, the extended Hwarhath family takes part in raising children. Also, this gender expectation is not absolute. The Hwarhath admit that some women do not want to be mothers. Women with no desire to be mothers continue to be accepted within society as there “are always enough mothers in a great house” (Arnason 171).

The physical space that separates males from females in Hwarhath society creates a similar environment that exists because of technology in Oankali culture. There is no division of labour by default and both men and women are responsible for the drudgery of every day life. In *Ring*, only the private lives of First-Defender Ettin Gwahar, Nicholas Sanders and Anna Perez are shown. All three have a high-ranking status which might infer that these three have some luxuries that others aboard the space station do not. Yet even at high political levels, individuals are expected to make their own food and clean up after themselves (Arnason 152, 274). Nicholas, the white male character used by Arnason to problematize the

² Not enough information has been given concerning family life on Earth as it exists in Arnason’s narrative to speculate on how the childrearing labour is divided between human parents.

empirical narrative of how a white male should behave, is the character who is most obsessive about a clean and orderly private environment, a traditionally feminine trait. Nicholas cannot stand disorder in either Gwarha's or Anna's apartment and will wash and dry their dishes, but leave them stacked on the counter as a non-verbal reproach (Arnason 352, 59). Because no unrelated males are allowed into the female quarters, it must be assumed the female Hwarhath on the space station are also responsible for maintaining their own environment as well.

Arnason presents the Hwarhath culture as novum that has no gender expectations in regard to division of labour. Like Oankali and human cultures, a biological necessity exists that females bear and give birth to children. Hwarhath men have no responsibility for childrearing: their physical separation from the home planet makes this impossible. Yet because Hwarhath women live in large lineage houses, childrearing is a task performed by many. Finally, everyone is responsible for the mundane, day-to-day jobs that allow life to function well, even if some individuals are consistently better at it than others.

In presenting these alien worlds, both authors seem to agree that the division of labour found in societies based on inflexible systems of belief facilitates judgements about that labour. Childrearing, and the empirical culture's expectation that women will bear the brunt of this labour, leads to cultural narratives that women are incapable of much else. The Resister society in *Rites* mirrors this belief despite the absence of children. 'Normal' life found on Earth is not depicted in *Ring*, but single nuclear families are still the norm, and misogyny still exists. Though there is no evidence found in *Ring* of daily domestic gender roles as they exist on Earth, given that humans live within a system of belief that does not allow for much thought outside of an egocentric system, the readers can extrapolate that life on Earth has not changed significantly concerning the division of childrearing labour between men and women since the 'present' time of the book's publication. Both authors therefore

seem to be insisting that a paradigm shift is necessary with American cultural concerning the domestic social roles between women and men.

Intimacy

I am ending this chapter with a discussion of the authors' use of intimacy. The reason for this inclusion is that intimacy in all its forms – between parent and child, between lovers, between friends – is often used as a partial definition of what it is to be 'human.' Even the "The Most Astounding Fact", a video that speaks about the vastness of the cosmos and our insignificance within it, offers snapshots of affection: silhouetted teenagers playing soccer, a father and son laughing together at a photograph, the reflection of the 'self' seen from an extreme close up of a human eye, otherwise known as the 'gateway to the soul.' Acts of intimacy involve the perception of others as intrinsically valued, not simply as objects. When the United States created legislation denying basic rights for homosexuals, the resulting national heterosexual narrative with dominant males and submissive females created a hierarchy where certain humans had more value than others. It is therefore without irony that the fictional humans in all three of the novels studied lack the ability to display intimacy or to see the value of other individuals. Instead, both authors create aliens who are capable of this human trait. In essence then, both authors have created novums in which the humans are 'aliens' and the aliens are the ones who display the most loving qualities.

Intimacy in Ring of Swords

Though sex exists, it is difficult to find true intimacy within the human population in *Ring*. A partial explanation for this is that Anna is the reader's only connection with the human world. Intimacy is hard to locate in the text when Anna herself refuses to be intimate with anyone on her home planet, or her co-workers. Anna's letters home "are all short... because she [does] not have much to say" (Arnason 30). Anna is also the character who describes her co-worker as "screwing one of the dips" (Arnason 28). *Screwing* and *dips* are word choices that erase intimacy and humanity from the encounter. The first word is a mechanical metaphor that renders both subjects to objects. The second is a truncating of the word *diplomate*, an action that in effect removes the humanity and the intellectual value from that person, rendering him into an unimportant, uninteresting and unlikable character. Anna is never friendly with her colleagues. After she negotiates with the Hwarhath women, she rarely socialises with the male negotiating team. She does speak with them briefly most afternoons, but otherwise spends most evenings by herself in her apartment (Arnason 186). Human intimacy may exist: nuclear families are what is deemed to be 'normal' and most of the human negotiating team does return to Earth, suggesting there are reasons for the desire to return home (Arnason 340). But nuclear families do not guarantee closeness, and the return of most of the male negotiating team cannot be only understood as the desire to be with family members. Anna herself does not miss Earth, nor the people on it (Arnason 339). Therefore, the human desire to connect with others cannot be documented. The intimacy found in the narrative is what develops in the relationships between Nicholas and Gwarha, Anna and Gwarha, and Anna and the women of Hearth.

That Nicholas and Gwarha are physically intimate and that Gwarha loves Nicholas has already been established. Gwarha loves Nicholas's hairless body and is endlessly

fascinated by it (Arnason 235, 344). Despite the torture Nicholas had to endure before he met Gwarha, he is still grateful the two species have come into contact (Arnason 163). The two are also intellectually and emotionally intimate with each other. Nicholas transcribes his view of daily events as journal entries and will often use forum to tell Gwarha things he cannot say publicly. Nicholas may tell inform Gwarha of complications concerning military plans, that Gwarha is consuming too much alcohol, or simply that he loves him (Arnason 13, 63, 164). Gwarha privately reads through Nicholas's entries, often adding in small remarks, jokes, or explanations of events that Nicholas might not have fully understood (Arnason 13-14, 63, 164). It is here that the two find true privacy when both have very public roles and live in a society that likes to gossip.

Nicholas and Gwarha have a long history of physical intimacy and friendship with each other which has allowed the two to develop a secret language of touch. At a private party at Gwarha's, a drunken Hwarhath soldier begins to publicly doubt the loyalty of Nicholas as well as whether Nicholas is anything more than a "clever animal." In his anger, Gwarha dares the soldier to "tell [him] again what Nicky is." In his attempts to diffuse the situation, Nicholas "[reaches] over and [begins] to rub the muscles at the base of [Gwarha's] neck... [Nicholas digs] in with his thumbnail. [Gwarha glances] at [Nicholas]... and [shuts] his mouth" (Arnason 270-72). Though Gwarha is Nicholas's superior in public, in their private lives they are equals and work together as a team. The private conversations located in the journals and the intimate language of touch reveal that Gwarha and Nicholas have a relationship which is the opposite of what is found in Arnason's human society. First, the two men are able to use experience and reason to aid them in navigating the new environment of their Person/Alien relationship. As a high ranking military official and as a linguist, both men use their educations of strategy and communication to maintain the public nature of their relationship. Second, because both Nicholas and Gwarha can read each other, as well as the

environment that surrounds them, Nicholas can secretly be Gwarha's superior; he can signal to Gwarha that the First-Defender must change his behavior in order to avoid consequences that might be damaging to their reputations. This is done without embarrassment to either of them. Because both men are able to see outside of their own egocentric interests, they have been able to develop intimacy with each other on many levels.

Finally, Gwarha and Nicholas are emotionally intimate with each other. Nicholas commits treason, deciding to give Anna confidential political information concerning the planet and culture of Hearth, underlining the possibility that the Hwarhath might decide to annihilate Earth before humans are made aware of the situation. He is caught, and while awaiting the decisions of the Hwarhath women concerning his fate, he asks Gwarha to bury him on the planet of Hearth, should the worst outcome be decided. Despite Gwarha's anger of Nicholas's betrayal, he answers, "This conversation is not necessary... [but] I will take your ashes to Ettin, when the time comes, if that is your wish... Don't be so frightened, Nicky, and don't say things that frighten me" (Arnason 309). Despite Nicholas's political betrayal, the intimacy built between Nicholas and Gwarha over time remains and is valued more than public reputation. Gwarha does not wish to imagine the worst outcome and asks Nicholas not to speak of it. Whereas humans can only objectify each other, the Hwarhath value intrinsically cherished people.

Intimacy develops in the relationship that is established between Anna and Gwarha as well as between Anna and the women of Hearth. The conversation between these two at their first meeting, after the failed kidnapping attempt of Nicholas on Reed 1935-C, is cold and aloof. She is surprised that Gwarha speaks English. He does not respond with friendliness: "I have known Nicholas for almost twenty years... Of course I have learned English... Why did you send me the message?... [Why] does your species give power to idiots?" (Arnason 177). As mentioned previously, Anna's first official meeting with the Hwarhath women also begins

with accusations, wanting to know how humans could allow men to have so much control and freedom within the female sphere of existence (Arnason 169). Yet as a scholar pointed out, over time and with communication, the hostilities are replaced with knowledge and reason about the 'enemy' (Gordon 255). By the end of the novel, though no physical intimacies between Anna and the Hwarhath emerge, intellectual and emotional intimacies come into being. Ensuing the concealment of Nicholas's political betrayal from public record, Anna and Gwarha have become what might be described as friends. During their last encounter before the close of *Ring*, they have certainly become intimate colleagues. He escorts her to her apartment. For the first time Anna invites him in. The two speak with a closeness, sharing the weight of secret knowledge and a desperate wish for a peaceful outcome. Upon leaving, Gwarha examines the holograms she has been living with since her arrival at the space station: pictures and videos from Reed 1935-C. In an act of friendliness and intellectual concern he states: "And I'd better get you some new holograms. You can't want to spend the next year looking at that scene" (Arnason 330). His desire, as a friend, to make the rest of her long stay on the space station as comfortable as possible shows his concern for her mental well being.

Growing respect between Anna and the Hwarhath women results in the beginning of friendships. The growing friendship between Anna and one woman in particular, Tsai Ama Indil, has not gone unnoticed by the women of Hearth: "Nicholas grinned, 'I've been hearing rumours about that... the [Hwarhath] know that it's possible for their people and humans to become romantically involved, and they love to gossip'" (Arnason 346). Anna quickly denies any romantic attraction and changes the subject, but the closeness between her and the Hwarhath women cannot be denied. As an intimate political partner, the Hwarhath are now concerned for Anna's safety should she return to Earth: MI would capture her and extract all information Anna has about the Hwarhath by any means necessary (Arnason 347). The

solution proposed by the Hwarhath is that Anna become an ambassador with diplomatic immunity. With unprecedented research opportunities, Anna could attain experience over years until she became a senior diplomate, untouchable to MI (Arnason 361). To strengthen this proposal, Anna is invited on an official visit to the southern regions of Hearth by one senior politician and is asked permission by a second representative to have a future female child named after her. The position of something similar to a ‘Godmother’ would tie Anna to Hearth, requiring her presence for occasional ceremonies (Arnason 355-60). Through friendly and diplomatic gestures, the Hwarhath have proven themselves capable of intimacy, even in a politically charged environment which eliminates much of physical intimacy.

Intimacy in *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*

Butler’s humans also display no forms for intimacy. In fact, the Resisters seem to abhor it. Upon their awakenings, “Get away from me!” are the very first words Tate utters. Leah attacks Lilith after she wakes up. Curt is immediately hostile and demanding (Butler *Dawn* 128, 37, 41). Certain intimate gestures are documented in *Dawn*, but these gestures are problematized by the Resister cultural narrative. Curt does “[slip] his arm around Celene when she [sits] near him, [looking frightened]” (Butler *Dawn* 143). But this gesture is only performative, not a manifestation of true intimacy. He performs this gesture in the midst of asserting his authority through undermining Lilith’s credible account of their circumstances on the spaceship. To complicate matters more, just days earlier Celene demanded to know when men would be woken (Butler *Dawn* 139). This suggests that Celene had been looking for a comfortable role to insert herself into, rather than finding true companionship. Both Curt and Celene search for and fall into pre-war gender roles. The need for intimacy has been replaced by the need to be authoritative or be protected by authority. The physical pushing

away of humans from each other and the demanding questions are rejections of intimacy as a social norm.

Though Resisters establish their own settlements and perform the community roles they have accepted, no familiarity grows between them. Instead, they appear to destroy budding affection at every opportunity. One of the kidnappers shoots an agouti Akin has begun to be friendly with in order to re-establish control over him through fear. Tate threatens to throw Akin against a wall when he attempts to seek comfort from her. Her authority over him is more important than his emotional well being. Finally, Akin speaks to two other construct children who don't speak English. All three of them use their tentacles or sensory pads to communicate instantaneously through their bodies. The humans who watch them uncomfortably complain, "not like kids at all... like a bunch of dogs" (Butler *Rites* 340, 71, 85). Closeness and loving acts only cause hateful reactions from Butler's humans.

The question regarding the lack of intimacy between the Resisters is strengthened by the lack of comfort items found in the Resister community. The houses are made from wood, which is to be expected from a community that is required to construct its own houses and structures by hand. But it is interesting to note that house interiors also seem to only be comprised of wood. While Butler is also elusive in her description of furniture and home décor, enough information exists to give the readers an understanding that the houses of Phoenix are practical, not comfortable. Wooden floors are mentioned, but the mentions of carpets or small woven rugs are absent (Butler *Rites* 348, 56, 510). Similarly, while the furniture is not described, the destruction of furniture is. Furniture is "smashed" or "broken," not ripped or torn, suggesting the entirety of the house is hard and functional, not soft and inviting (Butler *Rites* 355-56). Yes, the argument can be made that such living standards are to be expected in communities that must construct everything themselves. I however counter this argument by reminding the reader that Phoenix has industry, including spinning,

weaving, sewing, and blacksmithing, where far more items are produced than can be used or traded (Butler *Rites* 367). With access to both materials, means and time, it is strange that Resisters don't create their own comfortable 'paradise', especially when creating "handsome houses" and other establishments is important to display the Resister ability to take control over their own environment (Butler *Rites* 280).

Finally, it is important to note the existence of bedrooms and private spaces for couples is not evidenced in *Rites*. The narrative, as it does with Resister sexual activity, allows the reader to assume these spaces exist because of the cultural norms of empirical America. In actuality, within the narrative, where humans sleep or have privacy is an unknown. During their stay in Chkahichdahk, Lilith made private rooms for individuals and couples (Butler *Dawn* 132-33). On the journey from Phoenix to the salvage site, the travelling Resister group erects tents or hammocks, constructions that lack both privacy and comfort (Butler *Rites* 347). In Phoenix, these spaces are an absence of knowledge. This absence of a bedroom or private place of comfort may be an insignificant point to analyse, if it were not for Tate's illness. Akin returns to Phoenix after many years to inform the Resisters that he has been able to give them what they wish: a place of their own where they can build a civilisation without Oankali interference. Gabriel takes Akin into the couple's house. Upon entering, Tate is seen lying "on a bench against a wall" (Butler *Rites* 484). Tate is not in a bed, nor a bedroom. She is not covered with a blanket, nor does she have a pillow. I have brought forth this argument concerning the lack of comfort items because it represents the lack of intimacy the Resisters have for each other and for themselves as individuals.

Resisters, while they may publicly respect each other as individuals, find it impossible to treat others or even themselves with affection or kindness. Tate's injuries to her spine, bones and internal organs are substantial and her Huntington's disease has been reactivated. She has been ill for three months and has both Gabriel and Yori have attended to her. Yet no evidence

exists that any physical or emotional comfort has been given to Tate (Butler *Rites* 486-91).

The inability to give intimacy of almost any sort to either themselves or each other becomes yet another example of the Resister system of belief that is unable to expand to accommodate the needs of others.

In contrast to this, the Oankali are aliens who present themselves as being incapable of *not* being intimate with others and their environment. The Oankali are built for intimacy. The construction of their bodies as well as the construction of Chkahichadahk and Lo demand intimacy just to function. The Oankali communicate most effectively by physically connecting through their tentacles, sensory arms and sensory pads. Oankali sexuality is more intimate than human sexuality because the ooloi insert themselves into the neurosensory systems of the other. Operating with the spaceship at a most basic level involves the stroking of the walls/floors to engage in the most basic of functions, the opening of doors, for example. Chkahichadahk and Lo are databases as well as communication centers. But unlike humans who are required to interpret information left by others, through reading notes or listening to recordings, a process that separates the reader or listener from the producer of the information by both space and time, the Oankali experience the information exactly as did the original depositor of that information did. Finally, Chkahichadahk can be used to hold large scale meetings involving hundreds or individuals, if not more. In such circumstances, all Oankali involved have an intimate connection to each other, an intense experience for those unaccustomed to it (Butler *Rites* 410, 69-70).

Connections between the Oankali and humans are not as intimate as between two Oankali for biological reasons. In response to this, some Oankali have learned to treat humans with cultural tenderness and comfort by copying human gestures. Tediin “[takes] both Lilith’s arms” in her own, thanking her for the time she has spent with Tediin’s family (Butler *Dawn* 107). She has attempted to show with human physical gesture how much Lilith

means to her. Nikanj also attempts human gestures, wrapping a comforting sensory arm around Lilith as Lilith gazes upon Earth for the first time in centuries (Butler *Dawn* 116). The need the Oankali have to experience intimacy with others is great enough to force some of them to adopt foreign habits in order to express it.

Everything the Oankali do is to cause happiness or extended health in the other. They correct all maladies from insect bites to defective genes (Butler *Dawn* 21, 210; Butler *Rites* 491). Mental anguish and the associated headaches and ulcers that accompany it, as seen in Tino who struggles to live by both the Resister and Oankali cultural norms, confuse the aliens, but they do what they can to relieve the symptoms (Butler *Rites* 421-26). It is in fact difficult *not* to speak of how the Oankali are intimate or show affection because it is a part of who they are as beings. They revere life. In their opinion, all contact with others should only be pleasurable (Butler *Dawn* 79; Butler *Rites* 446).

In conclusion, both authors have presented two points of view in their attempt to have their readers look upon the empirical environment of the United States in a fresh way. As repeatedly demonstrated, they presented the most negative aspects of human culture in their fictional human communities, and both authors circle around the themes of male dominance and female submission. Butler's Resisters adhere to a very traditional, evangelical-Christian understanding of the placement of men and women. Arnason is a little more nuanced. Both authors present humans as sexually active, but in both instances, human sexuality lacks true affection and passion. The Resisters use sex as social control. Arnason's humans have sex for information gathering purposes. In both cases, the authors have described humans as creatures who are unable to be intimate and kind with each other, and perhaps even with themselves. As novums, these depictions of humans serve to distance the readers from identifying themselves with them and makes the inhuman government actions in the empirical United States more disdainful.

In response to the constructed narratives of sexual identity and gender expectations, both authors have created alien cultures with different narratives for each. The Hwarhath culture is an acknowledged, constructed homonormative identity narrative. The Hwarhath have chosen to live by this sexuality because it is *not* natural, and it separates them from lower life forms. The Oankali have a sexuality that, especially with the advent of technology, can be compared to cybersex. The introduction of technology as a sexual metaphor diminishes the importance of already established sexual narratives, allowing the reader to view sexual connection with others in a new light.

Both authors present alternative social systems where the submissiveness of one biological sex regarding another does not exist. Whether this is achieved through technology or the complete separation of the sexes is less of a point. Instead, it seems the authors are stating that the division of labour, especially in rigid systems of belief, allows for people as well as the labour performed by them to be valued and commodified. Therefore, to achieve equality, a dismantling or a forced shift in the belief system is required.

Finally, intimacy within the novels has been analyzed. Humans existing in both Butler's and Arnason's narratives are incapable of public or private intimacy. Intimacy, like non-submissiveness of women in Resister society, rubs abrasively up against a patriarchal and capitalist belief system, and threatens that system. It is also abrasive against the collection of other commodities, such as information. Strong, intimate ties between people built over time begin to dismantle that type of system, which places values on objects but cannot commodify increasing levels of feelings and trust built over time. Therefore, to have success in such a rigid system requires the suppression of close contact between individuals: Tate can only be 'stored' on a bench when ill; Anna cannot focus on former family members or friends on Earth while focussing on her goal of finding xenointelligence.

Intimacy requires human resources and energy that cannot be quantified. It counters the capitalistic/conservative system of acquirement and values the act of giving human time and effort, without the expectation of receiving in return. That the Oankali care for each other because they themselves cannot tolerate another's suffering might be labelled as false intimacy. But Nikanj attempts to give Lilith space and privacy, though it goes against its own nature to do so. Kahguyaht brings Lilith paper and pens as a secret, unsaid emotional message. These actions are evidence that both have set an unquantifiable value on Lilith and are expressing it in her cultural terms. The Hwarhath too develop intimate relationships. Nicholas and Gwarha have an example of the type of relationship many empirical couples yearn for: personal intimacy built over time that cannot be destroyed even under the worst of political circumstances: treason. Anna has learned about intimacy through the Hwarhath and has learned to become intimate with them. In return, she is rewarded with protection and trust that cannot be commodified. In both cases, Lilith and Anna have broken free from the rigid, earthly system of belief.

Conclusion: A Great Shift?

Aliens are our shadows, and we theirs. (Csicsery-Ronay 1)

This entire project has been devoted to the examination of Butler's and Arnason's use of novums to create cognitive estrangement in their readers to effect political change. The goal of such political change has never been in doubt: liberal and open societies based on flexible systems of belief that do not place high value on commodification and are accepting of all individuals over time. What is not evident in my work is how the authors assume that such a society will be created. Butler and Arnason repeatedly answer this question in their novels and that answer is found in a theme I have touched upon several times but have never directly addressed: communication. The societies that are capable of accepting even difficult and painful reforms are those that have an established basis for open communication and the reasonable analysis of new information. Societies that wish to hinder such reforms refuse such communication and will not use reason contemplate new ideas on their own terms.

Within the texts explored for this project, the communities represented by these opposing systems of belief act accordingly. The Resisters deny the spread of reasonably analysed information: they have isolated themselves so that the Oankali will always remain foreign and strange to them, and only retell the same narratives of their cultural identity through their bibles, how-to/survival information books as well their anti-Oankali propaganda. They also deny the behaviors of non-submissive women to suppress the occurrence of alternative experiences that counter their social norms. Pseudosiphonophores literally hoard information, and keep it contained in dark, secret environments away from the general population. Their inability to share and contemplate knowledge on a large scale holds

them in a primitive state of being. The humans represented in *Ring* are not much better. They are incapable of complex thought above a certain intellectual level and are therefore little better than archaic life forms themselves. Countering these novums, the Oankali are physically built for the constant absorption and spreading of uncensored information through their tentacles and the spaceships, a method that has the ability to reach vast numbers of individuals in a short period of time. Though they are not perfect, and though some intelligence may take time to grasp, they do not prevent information exchanges, and once vital, life-changing data is accepted, change to their environment and culture happens quickly to accommodate it. The Hwarhath do not have the Oankali ability and must resort to traditional information gathering techniques of research and discussions involving representatives from all parts of society. But their desire for an objective view of new events is equally important to them as it is for the Oankali, and they will invest the time and effort it takes in order to achieve it.

Within *Dawn* and *Rites*, the Oankali have transformed themselves and their culture, demonstrating to Butler's readers that change can occur to accommodate everyone. At the close of *Rites*, these aliens have even decided to allow Resister humans who absolutely refuse to take part in the hybridization program to be transplanted on Mars, where they can continue their biological existence in peace (Butler *Rites* 467-77). It is here that Butler is suggesting in typically critical dystopian terms that the Conservative Right need not be destroyed, but they must be removed from influence over the greater, global population.

The Hwarhath have not changed their society by the conclusion of *Ring*, but both the female and male spheres understand that transformation is imminent, and it scares them. Tsai Ama UI states directly to Anna:

It is clear to me that the old ways of understanding behavior are not going to work. [Humans] are too different... I thought I would not have a problem [studying your culture]. I'm a scholar... But I have to confess, I am unsettled, and it's possible that I am afraid... it isn't human weapons that frighten [us].
(Arnason 216-17).

Gwarha reflects the same fears found within the Hwarhath men. After meditating over the diviner's advice concerning the nightmare of his ancestor condemning his relationship with Nicholas, he decides the diviner is right: The ways of the past should stay in the past. But this revelation only gives him half an answer. Gwarha admits to Nicholas, "[the diviner] is right. But I cannot see what the new way of life ought to look like. I don't know how to move forward. What am I going to do, Nicky?" (Arnason 222). Both sides of Hwarhath society are fearful because they instinctively know that this new environmental change will cause a social restructuring. "What are men good for, if there are no enemies and borders to protect?" asks one woman (Arnason 251). Similarly, the narrative tells of the great number of women who are suddenly taking part in interstellar travel in order to negotiate with Anna, something that has never been done before. This leaves intelligent readers knowing that there must be a few women who eventually would prefer careers located outside of Hearth. Finally, the existence of a heteronormative culture, regardless of how well it does or does not function, has caused the people of Hearth to question their own history, as well as their ideas of morality (Arnason 251). It is an unknown how this narrative would continue after the final page, but the prognosis is positive. The Hwarhath accept humans as 'people' and commit to a peaceful existence with them. Though they are uncertain and unsettled, they also believe that knowledge "is the only certain consolidation" and that in the end, "all we can do is go forward" (Arnason 221, 330).

Returning to the question at large, have socially marginalised fractions been able to use communication to effect change within society? The answer is an unequivocal ‘yes’ due to the development of internet technology that was in its infancy at the time of these novels’ publications. Much scholarly work has been done on how internet access and the transference of information on a global scale has transformed and continues to transform politics. Before the advent of the internet, the capitalist economy had only one identity: an unstoppable force of commodification that “[pushed] aside anyone or anything that stood in its way” (Smith 265). Internet access has given individuals and activist groups access to a larger platform of communication, and they have become increasingly adept at using it. This is especially true as technology has become cheaper and more compact in the last decades.

Access to international communication has allowed homosexuals and women to fight against the injustices they face in the United States relatively quickly and effectively. In 2010, Dan Savage grew increasingly frustrated at the inability to politically change discriminatory laws that allowed for the bullying of school-aged homosexuals, resulting in multiple daily suicides of young American homosexual citizens. He and his partner began the “It Get’s Better Project” via YouTube as a way to give information to younger homosexuals isolated in conservative communities. Though their schools and churches were unwilling to provide teenagers with information, Savage was able to reach out to them directly, letting them know that there was hope for their future if they could just finish high-school. By 2013, over 50 000 videos of the same nature had been added (Webster 357-58; Muller 270). Through these videos, homosexuals were given a voice, lifting themselves from the two-dimensional figures they had been previously made out to be by the American sexual identity narrative. The project brought to light the national problem of teenage suicide connected to homophobia, which gave the American Civil Liberties Union a bigger platform to demand the repeal of unconstitutional legislation. In contrast to the ‘dehumanising’ effect that modern

technology is often accused of having, this technique has used to technology to replace the 'human' nature into people who were stripped of it by authoritative forces.

The #MeToo movement has used the internet to modernise and make more effective a feminist strategy from the 1970s. Second Wave feminists advocated for speaking of personal experiences of discrimination against women under the phrase "the personal is political" (Larabee 8). This was designed to make visible the extent of the problem. However, before the existence of a platform for mass communication, such information could be ignored by those for whom it did not align with their social understandings. The present technology allows thousands of voices to heard simultaneously, an action that takes up so much 'space' it cannot be ignored. This movement, less than two years old, has been directly linked to social developments unimaginable even a decade earlier: the resignation or firing of many politicians, reporters, comedians and television personalities, and the social ostracization of film producers such as Harvey Weinstein. It has also probably played a role in the recent conviction of Bill Cosby (Bennet; Roig-Franzia).

The development of the internet cannot be seen as the 'technological saviour' which will rid the world of all injustices. The internet is 'free' for everyone to use, including the groups of society that wish to keep the traditional status quo in place. While information may be shared nationally or globally very quickly, the information itself does not effect change. Only the actions and efforts of people can do this. In addition, international governments impose regulations on access to the internet to various degrees. Public conversations in the United States have circled around the notion of privatizing internet access, commodifying it and erasing internet neutrality. But despite these arguments, the internet has done much to create new imbalances of power between dominant cultures and minorities, taking away power from the former and adding it to the latter. This is why the title of this part of my paper has a question mark. The future can never be truly known, but at the moment it does feel that

society is witnessing a political shift. For those of us who identify as liberal minded and try to be at least consciously aware of our place within the capitalistic machine, the present feels hopeful.

Before finally closing my project, I would like to answer as best as possible, one final question: Will Matsehar ever find happiness? It is difficult to be naively hopeful for this character. The Hwarhath do not have the equivalent of the internet in their society. But, Matsehar is the “best male playwright” of his time and his creations are popular (Arnason 152). He is best known for breaking down the traditionally strict forms of storytelling in order to bring about new social narratives. He was able to create a translation of Shakespeare’s *Othello* that did not remove the heteronormative plotlines, and his audiences were not offended. Even Gwarha, who is usually socially traditional, has to admit a play “about this kind of love ought to leave the audience with a feeling of horror and disgust. But I feel nothing like that” (Arnason 196). Though Matsehar does suffer mentally, he also does what he can through the communication tools available to him to shift the system, forcing it to reasonably contemplate new ideas. He is the activist that Arnason wishes to inspire her readers to be. His society may not change for him, but he does what he can to make sure future heterosexuals have opportunities he does not presently enjoy.

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