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"We're Never Trapped by Power": A Plurality of Feminist Resistance in Octavia Butler's Dawn

Abstract

Women writers use the feminist dystopian genre as a way to resist gender-based oppression in complex ways. To do so, women writers must first construct bleak worlds that subjugate their female characters before they can craft ways for these characters to resist. This article specifically examines Octavia Butler's novel, Dawn, because the central female character finds ways to resist through working within the system in order to work against it. Even though she cannot overthrow the government or escape, she exercises substantial resistance through her body, voice, and intelligence. Butler ultimately demonstrates that women are able to resist from the margins in complex ways, which prompts real-world women readers to fight and resist gender-based oppression in their own societies.

Keywords: feminism, Octavia Butler, science fiction, feminist dystopia, gender

"As soon as there's a relation of power there's a possibility of resistance. We're never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy." (Michel Foucault)

1. Introduction

Women writers have woven feminist resistance into the fabric of their novels for centuries to protest the misogynistic treatment and representation of women in patriarchal society. Myriad feminist scholars have affirmed that women in literature and culture are "trained, shaped, and

impressed" by the patriarchal values within a society in ways that do not apply to men, which makes it exceedingly difficult for women to exercise resistance against this problematic ideology because it permeates and then deeply-embeds itself in the way humanity thinks and acts (Bordo 13). However, Foucault implies that power over an individual is not absolute because an individual can exercise "precise strategies" of resistance in "determined conditions" or certain circumstances (qtd. in Sawicki 25). This complex relationship between patriarchal power and feminist resistance to it is demonstrated through the works of countless women writers, such as Charlotte Brontë, Toni Morrison, Jane Austen, Maxine Hong Kingston, Louisa May Alcott, Louise Erdrich, Kate Chopin, and Sandra Cisneros. These are just some of the countless women writers who feature patriarchal societies in their works and oppress female characters through marriage, class, race, and other societal expectations; however, they also include feminist modes of resistance through personality, rejecting marriage, marrying on specific terms, art, writing, and in the most extreme of circumstances, suicide and murder. Thus, as Foucault notes, there are "a plurality of resistances" and "each of them a special case," which indicates there are countless ways for an individual to resist because resistance is contextual and specific to one's unique circumstances (96). Even so, society is, as Simone de Beauvoir declares, "[decidedly] male" and feminist modes of resistance are often trivialized or dismissed in favor of more obvious resistance strategies, such as simply extricating oneself from the problematic environment or overthrowing a corrupt government (xxii).[1]

While many of the aforementioned women writers explore complex modes of feminist resistance to patriarchy in their works, I posit that the feminist dystopian genre – "a bad place for women" and "characterized by the suppression of female desire … and by the institution of gender-inflected oppressive order" (Cavalcanti 49) – is a unique and imperative subgenre of women's literature that is exclusively dedicated to exploring complex representations of feminist resistance. Even though this genre has become "the preferred form for an expression of struggle and resistance" (Baccolini 519), Jenny Wolmark argues that it still occupies a "marginalized position in relation to other forms of cultural production" because it is conceptualized as entertainment compared to more canonical women's literature (2). The feminist dystopian genre is impactful because it rejects the proverbial notion that obvious resistance strategies are more powerful than complex and nuanced resistance

strategies, such as asserting subjectivity or using one's voice to combat gender-based oppression. Women writers, such as Octavia Butler or Margaret Atwood, employ the feminist dystopian genre to emphasize that women can resist gender-based oppression in many ways and under the bleakest of circumstances in a way that non-feminist dystopian literature might not. Raffaella Baccolini, a premiere scholar in feminist science fiction and dystopian studies, reinforces that the feminist dystopian genre is ideal site to explore resistance because it is didactically "transgressive" and provides "a critical perspective that can push toward change" because it not only names women's oppression, but it also explores intricate ways women fight to dismantle it (519-20). As a result, women writers empower a female readership to "recognize a subversive and oppositional strategy against hegemonic ideology" (Baccolini 519-20) and create "a potentially radical fictional space in which women can unravel and re-imagine existing power relations" and apply it to the real world (Mahoney 29). The entire point of the feminist dystopian genre is not to nonsensically subject female characters to gender-based oppression, but to: one, draw attention to the ways that patriarchal society systemically subjugates women; two, explore the complex and nuanced ways that women can resist against gender-based oppression; and three, prompt a female readership to identify gendered power and then discover their own "plurality of resistances" (Foucault 96) against it to enact change in the real world![2]

Although it seems counterintuitive for a woman writer to intentionally place female characters in subjugated positions, there is a "clear difference" and rhetorical separation "between [simply] replicating something" problematic and replicating something problematic in order to "[critique] it," which is why I posit that it is an effective—albeit exceedingly complex—feminist technique![3] Feminism, as Linda Steiner claims, "is an emancipatory, transformational movement aimed at undoing domination and oppression," and as such, works by feminist writers and artists naturally "embody [these aforementioned] feminist values" (359). When applied to the feminist dystopian genre, it is evident that when a woman writer replicates gender-based oppression, she is doing so in order to emphasize the injustice – that is, the genre is rhetorically feminist because it is predicated on identifying gendered power, and then, thoroughly exploring how female characters can resist it in complex and nuanced ways. Marlene S. Barr refers to this rhetorical function as "feminist fabulation," which she defines as "feminist science fiction that offers us a world clearly

and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way" (10). Her term is a feminist revision of Darko Suvin's term, "cognitive estrangement," which he coined twenty years earlier to demonstrate how science fiction and other speculative texts operated (372). Like Suvin, Barr contends that the world of a feminist dystopian text is exceedingly different from the world of the reader, but unlike Suvin, Barr asserts that the gender-based oppression female characters' experience is exceedingly familiar to readers, which then encourages readers to think critically about ways to resist gender-based oppression in the real world.

Thus, feminist dystopian writers "are not merely writing light, diversionary, or 'escapist' fiction but are analyzing and responding to vital contemporary issues" (Rosinsky 3). That is, they are not uncritically reproducing the oppression of women for histrionics or entertainment; instead, they do so to demonstrate that all women experience oppression and can exercise resistance, but not all women experience oppression – and can resist that oppression – in the same way. To demonstrate the complex way a feminist dystopian text operates and lends itself to complex modes of feminist resistance, I will examine Octavia Butler's novel, Dawn, the first novel in the Xenogenesis trilogy.[4] While myriad critics acknowledge that Butler's fiction centers on "stories of power," they seem to dismiss or disregard it in favor of readings that almost celebrate Lilith's coerced "new selfhood" and position as a liaison between the humans and Oankali/ooloi (Wolmark 28).[5] Instead of ruminating on Lilith's identity, I will shift the conversation to the ways in which Lilith resists the Oankali/ooloi's corrupt ideology by resisting from inside the system. To accomplish such a complex way of resisting, Butler bifurcates her novel so that readers understand the difference between who Lilith is, and who she has to be in order to resist gender-based oppression. Throughout the novel, Lilith explains that her complicit behavior has ulterior motives; therefore, to resist in an incredibly restrictive regime, a woman must resist in more subtle ways because open and obvious resistance is impossible due to near constant surveillance. In turn, the value of the feminist dystopian imagination derives from emphasizing, rather than casting the readers' gaze away from, the systemic subjugation of women and how they resist it in individual and complex ways. Despite the bleakest of circumstances, women find ways to resist.

2. Butler's Contribution to Feminist Dystopia

Feminist dystopian scholarship predominantly focuses on examining feminist dystopian novels because they were among the rare ways in which women writers could ensure that their ideas about gendered power and feminist resistance reached a wide readership. Anne Cranny-Francis explains that the public already "enjoy[s] genre fiction" because "it sells by the truck load," which means that "it makes sense [for women writers] to use a fictional format [that] already has a huge market" to express their progressive and subversive ideas about gender-based oppression in the real world (1-2). Women writers also wrote "from a self-consciously feminist perspective, consciously encoding an ideology which is in direct opposition to the dominant gender ideology of Western society, patriarchal ideology," which means that women writers wrote their texts from a woman's point of view in order to challenge and critique patriarchal gender-based oppression in the real world (Cranny-Francis 1). Thus, these women writers told "slightly different kinds of stories" that placed women at the center of the written narratives, which intentionally "function[ed] differently" than the texts written by their male counterparts in order to render "invisible" gender inequities "visible" (Cranny-Francis 1-2). To successfully critique patriarchy, women writers had to "paint an exaggerated picture of the existing power relations between the sexes, as if they were placed under a magnifying glass," which serves as "the main catalyst of narrative conflict" (Cavalcanti 49, 53); however, the way that each writer explored modes of resistance to gendered power always "[varied] in intensity and approach" because each author has a unique objective to accomplish through their narrative (Cavalcanti 48).

As a result, Butler is part of "the tradition of feminist [dystopian] writing, and at the same time, [seeks] to contest it," and as such, "her works often question the assumptions shared by many white feminist utopian [and dystopian] writers" (Miller 337). While Butler was one of the myriad women writers utilizing the feminist dystopian genre to resist gender-based oppression, she was also a quintessential pioneer who expanded the genre to include exploration of mechanisms of resistance to intersectional oppression by focusing on "issues of racial, political, and sexual stratification and oppression" and "sociological underpinnings of society and definitions of humanity" (Gibney 100). Not only do her characters resist systemic intersections of oppression

within her novels, but Butler also seems interested in resisting the notion that only white women's concerns are relevant within the feminist dystopian genre. Butler, herself, noted that "When I began to read science fiction, I was disappointed at how little creativity and freedom was used to portray the many racial, ethnic, and class variations" (Melzer 35). She astutely noticed the capacious potential within the feminist speculative writing and actively sought to assert more diverse female-centered concerns into the genre, and as a result, "made [the genre] more accessible to a wide range of Americans by showing that questions of power and agency can be explored meaningfully through the brown female body not just white male [and female] ones" (Melzer 109). Not only does Butler's fiction focus on "strong, black female characters," but she also experiments with the interplay between "enslavement and freedom, control and corruption, survival and adjustment" (Wolmark 28). To bring this double resistance along with the complex interplay between gendered power and resistance to it into fruition, Butler needs to first demonstrate how her protagonist, Lilith, is oppressed before she can explore how Lilith resists in complex and nuanced ways.

3. Creating Gendered Oppression

From the beginning of Dawn, Butler establishes the gender-based oppressive texture of Lilith's world through words and phrases that convey oppression, such as "confined," "helpless," and "she did not own herself any longer" (Butler, Dawn 3, 5). Through third-person narration, it is revealed that Lilith, who slowly realizes that she has been saved from humanity's mass suicide attempt, feels as though she has lost complete control of her autonomy, which is why she vehemently tries to negotiate with her alien captors, the Oankali/ooloi. However, they rebuff her pleas for basic information, such as what has happened, where she is, and what they have or have not done to her because "power need not explain itself to the powerless" (Jacobs 96). Right away, Lilith realizes that "her only currency was cooperation," which means that the only way to obtain the answers she desperately craves about her situation is to comply with what the aliens want (Butler, Dawn 6). She does so by allowing the Oankali to cohabitate with her in the cage she has been residing in for an unknown amount of time in exchange for information, which they make available very slowly. With time, Lilith becomes too accustomed to Jdahya, the Oankali she cohabitates with, and she begins to wonder, "How had she become so dependent on him? She shook her head. The

answer was obvious. He wanted her dependent" (Butler, Dawn 38). By entering her cage and coercing her to accept him in exchange for information, Jdahya became familiar in an otherwise unfamiliar world, which compelled Lilith to rely on his guidance because without him she would not be able to navigate the new world. As Jim Miller suggests, Butler's aliens are "benevolent dictators" – that is, they live a peaceful life and do not physically harm the humans; however, they also colonize the humans by sterilizing them against their will and either forcing them to integrate into their society or to remain in suspended animation forever.

4. Resisting Gendered Oppression

Even though Butler puts her protagonist through terrible circumstances, she does so in order to foreground the oppressive nature of the world Lilith is living in before she can start to resist it. Toward the beginning of the novel, Butler demonstrates that survival can serve as a mode of resistance to gendered power. Lilith is presented with an impossible choice: life or death. If she chooses to live, she must either integrate into Oankali/ooloi society and become a reproductive vessel, as well as a liaison between the humans and Oankali/ooloi, or she can choose to return to suspended animation forever and perish. The decision is not simple because it requires Lilith, like many other female characters throughout women's literature, to "negotiate between two poor options" or extremes (Ligoria 5). Like many feminist dystopian protagonists, Lilith makes the conscious choice to live, and her survival allows her to resist the Oankali's power. In Living a Feminist Life, Sara Ahmed draws on a poem by Audre Lorde called "A Litany for Survival," and examines the line "those who were never meant to survive," which she interprets as "those for whom survival requires creativity and work; those for whom survival is politically ambitious" (236). There are countless women who were not meant to endure but endure anyway and tenaciously through alternative and innovative ways because "coming into full view would be dangerous" for some women, which is why "survival can be protest" (Ahmed 237). It is impossible for all women to be direct, assertive, or visible because the situation she is in might make visibility dangerous behavior.[6] At first glance, choosing to survive seems passive or even complicit with gendered power because the woman is not taking obvious steps – such as leaving the community – to resist it. However, it is important to remember that in a dystopian world that thrives on gender-based

oppression, a woman's "capacity [to choose is] compromised" because "the spheres of thought and action are so severely constrained" (Jacobs 92), which means that obvious resistance strategies are impossible, while more complex and nuanced resistance strategies are plausible and empowering, such as deciding to survive in order to resist "from inside the system" (Lu 245). Even though Lilith cannot escape from the Oankali/ooloi ship, her decision to survive in order to resist from within the system that thrives on gender-based oppression is an incredibly feminist mode of resistance.

This notion is specifically demonstrated when Jdahya offers Lilith freedom through death: "'Touch me here now,' he said, gesturing toward his head tentacles, 'and I'll sting you. You'll die,'" but she does not accept his offer; instead, "She jerked her hand away" (Butler, Dawn 42). Even though she abhors her situation, Lilith rejects his offer because she realizes she wants to survive and use her life to gain the Oankali/ooloi's trust only to be able to resist later. Of course, the repercussion of choosing to survive physically and emotionally traps Lilith in her subjugated role as a reproductive vessel; however, once Lilith chooses to survive, she plays her role while actively resisting in complex ways, such as constantly asserting her subjectivity to her oppressors. This occurs when Lilith is paraded around to Nikanj's friends like an object. When she realizes that "She was nothing more than an unusual animal to them. Nikanj's new pet. Abruptly she turned away from them" (Butler, Dawn 55), she consciously resists her object position by turning her back and walking away because "she isn't willing to be an Oankali pet or guinea pig" (Ligoria 5). By doing so, she denies the Oankali/ooloi the chance to study her, which asserts herself to them as a subject who has her own wants, desires, and feelings![7] Even though she cannot overthrow or physically fight the Oankali/ooloi, the act of reclaiming her subjectivity in a moment where it is denied is a complex form of resistance.

In addition to asserting her subjectivity, Lilith – like many other female characters in feminist dystopian texts – uses her voice to draw attention to the ways she is "objectified and repressed" and ultimately "silence[d]" (Falk Jones 7). In order to resist, Lilith "breaks [the] silence" on her lived experiences, which not only highlights how the Oankali/ooloi subject her to gender-based oppression, but also draws attention to the larger systemic injustice of what is happening to her as a woman because the personal is political![8] For example, one day Lilith ventures far from the area

of the ship that she is familiar with to distance herself from the Oankali/ooloi and accidently gets lost. When Kahguyaht – a member of her adopted Oankali/ooloi family – appears to aid her, he silences Lilith by interrupting when she tries to talk. She vehemently refuses to remain silent, insisting, "'We're an adaptable species,' she said, refusing to be stopped, 'but it's wrong to inflict suffering just because your victim can endure it'" (Butler, Dawn 68). She not only disallows Kahguyaht to silence her, but she also takes the opportunity to stand up for herself and inform him that their behavior is cruel to the humans; by refusing to let this moment pass by and allowing the Oankali to believe that their behavior is justified, Lilith actively protests against Kahguyaht's misogynistic behavior. Although speaking out does not grant her freedom from the Oankali/ooloi, she uses her inferior position to resist Kahguyaht's gendered treatment of her by thrusting the injustice of what his species are doing into his purview and effectively silences him. While Lilith does follow him back to their abode, it is abundantly clear that she refuses to remain silent ever again, which is an act of resistance because she constantly uses her voice to "capitalize[s] on her otherness" or marginalized position to highlight the gender-based injustice of her situation (Falk Jones 8). Therefore, "the voices of women in dystopias are doubly powerful, as they rebound from negative silencing into clamorous sound" (Falk Jones 11).

Likewise, Lilith uses her voice to constantly educate the Oankali/ooloi about humans and problematize the way in which the community of Oankali/ooloi operates. When Lilith meets Paul Titus, a man who is living with and amongst the Oankali/ooloi, he tries to seduce Lilith, but when she refuses his advances, he tries to force himself on her, and when she still refuses, he brutally beats her. When Lilith awakens from this attack, she wants to know the extent of her injuries, and Nikanj says, "Did you really need to know, Lilith?" to which she replies: "Yes … It concerned me. I needed to know," and he then says, "I will remember that" (Butler, Dawn 98). After this exchange, Lilith "felt as though she had communicated something important. Finally" (Butler, Dawn 98). This exchange, as well as how Lilith felt about it afterward, demonstrates how important it is to Lilith that humans are not kept in the dark when it comes to choices and information about their bodies. Since Nikanj claims that he will remember this preference, Lilith has made a breakthrough with him, which demonstrates that using one's voice, albeit it subtle and nuanced, can be an effective mode of resistance.

Even though Lilith resists against the Oankali/ooloi by asserting her subjectivity and using her voice, she also resists by inadvertently compelling the aliens to trust her after she helps Nikanj through its metamorphosis.[9] They task her with the responsibility of awakening more humans and integrating them into the Oankali/ooloi way of life on the ship, which she does not want to do. However, Lilith realizes that she can leverage her coerced position as the liaison to resist:

> *There was no escape from the ship. None at all. The Oankali controlled the ship with their own body chemistry. There were no controls that could be memorized or subverted. Even the shuttles that traveled between the Earth and the ship were like extensions of the Oankali bodies. No human could do anything aboard the ship except make trouble and be put back into suspended animation – or be killed. Therefore, the only hope was Earth. Once they were on Earth … they would at least have a chance. That meant they must control themselves, learn all she could teach them, all the Oankali could teach them, then use what they had learned to escape and keep themselves alive.* (Butler, Dawn 117-18)

Lilith learned that obvious resistance strategies are impossible on the ship because the humans cannot manipulate Oankali/ooloi biology or physically overpower them to take command. She has also witnessed how visibly threatening behavior results in being drugged and returned to suspended animation, which means that the individual will sleep forever and not get another chance to resist. Relying on the experience and knowledge she gleaned from living with the Oankali/ooloi, Lilith concludes that the only way to resist the Oankali/ooloi is to work from inside the system by making it seem like she is compliant when she is not to let the Oankali think "they have won [her] over" until she and the remaining humans are permitted to return to Earth (Miller 341). Lilith understands that the humans must be patient and learn all that they can in order to survive on the changed Earth's surface in the Amazonian basin before they can even consider more obvious resistance strategies, such as escape. Through encouraging a different type of resistance that is non-violent, Butler – through Lilith – demonstrates that "perhaps the conventional woman's values of healing, teaching, and sharing are worth upholding, in a non-essential manner, as tools to help work through dystopia" (Miller 344).

5. Closed Ending as Resistance

Even though Dawn is the first novel in the Xenogenesis trilogy, it concludes on a very concrete note because it is the only text in the series that follows Lilith's perspective closely.[10] There is, in other words, no ambiguity in terms of her fate for this segment of her life's journey, which complicates Baccolini's assertion that feminist dystopian texts purposely employ "ambiguous, open-endings" in order to "[reject] the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel" (520). By leaving the conclusion of the novel open, the female character is not oppressed any longer, which suggests that the absence of specificity allows the female character to resist in ways that are not too sentimental or overly optimistic. While Baccolini's theorization applies to many feminist dystopian texts, her argument is not applicable to Butler's Dawn. For example, as the novel works toward its conclusion, Lilith finds out that she will not be joining the other humans in the Amazonian basin, a detail that the Oankali/ooloi did not previously mention. In the midst of telling Lilith she must remain on the ship to continue her position as a liaison between the species, Nikanj asks Lilith, "Is it an unclean thing that we want, Lilith?" and she responds, "Yes!" (Butler, Dawn 245). Butler seems to deploy the exclamation point to suggest that despite her circumstances that have taken away all control, Lilith still chooses not to be silenced or capitulate. After this, Nikanj adds, "Is it an unclean thing that I have made you pregnant?" (Butler, Dawn 245). At first, this news renders Lilith "speechless," but as the news sinks in it also causes her to "stare down at her own body in horror" and to make "a violent effort to get away" (Butler, Dawn 245-46). Nikanj has raped Lilith because he impregnated her without her knowledge or consent, which is deeply upsetting to Lilith who feels violated and wants nothing to do with the Oankali/ooloi, and readers are supposed to "feel extremely uneasy" by what happens to Lilith (Gibney 105). Despite the horror of the situation, Butler is very careful with how she crafts this moment; she uses the word "horror," coupled with "own body," to indicate that Lilith's body, despite losing control of it, is still her own. In the final lines of the chapter, despite her dire and devastating circumstances, Lilith still finds hope and solace in her strategy of working within the system in order to resist it. This solace is not for herself, but for the humanity itself:

She considered resisting, making it drug her and carry her back. But that seemed like a pointless gesture. At least she would get another chance with a human group … Another chance to say, " Learn and run!" She would have more information for them this time. And they would have long,

healthy lives ahead of them. Perhaps they could find an answer to what the Oankali had done to them. And perhaps the Oankali were not perfect. A few fertile people might slip through and find one another. Perhaps. Learn and run! If she were lost, others did not have to be. Humanity did not have to be. (Butler, Dawn 247-48)

Lilith learns that one's capacity to resist does not have to be synonymous with success, but with the ability to choose to survive and fight in the best way that she can. In order to resist, or even have the hope of continuing to resist, she must submit to the Oankali so that she is given another opportunity to teach and guide another group of humans; she will learn from her past mistakes and might even try a different strategy to get the next group more on board so that her plan goes better than it did the first time. Even though she will not be granted holistic freedom, she can exercise resistance in innovative ways, such as teaching. By maintaining hope, and taking what is happening to her in stride, Lilith is not complicit with what is happening to her but resists by trying to hope for a better future for humanity. Butler seems to use a more concrete ending to do several things: one, she uses the feminist dystopian imagination to augment the seriousness of corrupt social structures that thrive on the sacrifice of women's bodies; two, readers cannot interpret Lilith's body and her circumstances as any way but unjust; and three, she demonstrates that even in the darkest and bleakest of circumstances, there are ways to fight back. Lilith still resists at the end of Dawn through choosing to keep fighting even though she knows she will probably never escape.

6. Conclusion

Even though the feminist dystopian genre explores exceedingly dire circumstances for female characters, there is still room for unsentimental hope. Baccolini argues that "utopia is maintained in dystopia, traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story, only outside the story; only by considering dystopia as a warning we readers can hope to escape such a dark future" (520). Zaki, echoing Baccolini's assertion, claims that "the overt pessimism of a specific dystopia is often belied by the covert utopian hope that readers will change the trajectory of their society. Such dystopias, then, are intimately connected to utopias in offering oblique hope to the reader" (244). Critics suggest that there is often no hope for female characters within the story, but there is hope for the individual reading the feminist dystopian text because they do not live in the

same dystopian world as the female protagonist and still have a chance to fight for change in the real world to avoid a similar fate. This assertion, applied to Butler's Dawn, implies that readers of this genre do so in order to be reminded that they should "pay attention"[11] to what is going on in politics. In this view, the value of the feminist dystopian imagination is to scare women into not behaving in such a way that could lead to even further or augmented, patriarchal power.

While this is one potential value of the feminist dystopian imagination, I would also argue that the value of this genre extends beyond scare tactics. In addition, the feminist dystopian genre demonstrates the self-sufficient power of women to resist under the bleakest of circumstances in any way that they can. For example, in the third and final book of the Xenogenesis trilogy, Imago, it is revealed through a conversation with her youngest child, Jodahs, who confronts Lilith about her life, that she never escapes the Oankali/ooloi. Her child realizes this and asks, "You didn't have a choice, did you?" and Lilith replies, "I did, oh, yes. I chose to live" (Butler, Imago 177). At this juncture, the trilogy has come full circle: if Lilith had not decided to survive in Dawn, she could not have reared her offspring in Adulthood Rites and Imago to become more empathetic than the Oankali/ooloi. Specifically, in Adulthood Rites, her first son, Akin – who is a construct child, part-human and part-Oankali/ooloi – becomes aware of the alien's hypocrisy and contradictory personality, which is "both generous and condescending, admiring and dismissive," and marks an epoch in his life where he fights and does not stop fighting for the humans to have their rights back (Miller 340). Without Lilith's parental influence, Akin would not be as empathetic or aware that the relationship between humans and the Oankali/ooloi, or "the relationship between the ruler and ruled is [less than] egalitarian," and the humans would also not have a burgeoning colony on Mars (Zaki 242).

Through choosing to survive and ultimately dedicate her life to resisting in any way that she can, Lilith has discovered a quiet power in her role as a martyr-like figure for humanity. Her choice to live resulted in a lot of personal sacrifice, which seems problematic at first glance; however, as Michelle Green argues, "women make such sacrifices more often than men" because "they refuse the consequences of not being the ones to take action" (182). Although Lilith sacrificed her personal freedom, she still never capitulated because her multiple acts of active resistance persisted against the Oankali/ooloi's problematic ideology throughout the entire Xenogenesis

trilogy. Through more subtle and nuanced modes of resistance, such as refusing to be treated like an object, using her voice, subverting her role as the liaison, rearing her children to be empathetic, etc., Lilith not only liberated humanity as she always wanted, but she also made both species aware of their faults so that they would not reproduce the same problematic behaviors and ideologies of the past. Lilith is an important character because she demonstrates that women can exercise resistance in complex ways from the margins, which can then empower women readers to find their own ways that resist gender-based oppression in complex ways in the real world. The feminist dystopian imagination is powerful since it features women who resist in individual ways because resistance is not a one size fits all, which empowers all types of women.[12] Through different types of resistance, this genre can reach a larger audience of real-world women and empower them to keep fighting.

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[1] Critics frequently discuss resistance in feminist dystopian novels in ways that ignore subtle and nuanced resistance in favor of more obvious resistance. In his examination of The Handmaid's Tale, Allan Weiss poses a series of questions about Offred, the main protagonist, such as: "Is she a valiant rebel challenging the regime's domination and oppression? Or is she a powerless victim of Gilead's oppression? Or is she instead a willing or unwitting participant in the regime?" (120). His questions seem to place her into rigid categories: rebel, victim, willing participant, or unwitting participant, which consequently overlooks the moments in the narrative that represent more complex and nuanced resistance. Like Lilith in Butler's Dawn, Offred cannot exercise resistance in overt ways because she would be removed from society, which is why she must resist in more subtle, nuanced, and even clandestine ways. I am not suggesting that women or female characters cannot resist in obvious ways, or that obvious resistance strategies are inherently masculine. Instead, I am proposing that in a feminist dystopian text, when female characters are so severely restricted and kept under harsh surveillance, their complex circumstances prompt them to rely on more subtle and nuanced resistance strategies to challenge patriarchal ideology and ultimately empower themselves.

[2] When women read feminist dystopian fiction, they are often empowered in real ways to confront gender-based impression and systemic structures of gendered power in the real world. In many countries, women wear the scarlet red cloak and white bonnets from Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, which "has emerged as one of the most powerful current feminist symbols of protest, in a subversive inversion of its association with the oppression of women" (Beaumont and Holpuch). Feminist dystopia has the power to move women to march and protest real-world gender-based oppression.

[3] See Anita Sarkeesian's YouTube video, "Woman as Background: Part II," on her non-profit website, Feminist Frequency. Even though she discusses video games, the tenets of her argument are that replicating a problematic idea is fundamentally different than replicating a problematic idea in order to critique it.

[4] The Xenogenesis "trilogy is set in a post-holocaust future in which the few remaining humans have been rescued from an uninhabitable Earth by an alien race called the Oankali [and ooloi.

They] are ‘gene traders,’ that is, they combine their DNA molecules with the genetic material of whatever races they come into contact with so that each race is changed, in the Oankali [and ooloi] view, for the better” (Wolmark 29). Dawn, the first novel, centers on Lilith Iyapo, an African American woman “who has been chosen by the Oankali [and ooloi] to ‘awaken’ the other survivors of the Holocaust whom the Oankali have rescued and kept alive in organic storage pods” (Wolmark 30). Eventually, Lilith is forced to carry out their colonial mission: to integrate humans into their society.

[5] The relationship between the humans and Oankali/ooloi in Dawn has significant and varying degrees of “totalitarian[ism],” which renders the interplay between these species inequitable because the aliens have the power and the humans do not (Claeys 109). Since one species tries to force another species to conform or accept certain rules and expectations, and the other species does not want to, violence erupts and one species inevitably takes on a dominant presence, forcing the inferior species to bend to their will.

[6] This is a typical pattern in many feminist dystopian texts. In order to resist gendered power, female characters often have to put on a charade of compliance in order to resist it later. If they were to act outwardly resistant, they would be terminated or removed, which would render resistance impossible.

[7] This moment is reminiscent of Althusser’s concept of Repressive State Apparatuses, but in this case, Butler demonstrates how Lilith is not complicit with the Oankali/ooloi, who function as the police within Althusser’s theory, but an active agent who is able to resist being called out and subdued. Furthermore, this moment is equally reminiscent of the argument Gayatri Spivak makes in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, which is that when a woman cannot speak, she can make her body speak for her. Lilith knows that using her voice to tell the Oankali/ooloi to leave her alone will not work; instead, she simply turns her body away, making it clear through her body language that she is resisting their desire to treat her like an object.

[8] See Moraga and Anzaldúa.

[9] As she watches Nikanj, the ooloi who does not have a male or female gender, but is neuter or neutral, begin its metamorphosis, Lilith is “angry, bitter, and frightened,” but when she sees Nikanj

struggling, she makes the conscious decision to “come back. She had not been able to leave Nikanj trembling in its bed while she enjoyed her greater freedom” (Butler, Dawn 102). Lilith put her own desires aside to tend to the ooloi that needed her even when she was not asked to stay and tend to it; in other words, she chooses to do this on her own, which allows her to maintain a sense of humanity that she desperately wants to protect and preserve because it is an integral part of her identity.

[10] The other two books, Adulthood Rites and Imago, follow Lilith’s son Akin, and gender-neutral child, Jhodas.

[11] See The Handmaid’s Tale.

[12] The feminist dystopian imagination does not compel its women readership to fight for their rights in the same way, but to understand that fighting for one’s rights can happen in myriad ways and is entirely dependent on the situation at hand – that is, what seems like a plausible way for one woman to resist might not be plausible for another.

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