

**ALIEN OTHERS: SPECULATIVE HYBRIDS IN IMAGINARY
WORLDS**

by

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Abstract

Hybridity plays a principal role in both J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* and Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, crystallizing in the treatment of the origin of species.

Through these texts I investigate how the generic condition of speculative fiction (SF), in its claims to unreality, opens up an imaginative space in which to excavate hybridity as a site of tension between the concepts of race and species. I draw on the theoretical constructs of hybridity and posthumanism, particularly as formulated by Robert Young in the first case and Cary Wolfe in the second, to argue that these concepts are fundamentally interdependent in post-Enlightenment Western humanism. Both Young and Wolfe show how a tradition of Western humanism has enabled, justified and managed the oppression of both animal and racial Others by casting them as subhuman. Tolkien's and Butler's representations of hybridity are haunted by historical manifestations of this logic; Tolkien's Half Elves are informed by the threat of the Nazi programme of racial purification, and Butler's human-alien hybrids recall a legacy of slavery and a contemporary discourse of genetics. By blurring the boundary between race and species, they expose the fact that race and species are always already mutually constituting. Drawing on Butler's and Tolkien's texts, I argue the importance of integrating an analysis of race into the efforts begun in posthumanist animal studies to build a more honest and ethical way of thinking through the relationship between our species and others.

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Introduction: Hybridity in Speculative Fiction

Hybridity plays a principal role in both J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* and Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis*ⁱ trilogy, crystallizing in the treatment of the origin of speciesⁱⁱ.

Through these texts I investigate how the generic condition of speculative fiction (SF), in its claims to unreality, opens up an imaginative space in which to excavate socio-cultural and political problems that have become naturalized or ossified in "real world"ⁱⁱⁱ

discourses. My aim is to address a tradition of hybrid creatures in speculative fiction that locates a site of ambiguity between the category of human and the category of animal. I am concerned with this tradition because it emerges out of and contributes to an instability between these two categories that has historically been used to dehumanize people on the basis of race, and that continually threatens to do so. Both Tolkien and Butler grapple with this threat, each from their own particular socio-historical subject position. I locate Tolkien's hybrid creatures, and the limits within which they are circumscribed, within the paradoxical anxieties of early twentieth-century Britain. On the one hand, they register considerable anxiety around the maintenance of racial and cultural purity in the wake of accelerating cultural intermixture precipitated by the British imperial project. On the other, Tolkien's hybrid Half-Elves in particular suggest a reaction to the horrors that attend such a programme of purity as evidenced in the rise of Nazi Germany. Butler's hybrids grapple with the history of dehumanization in the transatlantic slave trade and its echoes in contemporary genetic discourse and policy in the United States. Both sets of texts dwell on these sites of friction and anxiety, and in doing so present a striking reminder of the interdependence of the categories of race and species. I draw on the theoretical constructs of hybridity and posthumanism, particularly

as formulated by Robert Young in the first case and Cary Wolfe in the second, to help contextualize this interdependence as endemic in post-Enlightenment Western humanism. In his critique of the sometimes naïve valorization of hybridity in postcolonial theory, Young analyses the deployment of the term since its inception in a Victorian taxonomical ideology that characterized racial Others as animal. Wolfe, in his turn, critiques the very foundation of this taxonomy that casts animals as subhuman, and thus available for human exploitation. Both in their way show with tremendous force how a tradition of Western humanism has enabled, justified and managed what Jacques Derrida calls the “non-criminal putting to death” of the animal (“Eating Well” 278) – both human and otherwise. What needs to be further theorized, however, and what both Butler and Tolkien make apparent, is the persistence of racialization in the construction of the animal. Drawing on Tolkien’s and Butler’s hybrid creatures, I argue that any theory that attempts to remedy the humanist condition of white supremacy *or* human supremacy must seriously engage the relationship between the construction of race and the construction of species, and the fluidity between the two categories. The “question of the animal”^{iv} needs to be brought into a sustained dialogue with the problem of race. To this end, I look to extend the links between postcolonial theoretical work on hybridity and posthumanist animal studies.

1.1 Hybridity and its (Humanist) Discontents

Since Homi Bhabha’s uptake of hybridity^v in *The Location of Culture*, the term has proven a site of both incredible productivity and contestation. In his formulation, the colonial context necessarily brings about a mixing, or overlap, of cultures that becomes

something new, simultaneously engaged with and distinct from the (already impure) cultures that gave it rise. Hybridity, according to this model, is an inevitable product of colonial occupation, and inherently destabilizing to the colonial hierarchy that made it possible. Critics have pointed out that Bhabha's formulation risks overlooking the specificity of hybridity as it operates in varied socio-historical permutations (Ahmad), that its focus on processes of enunciation deemphasizes the materiality and agencies that contribute to its functioning (Parry), that it ignores historical instances in which hybridity has contributed to reinforcing colonial hegemony (Wicomb), and that it deflects the term's racist history (Young). Perhaps as a consequence of the sheer volume of work generated both in celebration and critique of the concept, the term has come to be seen by many as overused and overburdened to the point of aspecificity, uncritical valorization, and political emptiness. Simone Drichel expresses this sentiment, citing claims that "in its privileging of hybridity, the entire field of postcolonialism has been narrowed down to a singular intellectual pursuit," and that "hybridity is now in (ever increasing) danger of being 'fixed' in meaning in postcolonial discussions by becoming the new 'transcendental signified'" (604). Taken for granted as a "presence" rather than a tension and performance, hybridity "falls prey to the metaphysics of presence and becomes yet another ontological fixture, thereby not only losing its ethical promise but also becoming locked into an irresolvable opposition between (ontological) otherness and (ontological) hybridity" (606). Anjali Prabhu worries about the term's increasing haziness, writing that with the interchangeable uptake of the concepts of "diaspora, creolite, creolization, intercultural interaction, transculturation, metissage, or syncretism" it becomes unclear what is being suggested "when referring to processes that are understood to be

hybridizing” (2-3). As she points out, this is a problem since these terms are all rooted in their own socio-historical landscape, and come with their own specific political valences. In my work on race and species in speculative fiction, I am thinking about hybridity within its particular Anglophone, colonial and trans-Atlantic context, its distinctly biological connotations, and its problematic implication in discourses of miscegenation. Robert Young’s critique is especially important to my understanding of its role in a historical struggle over the taxonomical construction of race with respect to species.

In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, Young asks us to consider the legacy of a racist scientific discourse that resonates throughout the history of the word *hybridity*: “In reinvoking this concept, we are utilizing the vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right as much as the notion of an organic process of the grafting of diversity into singularity” (10). In our own iterations of the term, he argues, we cannot help but echo the preoccupation with categorizing and managing difference out of which it developed, and with it a deep anxiety around racial miscegenation (159). Over the course of the book, he demonstrates the term’s deeply racialized and sexualized connotations, tracing its role as a key element in nineteenth-century debates over whether people of different races belonged to one or several species:

It was the increasing vigour with which the racial doctrine of polygenesis was asserted that led to the preoccupation with hybridity in the mid-nineteenth century. This was because the claim that humans were one or several species (and thus equal or unequal, same or different) stood or fell over the question of hybridity, that is, intra-racial fertility. ... What has not been emphasized is that the debates about theories of race in the nineteenth century, by settling on the

possibility or impossibility of hybridity, focused explicitly on the issue of sexuality and the issue of sexual unions between whites and blacks. (9)

In the term hybridity, then, we see how modern biology has intimately linked race and species, and set the two concepts up on a slippery continuum on which one bleeds into the other. Indeed, even the notion that race represents intra-species variety contains within it the Darwinian understanding that the distinction between species is fluid, and thus “there is no essential distinction between species and varieties” (qtd. in Young 11). Both Tolkien’s and Butler’s work provide ample evidence that this notion of race on a biological continuum with species has retained its force into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as becomes clear in the central role that fertility and reproduction play in the origins of their hybrid creatures^{vi}. In his critique, then, Young usefully exposes the problematic blurring of value and anxiety-laden Western scientific taxonomy into contemporary representations of cultural admixture. However, I want to suggest that there is something powerful about even these problematic resonances. As Monika Gagnon argues, the “etymological complexity (of the term “hybridity”) exhibits the contradictory qualities that continue to make it both provocative and useful” (27). While these etymological traces of race, sex, and animalization are cause to remain critically vigilant, the term hybridity does a particular and important kind of work precisely to the extent that it keeps them within view. It is charged with the contestation and interdependence that have attended the construction of race and of species taxonomies, and it should. It should serve as a reminder to stay alive to the conditions in which these categories were made and to guard against their naturalization. Beyond this important descriptive function, however, its invocation of a discourse of species offers a point of

engagement with what remains largely unexamined in postcolonial theory; that is, the question of the animal. In identifying hybridity as a site of slippage between race and species, Young therefore shines a light on an important but repressed site of its potential. While he is right to see the animal in hybridity as a site of danger and compromise, I think it also needs to be recognized as a possible point of departure. In its slippery ambiguity, the concept of hybridity offers a valuable site at which to begin thinking about what the long history of racialized dehumanization can bring to a changing conception of the human and the animal.

There is, of course, a very good reason for why the question of the animal has not been embraced in postcolonial theories of cultural hybridity; this is the field, after all, that has concerned itself with illuminating the vicious colonial strategy of animalizing racial others in order to justify exploitation and oppression. The struggle against colonial power, then, has in large part focused on resisting this dehumanization of colonized people, indeed insisting on their humanity. This work has had, and continues to have, immeasurable importance in the lives of racialized people, and the need for it is still very pressing. It is also something, though, that a number of critics who fall (willing or not) within the bounds of what is being called posthumanism, are trying to unsettle.^{vii} More precisely, I am referring to a range of posthumanist work that deals in particular with how animals are conceptualized, produced, and managed by humanist thought and how we might begin to reimagine the relationship between humans and animals. The works of Donna Haraway, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, and Cary Wolfe strike me as especially powerful examples of this kind of thinking. These authors, among others, remind us that the power of dehumanization to debase is predicated on a system that casts

the *unhuman* as *subhuman*. Haraway makes this link in her discussion of the word “species” in *When Species Meet*: “The discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal – all reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution – is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism” (18). Agamben captures this problem somewhat differently in what he calls the “anthropological machine” (33-39), a term that describes the discursive practices with which humanism produces and polices the boundary between self and other. In the figure of the machine, Agamben illuminates the fluid and arbitrary nature of the qualities taken to determine who is and who is not human. The category of the “human being,” then, is not the innocent, natural category that humanist modes of thought make it out to be; rather, it is constantly being remade to accommodate an evolving understanding of both animals and technology in order to preserve the set of privileges, exemptions and ethical considerations to which humans (whoever that may be according to whoever has the power to decide) are exclusively entitled.

While all the above texts will continue to inform my discussion of species, I engage in particular with Wolfe’s *Animal Rites* and *What is Posthumanism*. These texts are the focus of my attention for a number of reasons. First, they primarily and consistently concern the question of the animal – or, as Derrida proposes in order to highlight the heterogeneity of animal life and the constructedness of animality, the *animot* (*The Animal* 41). Second, Wolfe explicitly takes on the term *posthumanism*, and actively tries to intervene in how the concept is conceived. I admire the care he takes with this term, and his definitions of both humanism and posthumanism serve as guides throughout my own project. I begin, then, as he does, with an understanding of humanism

as a set of ideologies that share a few core principles. These principles have been deployed in vastly different ways and to different ends, as Foucault points out in his efficient historical overview of the concept:

In the seventeenth century there was a humanism that presented itself as a critique of Christianity or of religion in general; there was a Christian humanism opposed to an ascetic and much more theocentric humanism. In the nineteenth century there was a suspicious humanism hostile and critical toward science and another that to the contrary placed its hope in that same science. Marxism has been a humanism; so have existentialism and personalism; there was a time when people supported the humanistic values represented by National Socialism and when the Stalinists themselves said they were humanists. (“What is Enlightenment?” n.p.)

Despite this impressive flexibility, however, Wolfe begins his introduction to *What is Posthumanism* with a definition of humanism (from Wikipedia no less!) on which, he asserts, all these varieties can more or less agree:

Humanism is a broad category of ethical philosophies that affirm the dignity and worth of all people, based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appeal to universal human qualities – particularly rationality. ... [It] entails a commitment to the search for truth and morality through human means in support of human interests. ... Humanists endorse universal morality based on the commonality of the human condition, suggesting that solutions to human social and cultural problems cannot be parochial. (xi)

As Foucault suggested, it is important to recognize the diversity of ideologies encompassed within the category of humanism, with their arrestingly different goals,

political bent, and ends. Humanism has proved a crucial tool in civil rights gains and solidarity building, and has also been used to justify colonialism, war, and genocide. In spite of this variety, however, it always centres on the notion of humanity: a category that can be delineated by an identifiable characteristic and that entails a particular set of ethical considerations. Thus, while two different humanisms, and their associated definition of the “human,” can look very different, the underlying principle remains the same. The problem with this fundamental schema, according to Wolfe, is that regardless of the standard used to define humanity and regardless of intention, humanism always assumes and relies on a speciesist binary that casts the human as exclusively deserving of moral and ethical consideration. This position, he argues, is logically and philosophically untenable, since as Carl Elliot points out “Our moral attitudes are not *grounded* by a theory of persons; they are *built into our language*. Part of what we mean by the word ‘person’ entails a certain moral attitude” (qtd. in *What is Posthumanism* 56). Thus, human exceptionalism can and does persist even as we are forced to concede that “the traditionally distinctive marks of the human (first it was possession of a soul, then ‘reason,’ then tool use, then tool *making*, then altruism, then language, then the production of linguistic *novelty*, and so on) flourish quite reliably beyond the species barrier” (*Animal Rites* 2). Beyond these philosophical problems, however, Wolfe is concerned about the implications of human exceptionalism for those relegated to the Other side of the binary, who are then *not* entitled to the same ethical consideration and very often vulnerable to abject exploitation. The failure to address this critical issue in much of the political and ethical work produced in the humanities constitutes a major

problem for Wolfe, and he positions his own as a remedy. He opens *Animal Rites* with the claim that the field of cultural studies is guilty of

a fundamental repression ... of the question of nonhuman subjectivity. ... This means, to put a finer point on it, that debates in the humanities and social sciences between well-intentioned critics of racism, (hetero)sexism, classism, and all other –isms that are the stock-in-trade of cultural studies almost always remain locked within an unexamined framework of *speciesism*. (1)

Both *Animal Rites* and *What is Posthumanism* consider in detail various iterations of this repression, as in his critique of Bhabha's formulation of mimicry. While he finds this notion of ambivalent mimicry that produces a "difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86) useful in theorizing the points of intersection and interaction between colonial discourses and discourses of species, he ultimately characterizes it as inadequate to the task of addressing the problem of species difference – something that "strikes (him) as an important lacuna in any critique of colonialism." Wolfe sees the root of this problem – what he calls Bhabha's "residual humanism" – in the exclusive preoccupation with the textual and enunciative (*Animal Rites* 188). For Bhabha, the subversive possibilities of mimicry emerge out of imperfect reiterations: the foreign element introduced in each act of cultural translation that ironizes and exposes the instability of the 'original' (which is itself always already a performance and fabrication) (227). What happens, though, to the unspeaking other? Wolfe suggests that in venerating the "performativity of (cultural) translation," Bhabha risks fusing, "under the figure of the 'human,' the right not to be colonized with the ability to engage in 'cultural translation'" (188-9). In order to address this inadequacy, Wolfe argues for the need to develop a

fundamentally different, posthumanist way of thinking about ethics and justice. The place to begin this work, he suggests, lies in the vulnerability that we share with nonhuman others – a vulnerability that destabilizes the boundaries not only between “human and animal but also between the organic and the mechanical or technological” (*What is Posthumanism* 90). Human *and* animal experience, he says, is characterized by limitation and incapacity in two important senses: first in what he calls the “not being able” (88) of our bodies, and second in the limitations imposed and circumscribed by communication. We are limited not only by our mortality and physical vulnerability, but also in the way that we are shaped, determined, and subject to the prosthetic of language: “the materiality and technicity of a language that is always on the scene before we are, as a precondition of our subjectivity” (89). Attending to these vulnerabilities, Wolfe argues, provides a way of understanding our connection to nonhumans (also limited by their bodies and by their communicative systems), and of better understanding our own ontology. His posthumanism is therefore neither a denial of such a thing as the human, nor is it concerned with transcending the limitations of the human. The following passage provides a useful summary of his project, and serves as a guide as I try to think through the posthuman in the hybrid:

Posthumanism... actually enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection, and so on. It forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens*

itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of “bringing forth a world” – ways that are, since we ourselves are human *animals*, part of the evolutionary history and behavioral and psychological repertoire of the human itself. But it also insists that we attend to the specificity of the human – its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing – by ... acknowledging that it is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically “not-human” and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is. (*What is Posthumanism* xxv)

Just as this posthumanist approach enables a better understanding of the “specificity of the human,” it also enables a clearer understanding of systems of oppression exercised against other humans. While the consequences of institutionalized speciesism fall disproportionately on animals, Wolfe suggests, humans are also subject to its logic: once the ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of animals based solely on their species” (*Animal Rites* 7) becomes acceptable, the same ethical no-man’s land can then be applied to “other *humans* as well by marking *them* as animal” (43). Here Wolfe echoes an argument put forward by animal rights advocates as far back as Peter Singer. Indeed, the first chapter of Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, the foundational text that popularized the term *speciesism*, is titled “All Animals are Equal, or Why Supporters of Liberation for Blacks and Women Should Support Animal Liberation Too” (1).^{viii} While I appreciate the force of this argument – indeed, it is part of what motivates this project – I worry about its use as a mere rhetorical strategy in texts that take up the animal question. Wolfe’s work is particularly symptomatic of this tendency. While he continually relies on the history of

racism to support his arguments against ethnocentric speciesism, his engagement with race ends there. This stems, I imagine, from the desire to do justice to the animal question that has for so long been absent from analyses of oppression in the humanities. I respect this impulse to focus squarely on the animal, but I am concerned about the implicit assumptions that have, I think, contributed to a lack of serious engagement with race in the posthumanist animal project in general.^{ix} The final reason that I focus in particular on Wolfe's posthumanism is that he explicitly articulates a sentiment that I suspect lies behind this gap. In his contention that the question of the animal needs to be confronted in its specificity, and beyond what it means for humans, race becomes just one term in the ever-expanding scope of a humanist politics of inclusion. Racism, in turn, becomes more or less a thing of the past, or at least sufficiently de-bunked to be used as a convenient absurdity. Thus, he claims,

... the full force of animal studies – what makes it not just another flavor of ‘fill in the blank’ studies on the model of media studies, film studies, women’s studies, ethnic studies, and so on – is that it fundamentally unsettles and refigures the question of the knowing subject and the disciplinary paradigms and procedures that take for granted its form and reproduce it. (*Animal Rites* xxix)

Elsewhere, however, he follows Paola Cavalieri in countering speciesist ethnocentrism by allowing race to stand in for species, simply “plug[ging] in” (*What is Posthumanism* 59) one term for another. All you have to do, he suggests, to see that a speciesist claim is “ethically pernicious,” is replace the word “species” with “race,” as Cavalieri does with a passage by Robert Nozick:

...the members of any species may legitimately give their fellows more weight than they give members of other species...

But what is revealed about this position, Cavalieri asks, if we plug in other terms instead?

...the members of any race may legitimately give their fellows more weight than they give members of other race... (*What is Posthumanism* 59-60, quoting Nozick)

Wolfe and Cavalieri take it on faith that their reader will share with them the sense that such an argument, when race is the operative term, is despicable. In this argument, however, Wolfe denies what he elsewhere affirms – first that race and species are *not* equivalent, and second that racism has never gone away. What I want to emphasize is that racism operates in the very speciesism he is trying to dismantle. If the construction of Blackness is shaped by the humanist construction of animality, the construction of animality relies too on a deeply entrenched racist vision of the primitive and the subhuman. While humanism may be inadequate to the task of a true anti-racism, it has produced real changes for the better in the lives of racialized people. I worry, then, about the role that race will, or will not, play in shaping a posthumanist orientation to the *animot*, given the vulnerability of those humans most particularly subject to animalization. Wolfe is quite right to suggest that “traditionally marginalized peoples [might] be skeptical about calls by academic intellectuals to surrender the humanist model of subjectivity, with all its privileges, at just the historical moment when they are poised to ‘graduate’ into it” (*Animal Rites* 7). He aims to mitigate this skepticism by pointing to the fact that “marginalized peoples” are especially vulnerable to a humanist

framework that can always cast the social other as subhuman. But given that the framework of humanism has also facilitated concrete and radical improvements in the lives of many marginalized people, it is not enough to simply gesture at this vulnerability. Indeed, anti-racist struggle grounded in a humanist model of rights has made it possible for Wolfe to take the absurdity of racism for granted. What Young has shown about how the instability of the human/animal binary has been used in racial oppression serves as a valuable reminder of the need to remain conscious of race in posthumanist attempts to destabilize and refigure these categories. After all, there is more at stake for some humans than for others. The idea behind my project, then, is that these two discourses need to confront each other in a sustained and careful praxis. Wolfe's vision of posthumanism emphasizes the need to recognize a vulnerability shared by all life – indeed all matter – and for marginalized groups to recognize their unique vulnerability to the institution of speciesism. He wants to insist that postcolonial models of oppression take account of the oppression of animals. Postcolonial work on hybridity, however, shows the extent to which race is always at work in the construction of animality. Young's analysis of the word "hybridity," showing how hybrids have historically been constructed as the mechanism through which species are shaped and maintained, serves to remind us that the construct of the animal relies on the construct of race as well as the other way around. I will argue that the tradition of hybrid creatures in speculative fiction offers a highly fruitful place to bring these discourses together. Both Tolkien's and Butler's hybrid origin stories highlight that if racism is always already speciesism, as Wolfe insists, we also need to acknowledge that racialized people have always been, and continue to be, animal.^x

1.2 The Hauntings of Humanism in *The Silmarillion* and *Xenogenesis*

There are a number of striking similarities in the way that Butler frames hybridization in her *Xenogenesis* trilogy to the way that Tolkien does in his marriage of Elves and Men. Each case brings two distinctly different humanoid groups together in a union that provides one group with new beneficial characteristics and the other with an otherwise impossible longevity.^{xi} In the union of Tolkien's Elves and Men, both gain something invaluable from the exchange: the Elves leave a lineage in Middle Earth that lives beyond their exile, and Men gain the art of poetry and the vague quality of "ennoblement" (*Letters* 194). Hybridity in this case is not only productive, but also necessary. In the post-apocalyptic "gene trade" that Butler stages between humans and the extra-terrestrial species called Oankali, humans gain a rehabilitated earth as well as remarkable enhancements in their physical and intellectual abilities. In exchange, the Oankali gain access to greater genetic variability and flexibility that they crave and need. In both cases, the process of hybridization is tensely and painfully set against the presence of colonial power and speciesist exploitation. Neither author rejects humanism outright – both are clearly invested in a humanist tradition. But they do register a profound sense of its dangers for both humans and animals. Tolkien is in many ways committed to a Christian humanism that imagines a fundamental, linguistic bifurcation between Man and animal, and that envisions Man as master and steward of the animal world. Likewise, he is deeply caught up in colonial fantasies of white supremacy and purity. However, his work is also haunted by a consciousness of these ideologies at work in the discourse of racial purity that he watched convulse Europe with the rise of the Nazis. His hybrids register the

anxiety that, in the words of Césaire, the bourgeois humanist of the twentieth century, by virtue of his complicity in the hierarchical construction of race and nation, “has a Hitler inside him” (n.p.) I suggest that the interactions among Elves and Men reflect both a desire for purity and a sense of the dangers of cherishing the pure; likewise, Tolkien disrupts and displaces human exceptionalism even as he attempts to compartmentalize and reinforce the qualities of “human nature.”

Butler, in her turn, engages with the legacy of colonialism and liberal humanism in an American context. Hybridity plays out in a way that is painfully ambivalent and often ugly, reflecting the power struggles of the colonial contact zone and the troubled spectre of miscegenation. In its preoccupation with a power struggle that revolves around sex and breeding, the trilogy calls up the politics of rape, miscegenation, and eugenics that converge on the bodies of women of colour throughout America’s history of slavery and eugenics policies. While it is tempting to figure the human-Oankali exchange as an allegory for colonialism or American race relations, such a reading becomes untenable as the trilogy progresses. In many ways, the Oankali worldview resonates with a kind of utopic posthumanism. Their worldview centers on a fundamental valuation of life in all forms. Animal and plant species alike are precious to them, not only because they are useful, but also because the Oankali understand life in and of itself as “a thing of inexpressible value.” Thus, their decision to sterilize all humans who choose not to participate in the gene trade is based on their inability to allow them to “destroy [themselves] a second time” (*Adulthood Rites* 470). The irony here (to the Oankali all living things have a fundamental right to life, but apparently not liberty) powerfully destabilizes a liberal humanism that assigns the rights to life and liberty to those who

qualify as members of the human species, according to whatever standards are deemed expedient. As the human perspective in *Xenogenesis* overlaps and blurs with that of the Oankali, the reader becomes increasingly suspicious that Butler hasn't picked a side. While she never mitigates the outrage of the Oankali's total suppression of human agency, neither does she mitigate the fact that the humans' resistance to the gene trade is rooted in "A true xenophobia" (*Dawn* 23). In doing so, Butler profoundly destabilizes the act of categorization that delineates what is or is not human.

1.3 Speculative Fiction – Terms, Concepts, Potentialities

I end my introductory comments by clarifying what I mean by speculative fiction and laying out a language for distinguishing between the imaginary world within the text and the "real" world. The definition of SF, a genre elastic enough to encompass such diverse forms as science fiction, fantasy, horror, and magic(al) realism (Batty and Markley 6), is problematic. This distinction between the real and the unreal, as that between nonfiction, fiction, and *speculative* fiction, is even more so (Batty and Markley; Canavan and Wald). Diana Paulin's work on surrogacy provides a useful apparatus with which to approach these problems. In her analysis of *The White Slave* and *An Imperative Duty*, two Reconstruction era texts from the American South, Paulin looks at the process of substitution that the authors use to represent interracial unions in the face of violent repression of interracial desire: "Surrogacy describes multiple levels of substitution in representations – white bodies standing in for black ones, romantic relationships standing in for social conflicts or even the past standing in for the present – that trouble the identities and subjects they depict as well as those they indirectly invoke" (417-418). In

the same way that Elves, Orcs, or aliens in SF indirectly invoke the fraught dynamics of hybridity, the texts that Paulin examines exchange the threat of Black bodies with the benign intrigue of the racially ambiguous white-skinned woman. In doing so, they “engage the issue of interracial desire while attempting to minimize the threat that it posed ... to white supremacy, southern and northern unity, the maintenance of racial purity, and the segregation of the black and white populations” (420). However, the exchange is always imperfect. Paulin uses the analytical frame of performativity to conceptualize how this imperfection works: the surrogate rehearses but can never replace the thing that it invokes. Because it is a performance, the surrogate is slippery and elusive, taking on a variety of roles and meanings throughout the narrative (421); the racially ambiguous characters in *The White Slave* and *An Imperative Duty* therefore perform the various roles of “mediators, surrogates, representatives of different racial categories” as each narrative progresses.

This notion of the surrogate helps to disentangle the relationship between speculative fiction and “reality.” By definition, fantasy simultaneously falls short of and exceeds our expectations of reality, and fantasy worlds are compelling precisely because they are both familiar and alien, home and not home. This becomes clear in the hybrid figures that populate *The Silmarillion* and *Xenogenesis*, who, despite powerfully evoking the concepts of race and of species, cannot be fully accounted for by either. I do not expect them to be explained by or contained within the framework of hybridity; they are inescapably bound to it, however. In this tension between reproducing and eluding reality, they “reformulate culture” as Paulin’s surrogates do: contextualizing, complicating, and revising “historically sedimented identities, sites, and events” (418),

and in doing so, they start to expose the fantasies in which “reality” is embedded in the first place.

While the difference between SF and realist fiction is largely a matter of generic convention, this convention does matter. This is because SF both relies on a perceived distance from the “real world,” and works to destabilize the assumptions that maintain such a distance. However destabilizing a text may be, SF is by definition otherworldly. This quality of difference, paired with a close rapport with popular culture, makes the genre uniquely well suited for my research purposes. By distancing their imaginary worlds from the political and ideological stakes of the “real” one, Butler and Tolkien gain access to a provisional and unthreatening space in which to dismantle and reformulate taxonomical dicta regarding race and species. This distance in turn makes the threat of instability palatable and available for popular consumption.

I need a language, then, to distinguish between what is considered to be possible in the world the author inhabits as against what is possible in the world she creates. For the purposes of my inquiry, I provisionally define speculative fiction by two criteria: first by the development of an Other world in which distinct rules and possibilities operate, and second by its connotation of a diverse and popular audience. To avoid getting mired in problematic claims about reality and possibility, I use Tolkien’s distinction between “Primary” and “Secondary” worlds (“On Fairy Stories”). These terms usefully parse the world inhabited by the author and the reader from that created by the author and accepted by the reader to be Other, with its own set of laws and consequences.

2. Origin Myths and Race Wars: Of Elves, Men, Orcs, and Animals

Learn now the lore of Living Creatures!

First name the four, the free peoples:

Eldest of all the elf-children;

Dwarf the delver, dark are his houses;

Ent the earthborn, old as mountains;

Man the mortal, master of horses:

...

Beaver the builder, buck the leaper,

Bear bee-hunter, boar the fighter;

Hound is hungry, hare is fearful...

- *Treebeard, in Tolkien's The Two Towers*

The Silmarillion lends itself particularly well to an investigation of taxonomy and hybridity in that it self-consciously presents the origin stories that shape the geopolitical conditions of Middle Earth. In it, Tolkien traces the lineage of the creatures that populate his Secondary World with a minuteness verging on the obsessive, and that betrays a deeply conservative attachment to the idea of hierarchically-coded bloodlines. I want to suggest that the hybrid Half-Elves represent a point of instability in this overarching conservatism, at which anxieties around the dangers of cherishing purity erupt. Before I address this point of openness, though, it is important to address the extent to which *The Silmarillion* betrays a commitment to humanist and imperialist notions of pure difference.

Hybridity in Middle Earth registers contemporary anxieties around the rapid acceleration of communication, migration, and cultural interpenetration around the globe and nostalgia for a diminishing British empire. Within the construction of English identity as a colonizing culture, Young locates a parallel process of self-reification alongside an acute sense of lack. It is to this lack, he argues, that we can attribute the manifest desire for otherness in the literature rooted in English colonial culture. Thus:

If we consider the English novel, we find that what is portrayed as characterizing English experience is rather often the opposite, a sense of fluidity and a painful sense of, or need for, otherness. Perhaps the fixity of identity for which Englishness developed such a reputation arose because it was in fact continually being contested, and was rather designed to mask its uncertainty, its sense of being estranged from itself, sick with desire for the other. ... This transmigration is the form taken by colonial desire, whose attractions and fantasies were no doubt complicit with colonialism itself. (2-3)

This point provides a useful framework within which to read Tolkien's work, which in its reactionary attachment to notions of national and racial purity openly betrays a conflicted impulse that both denigrates and desires otherness. Indeed, as Tolkien expresses in a letter sent to his editor, Milton Waldman, it was out of this painful sense of the emptiness of English national identity that *The Silmarillion* emerged:

I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands.

...

... I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend ...
which I could dedicate simply to: to [sic] England; to my country. It should
possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent
of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither
parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and ... it should be
'high', [sic] purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long
now steeped in poetry. (*Letters* 144-5)

It is easy to see the national boundary-making at work in the myths and histories that
make up *The Silmarillion* and *The War of the Ring*, and the current body of Tolkien
criticism offers a number of excellent analyses of the ways in which these boundaries are
conceived (Chance, "Tolkien and the Other"; Eaglestone; Fimi; Kocher; Shippey). Tom
Shippey puts it succinctly when he writes, "Tolkien wanted to re-create a timeless and
idealized England (or rather Britain) in which the place and the people remained the same
regardless of politics" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 98). Likewise, a good deal of work has
been done to unpack the apparent processes of racial othering that shape the geography
and political structure of Middle Earth. Niels Werber, for example, discussing the racial
politics of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, compares the geo- and biopolitics of Middle
Earth, and the construction of the Orc as an Absolute Foe, to the ideological programme
of the Third Reich. While I will argue that the representation of race in Tolkien's work is
not as straightforward as Werber suggests, the link he draws between Tolkien's absolute
othering of the Orcs and the Nazi ideology of total warfare presents an important
reminder to stay alive to the preoccupation with purity that shapes Tolkien's Secondary

World. Referencing German political theorist Carl Schmitt, Werber's analyses of the dehumanization of the Other is very much to the point:

Because "we" are human and "our" aims just, the foe is construed as inhuman and his causes judged unjust. The "inhuman" enemy deserves neither pity nor lawful treatment, but instant death. Such punishment can be counted neither as murder in civil law nor as a war crime in international law because an inhuman "other" does not enjoy any human rights. The absolute enemy is counted as a "sheer body" or "naked life." (232)

In his lecture on the development of a modern conception of race and race war, Foucault locates this reduction of the racial Other to "sheer body" in a conceptual turn that reimagines difference not as the product of historical circumstance, but rather a struggle between biologically distinct species. Inter-group conflict becomes about not language and culture, but "a struggle in the biological sense: the differentiation of species, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest species" (*Society Must Be Defended* 80). With the emergence of scientific racism, the racial Other is "permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the (biologically monist) social body" (61) and thus must constantly be purged and expelled; any possibility of peace or reconciliation is out of the question. Werber points out the parallels between this conception of total war and Tolkien's "eternal war" between Elves and Orcs, for whom "warfare is their 'natural' destiny" (Werber 232). In order to accept the Elves' agenda of complete annihilation, we must accept the Orcs' irredeemable debasement and inhumanity. That Tolkien envisions this dehumanization along racial terms becomes chillingly clear in a letter in which he objects to an animated film script's representation of Orcs as having beaks and feathers: "The Orcs are definitely

stated to be corruptions of the ‘human’ form seen in Elves and Men. They are ... squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types” (*Letters* 274). In this rather breathtaking statement, Tolkien articulates the precise kind of othering that he wants to mobilize, insisting that his Orcs be seen as inhuman *not* because they are animal, but because of their racialization.

The construction of the animal in *The Silmarillion* is not innocent, however. Overlapping with the biological humanism that Young and Foucault describe, Tolkien also works within a Christian humanism that sees language as the lacuna that divides the human from the animal, and that endows humanity with free will against the animal’s servitude. Theologian John P. Bequette’s discussion of the values of Christian humanism provides a useful framework with which to engage Tolkien’s work. For Bequette, the ideal of Man hinges on the capacity for self-knowledge. Drawing on Saint Augustine’s notion of the image of Man made in the image of God, the uniquely human capacity for a relationship with God is rooted in the intellect, reason, and self-knowledge. This capacity for reason in turn relies on the capacity for language. As Derrida reminds us, Adam first exercises his dominion over animals in Genesis by naming them, and thus subjecting them to language (*The Animal* 15-18). God brought forth the world through the power of the word, and Man is made in His image. In the naming of the animals, language becomes the characteristic that places Man in the realm of intellect, knowledge, and power, as against dumb, unknowing animality.

This sense of the exceptional and deific quality of language structures representations of difference throughout *The Silmarillion*. As a committed philologist,

Tolkien's first concern was with language, and as Shippey notes, it was out of his concern for the differences encoded in language that the whole geographical breadth and historical depth of his secondary world was born:

the real root [of *The Silmarillion* and all that came out of it] was the relationship between them [the Elf languages] with all the changes of sound and semantics which created two mutually-incomprehensible languages from one original root, and the whole history of separation and different experience which those changes implied. (*The Road to Middle Earth* 230-1)

Beyond structuring difference between the peoples of Middle Earth, language determines who counts as a person. The privileging of language as the locus of knowledge, reason, and free will is embedded in the division of the “free peoples” from the animals – by implication the “unfree *nonpeoples*” – of Middle Earth. The list of free peoples that Treebeard enumerates in *The Two Towers* includes Elves, Ents, Men, Dwarves, and Hobbits. While the common interpretation of the term “free peoples” is that it refers to the creatures who have chosen the “right” side of the fight against Morgoth and Sauron, this definition is not totally accurate, given the fact that animals, plants, and even rivers and mountains, align themselves along the axis of good and evil. What the free peoples have in common is speech. Though not all speaking people are free, then, language is a prerequisite for freedom in the first place.

2.1 Imaginary Genealogies

There are profounder wishes: such as the desire to converse with other living things. On this desire, as ancient as the Fall, is largely founded the talking of

beasts and creatures in fairy tales, and especially the magical understanding of their proper speech. A vivid sense of that separation [of humans from animals] is very ancient; but also a sense that it was a severance: a strange fate and a guilt lies on us. Other creatures are like other realms with which Man has broken off relations, and sees now only from the outside at a distance, being at war with them, or on the terms of an uneasy armistice.

...

As far as our Western, European world is concerned this 'sense of separation' has in fact been attacked and weakened in modern times not by fantasy but by scientific theory. Not by stories of centaurs or werewolves or enchanted bears, but by the hypotheses, (or dogmatic guesses) of scientific writers who classed Man not only "as an animal" – that correct classification is ancient – but as "only an animal."

- Tolkien "On Fairy Stories"

We have, then, two humanisms at work in *The Silmarillion* that overlap and bump up against each other, and that are in many ways incompatible. On the one hand, we see the construction of the human as an animal, engaged in the animal struggle for survival and domination. On the other, Tolkien is invested in a vision of the human as a whole and incorruptible category, unambiguously differentiated from animals by language. These two conceptions of humanity in its relationship to animality interact throughout the *Silmarillion* in a way that is often unpredictable and unsettled, as in the linguistic divisions that trace the boundaries *within* the free peoples. Dimitra Fimi notes how

biological models of race have long worked in concert with philological models: "Backed by such influential philologists as Franz Bopp, Darwin claimed that an accurate genealogical classification of the races of man would allow the best categorization of the languages they spoke" (138). While this concept of language as race had by Tolkien's time mostly given way to a distinction between language as culture and race as biology, Fimi argues, Tolkien never fully relinquishes the connection between the two. Here, we begin to see how Tolkien's desire for "a mythology for England,"^{xii} and by extension a mythology in English, is positioned on the point at which, in Foucault's terms, "the theme of binary society which is divided into two races or two groups with different languages, laws, and so on will be replaced by ... the idea of racial purity, with all its monistic, Statist, and biological implications" ("*Society Must Be Defended*" 80-1). In this point of intersection, language is precariously positioned somewhere between history and biology – not a stable abyss, but a shifting and mutating, and thus untrustworthy, axis of difference.

The tension between these visions of the human emerges with striking clarity in the two passages from "On Fairy Stories" that serve as the epigraph to this section. In his discussion of the trope of talking animals in fairy tales, Tolkien betrays a profound discomfort with the notion of the animal as absolute Other, and describes the experience of total alienation from animals as deeply wounding. Arguing that the device of magic provides a way of contemplating the "proper speech," of animals he seems to acknowledge that writers of fairy tales are not inventing the possibility of an animal with a voice, but only inventing the possibility of understanding it. In denying the subjectivity that we can sense, but see only "from the outside at a distance," (22) we bind ourselves in

a perpetual state of severance and antagonism. In a note attached to this passage, however, Tolkien reveals his discomfort with the notion of the human as “only an animal,” (27) not exceptional in any ethical or metaphysical way. One reason for this discomfort is that it is incompatible with the Christian humanism that I discuss above. I want to suggest, however, that this discomfort also registers the sense that conceiving people as different from animals in *degree* rather than *kind* enables the sort of dehumanization that Nazism made impossible to ignore. Even inasmuch as Tolkien’s work takes up a discourse of racial purity and total war against the racial other, it also betrays an anxiety about the dangers of such a discourse. This conflicted quality of his body of legend echoes, almost comically, what Aime Cesaire identifies as the suspicion haunting the twentieth century bourgeois humanist that,

Hitler is his *demon*... what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, ... it is the crime against the white man ... and the fact that he applied to Europe the colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the Coolies of India, and the Blacks of Africa. (n.p. emphasis in original)

This tortured conflict is very clear in Tolkien’s letters. In one breath he can wax nostalgic for an untainted mythology for England, or insist that the Orcs’ inhumanity resembles the “least lovely Mongol-types.” In another, though, he anxiously distances himself from the claim that “Middle-Earth ... corresponds spiritually to Nordic Europe,” writing “Not *Nordic*, please! A word I particularly dislike; it is associated ... with racialist theories” (*Letters* 375). This conflict emerges, too, at points in *The Silmarillion* where the humanisms that structure Tolkien’s thinking about purity chafe against each other and

start to unravel. The hybrid Half-Elves become particularly interesting in this context of conflict and anxiety. To understand the truly destabilizing implications of the Half-Elves, though, it is important to understand the rigidity of the system of purity they unsettle.

All of Tolkien's creatures are positioned on a complex but apparent hierarchy, the top of which is occupied by the Elves. The first of the free peoples to be created, they are called the "First Born" (*Silmarillion* 7) of the Tolkienian God. Their superiority in the Tolkienian pecking-order comes not only from their seniority in Middle Earth: they are also inherently wiser, more beautiful, more creative, and more "noble" (*Letters* 176). Fittingly, they are the first creatures to introduce language into the world, and indeed define themselves *by* language against all other creatures: "Themselves they named the Quendi, signifying those that speak with voices; for as yet they had met no other living things that spoke or sang" (*Silmarillion* 45). However, not all Elves are made equal. While they share a common origin, the Elves become separated through a long series of events into different kinds, distinguished by language and cultivation. There are "High Elves" and there are "Lesser Elves," and even these categories are hierarchically subdivided. As Shippey points out, this hierarchy motivates much of the conflict throughout *The Silmarillion*, arguing that "the central tragedy of the Nolder (a branch of the High Elves) is... a tragedy of mixed bloodlines" (*Road to Middle Earth* 248). While Elves differ fundamentally from Men, therefore, their internal divisions also play a crucial role in determining what happens in Middle Earth.

Men are born centuries after the Elves, and are also subject to complex subdivisions. They enter Middle Earth from the East already divided into separate linguistic groups. The first to come are from the Three Houses of Hador, Beor, and

Haleth. These are the only Men to play any significant role on the “good” side of the fight against Morgoth, and provide the stock out of which all the Men who matter in the *legendarium*^{xiii} come. Indeed, these are the only Men who are really considered to deserve to be called Man:

Since in Beleriand for a long time the only Men known to the Noldor and Sindar [Elves] were those of the Three Houses of the Elf-friends, this name ... became specially associated with them, so that it was seldom applied to other Men who came later to Beleriand, or who were reported to be dwelling beyond the Mountains. (*Silmarillion* 381)

While other, "Swarthy Men" (*Silmarillion* 157), come later, they are effectively undifferentiated, almost universally already co-opted by the enemy, and play only a peripheral role throughout the *legendarium*. Fimi draws the obvious parallels between the Swarthy Men who come out of the East and English colonial constructions of the racial Other. Indeed, he points out that Tolkien's Three Houses of Men parallels the contemporaneous theory of "the three races of Europe" espoused by Madison Grant in the early twentieth century (145). By the end of *The Silmarillion*, the blood of Men is differentiated through various means into "High," "Middle," and "Wild." Without fail, the better quality of Man comes exclusively from High stock that has been least tainted by intermixture with other, “lesser” Men. As Werber points out, the significance of these bloodlines crucially affects major plot points in *The Lord of the Rings*, which is set centuries after the events of *The Silmarillion*: “To return from exile as a victorious king, for instance, is Aragorn's fate because it is his heritage, passed down from his ancestors to him through thousands of years of strict intraethnic, ‘pure’ breeding” (230). In the case

of both Elves and Men, therefore, lineage is meticulously tracked not just as an exercise in genealogy, but because bloodlines determine the fates of the characters and the course of events in Middle Earth.

2.2 Beren and Luthien: The Limits of Knowledge

It is paradoxical, in light of this fevered account-keeping of heredity and degrees of purity, that the fate of both Elves and Men, indeed the whole impulse of *The Silmarillion*, turns on the few instances in which the pure boundaries between them are breached. These instances of hybridity are both infrequent and closely circumscribed; there are only three marriages between Elves and Men throughout the entire *legendarium*, and in each case the Men in question are of the “Highest” quality.^{xiv} In spite of these limitations, however, these episodes have tremendous significance both for Middle Earth and for Tolkien himself. The marriage of Beren, a Man, and Luthien, an Elf, is chronologically the first of these to occur, and of all the elements of his entire *legendarium*, it was the closest to his heart.^{xv} The grandiloquence of the passage that introduces the story in *The Silmarillion*, then, is not simply rhetorical flourish: “Among the tales of sorrow and of ruin that come down to us from the darkness of those days there are yet some in which amid weeping there is joy and under the shadow of death light that endures. And of these histories most fair still in the ears of the Elves is the tale of Beren and Luthien” (162). Beyond its testimony to Tolkien’s personal attachment to this story, this passage also speaks to the importance of Beren and Luthien’s love story in the Elvish tradition. This is remarkable, given that from the Elf point of view, Luthien is very clearly marrying beneath her. The mixing of Men with Elves brings with it important benefits for Men;

Tolkien tells us that the intermixture is part of Iluvatar's (the God of Tolkien's universe) divine plan to infuse the qualities of nobility, art, and poetry into the blood of Men (*Letters* 149, 194). For the Elves, however, the benefits of the exchange are less clear. Indeed, both Fimi (151) and Shippey (*Road to Middle Earth* 253) note that, from the Elves' perspective, intermarriage presents a disastrous compromise to their carefully guarded purity. What needs to be further emphasized, however, is the fact that the Elves cherish this story above all others in spite of everything. Given the Elves' concern with purity, and their resistance to hybridization, it is important to consider why this might be.

The story of Beren and Luthien begins with a stance of prejudice mounted by Elves against Men when they first enter Middle Earth. Luthien's father, Thingol, is decidedly inhospitable to the newcomers, denying them property rights in the West of Middle Earth, enforcing their subservience to Elf princes, and placing a magical ban on their entering his kingdom (*Silmarillion* 144). When Beren finally is brought before him, Thingol denounces him as inferior to and unworthy of his daughter: "Unhappy Men, children of little lords and brief kings, shall such as these lay hands on you, and yet live?" (*Silmarillion* 196). Beren and Luthien thus have to overcome the draconian segregational laws imposed by powerful Elf kings. Together, they achieve "the greatest deed that has been dared by Elves and Men" (180), retrieving a Silmaril from the clutches of Morgoth (the great Evil of that time) – something that even the most powerful Elves were unable to accomplish alone. In doing so, they overcome not only the Elf kings' efforts to segregate Elves from Men; they also overcome the rules that Tolkien himself puts in place. The fact that Men are mortal and Elves are immortal means that the difference

between them is essential and existential, and interbreeding should be impossible.

Tolkien himself acknowledges this in a letter to one of his readers:

I suppose that actually the chief difficulties I have involved myself in are scientific and biological... Elves and Men are evidently in biological terms one race, or they could not breed and produce fertile offspring... But since some have held that the rate of longevity is a biological characteristic, within limits of variation, you could not have Elves in a sense ‘immortal’ ... and Men mortal ... and yet sufficiently akin. ... But I should actually answer: I do not care. This is a biological dictum in my imagined world. (*Letters* 189)

In this passage Tolkien addresses the idea of fertility as the boundary between species that Young discusses. The difference between Elves and Men, though, is clearly not only biological but metaphysical as well. Not only is Tolkien unsettling an important Primary World “biological dictum” on species, he is also contemplating the metaphysically impossible task of experiencing something that is fundamentally other. In marrying Beren, Luthien has the opportunity to “die indeed” (*Silmarillion* 221), an experience otherwise impossible for Elves to even imagine. What I want to suggest, then, is that what the Elves gain from intermixing with Men, is impurity itself, and in this impurity, the opportunity to take part in a fundamentally alien experience.

This element of difference that separates Elves and Men needs to be considered closely not only in the context of discourses of race and species, but also as a unique and strange kind of difference. Despite Tolkien’s apparent concern with both race and with species, we need to be careful not to assume that either category fully accounts for what we see in the difference between Elves and Men. Rather, to confront the problematic of

difference in his work, we need to seriously engage the terms of a Secondary World; that is, we need to be open to the *different ways* of conceiving of difference that become possible. Thus, rather than looking to a series of equivalencies or transpositions, where England=Shire, Hobbit=the English bourgeoisie, Orc=racial other, or where any other Primary World artifact is transposed onto the Secondary World, I want to attend to the instabilities and inconsistencies with which Middle Earth's axes of difference are mapped out. Indeed, given that Tolkien's world was written and rewritten over the span of half a century, it seems hardly possible that they could be anything but unstable. Shippey's characterization of *The Silmarillion* as manifesting the traces of different layers of meaning drawn from different sources, different ideologies, and different points in time usefully articulates this slipperiness. The text, Shippey writes, is "a chaotic palimpsest, with layer upon layer of correction and wholesale rewriting, of riders and deletions" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 225). As such, the categories and degrees of difference at work in Middle Earth register multiple and sometimes contradictory ideological frames.

This palimpsestic quality makes *The Silmarillion* a rich text in which to explore the instability of the boundary between race and species in its constant decomposition and reconstruction. It also means, however, that the coordinates of difference in Tolkien's Secondary World do not easily map onto Primary World categories. The conceptions of race operant in his *legendarium*, for example, rely on both a modern and premodern tradition. Tolkien scholars have illuminated the influence of Old Norse social structures (Chance, *The Mythology of Power* 15; Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth* 248), as well as the influence of medieval conceptions of race on Tolkien's construction of difference (Chance, "Tolkien and the Other"; McFadden). On the other hand, these texts are in

many ways quintessentially modern. Quoting political scientist Harold Isaacs, Canavan and Wald contextualize the state of instability out of which modern SF emerged in the disintegration of European imperial structures, leaving people “stumbling blindly around trying to discern the new images, the new shapes and perspectives these changes have brought, to adjust to the painful rearrangement of identities and relationships which the new circumstances compel” (241). Critics have further located Tolkien's deployment of difference in the context of a world order exploded by rapid technological development (Schick), as well as in the context of two world wars and the ravaging and reformation of Europe that attended them (Chance, *The Mythology of Power* 6; Eaglestone 4; Garth).

One of the challenges, then, in thinking through Tolkien's hybrids is the difficulty in identifying exactly what category is being hybridized. While *The Silmarillion* is clearly marked by ideologies of race and species, as in the case of Orcs, it is not clear that the Orcs represent either a racial Other or an animal Other in any uncomplicated way. The difference between Elves and Men is of an entirely different quality from the difference between Elves and Orcs, which in turn is of an entirely different quality from the difference between Light Elves and Dark Elves, or between Ents and trees, or between Men and beavers, or between beavers and hares. Except perhaps in the latter case, none of these differences can properly be called species difference, nor can they be fully captured by the notion of race. The term “Type,” I think, helps to capture the ambiguity between categories and to highlight the preoccupation with typologies, both linguistic and biological, that runs throughout Tolkien's work. It also resonates productively with Young's analysis of the “type” in racial theory in the late nineteenth century:

... type came into widespread use in the 1850s because it neatly brought together the implications of both species and race while dispensing with the theoretical and terminological difficulties of both. ... the invocation of human ‘types’ rather than species could avoid the thorny question of single or multiple origins and allow the notion of permanent differences, ‘fixed and congenital’, [sic] to be re-established on the basis of a common-sense appeal to history...” (13-4)

There are important functional similarities between the type as Young describes it here and what I am calling the Type as it operates in Tolkien’s Secondary World. Both side step the “thorny question” of origins, and allow for a conception of difference based essentially on whimsy. As the hybridity of Elves and Men suggests, however, the Type is essential to the functioning of his world not only because it establishes immutable and fixed characteristics within a given group, but also because it permits a certain, otherwise impossible degree of flexibility between them.

This flexibility serves to qualify the common claim that Tolkien’s Types are simply different facets of human nature. C. S. Lewis articulates this view in his discussion of what he calls “characterization” in *The Lord of the Rings*: “Much that in a realistic work would be done by character delineation is here done simply by making the character an elf, a dwarf, or a hobbit. The imagined beings have their insides on the outside; they are visible souls” (41). For Lewis, the different types of creatures in Tolkien’s fiction represent the distilled qualities of different facets of “Man as a whole” (41). Tolkien confirms this notion of the different Types in the *legendarium* as different aspects of human nature, writing that “Elves are certain aspects of Men and their talents and desires” (*Letters* 189), and elsewhere that hobbits represent “a vision of a simple and

calculable people in simple and long settled circumstances” (*Letters* 240). While it may be true, however, that Tolkien saw different facets of humanity in his different kinds of creatures, it would be a mistake to discount the alien aspects of the non-human free peoples that cannot be completely assimilated into a study of human nature. The immortality of the Elves, for example, is fundamentally *inhuman*, indeed incomprehensible to Men. The problem of mortality is a point on which Elves and Men cannot be reconciled, as Men are unable to see their mortality as a blessing, or to comprehend the burden that accompanies the Elves’ immortality, while the Elves are unable to understand the terror of death. Tolkien recognizes the profundity of this difference in a discussion of the Elvish conception of death as “the *Gift of Iluvatar*,” writing, “It must be remembered that *mythically* these tales are Elf-centred, not anthropocentric, and Men only appear in them, at what must be a point long after their Coming” (*Letters* 285). In a fascinating footnote to this letter, Tolkien forestalls the potential to see this point of alienation as simply a speculative exploration of what humans would be if given immortality: “In *narrative*, as soon as the matter becomes “storied” and not mythical, being in fact *human* literature, the centre of interest *must* shift to Men (and their relations with Elves or other creatures). We cannot write stories *about* Elves, whom we do not know inwardly; and if we try we simply turn Elves into men” (285). In this striking recognition of the unknowability of the very beings that he claims to have created in order to better understand humanity, Tolkien articulates an openness that he elsewhere suppresses in figuring his creatures as figurative representations of “Man.” While he echoes Young’s characterization of colonial English literature as “sick with desire for the other,” he does so – here at least – in a way that acknowledges the

opacity of otherness and accepts the impossibility of knowing or representing it. In this brief moment of openness tucked away in a private footnote, Tolkien manages to maintain his exposure to the “skeptical terror of letting our knowledge come to an end” ... and to confront his vulnerability to other, alien knowledges “in the embodiment of [his] own” (*Animal Rites* 5). The Type, then, circumscribes both an attachment to purity and a desire to unsettle it – within a controlled and restricted set of circumstances.

There is a lot that remains to be unpacked about race, species, and hybridity in Tolkien’s work. The question of the animal needs to be considered further, and strikes me as an important line of thought to be pursued in the flourishing strain of ecocritical^{xvi} readings of Middle Earth. Why, for example, are the Eagles, who *do* speak and who take part in many important battles against Morgoth and Sauron, not counted among the free peoples? There is something about the simple fact of *looking* human that needs to be further explored. And what are we to make of Radagast the Brown, a wizard that can speak to animals, and hear “their proper speech”? He plays a very minor role in Tolkien’s *legendarium*, yet the implications of his ability to cross, and thus deny, the linguistic severance between people and animals are enormous. These elements of Tolkien’s Secondary World complicate the relationship between language and freedom that I have pointed to. Likewise, what exactly are the Ents, and are they animals? If so, what is their relationship to trees? This question, I think, suggests a rich site at which to begin thinking about how plant life is constructed in relation to animality and humanity. In particular, I am curious about the question of breeding at work in the creation of the Orcs and Saruman’s Uruk-hai, and how this is imprecated in a discourse of both slavery and animal husbandry. All of these questions call for more attention than I can give them

here. I want to turn now to Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, in which breeding serves as a key term in destabilizing the boundary between race and species.

3. Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*: Alien Origins and Intimate Others

Set in the wake of a nuclear holocaust that almost destroys all life on earth, *Xenogenesis* envisions a nonconsensual hybridization between the surviving humans and the Oankali, the extra-terrestrial species that rescues them from annihilation and restores earth. The tension developed throughout the three novels (*Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, and *Imago*) that make up the trilogy centres on a struggle over the definition of humanity, and over the preservation of its boundaries. Ironically, the Oankali save the human species from nuclear extinction only to force them into a genetic trade that will extinguish their humanity,^{xvii} as Lilith, the protagonist and narrator of *Dawn*, puts it when she tells her Oankali rescuer/captor that the forced hybridization the Oankali demand will effectively “finish what the war began” (42).

As Tolkien does, Butler makes it difficult to come to a clear understanding of the kind of difference at work in her *Xenogenesis* trilogy. As in Tolkien's body of legend, the discourses of race and of species that circulate through these texts coexist uneasily. Both Butler's and Tolkien's hybrids, in dissolving the boundary that separates the category of race from the category of species, hybridize the categories themselves, embodying a confused and often painful confluence of discourses of race and discourses of species. In this way, both authors participate in the tradition of a particular kind of SF hybridity – a kind of hybridity that not only creates a third space between categories, but that, in this in-betweenness, precipitates the hybridization of the taxonomical edifice on which these categories are mounted. In contrast to Tolkien's prim sidestepping of the implications of reproduction in his idealized Half-Elves, however, Butler explicitly engages the

racialized and sexualized qualities that determine the discourse of Western taxonomy, presencing its complicity in a history of slavery, eugenics, and rape.

While Lilith's subject position as a Black woman is made apparent from the beginning, race relations are not the trilogy's primary focus. It is tempting, in the acute conflict playing out over the determination of species boundaries, to form a reading in which race collapses into the overwhelming struggle over species. As such, criticism that addresses the trilogy's deployment of hybridity tends to frame species difference as either a metaphor for questions of race and colonialism or as supplanting questions of race in the overwhelming breach and reconfiguration of humanity. In other words, species tends to become the primary focus of analysis on the one hand, as an extension or reconfiguration of racial difference, while on the other it becomes more or less a device through which to read a historical narrative of race and miscegenation. Walter Benn Michaels usefully lays out both of these critical approaches: on the one hand, the humans in *Xenogenesis* "are forcefully reminded of the irrelevance of their phenotypical differences by the fact that they are being asked to breed with aliens who look like sea slugs with limbs and tentacles." From this point of view, "one of the points of the trilogy is to render racial difference irrelevant" (650). On the other hand, though, "we could say that in science fiction" our reading of difference "should be understood as a choice between ways of imagining not the difference between humans and aliens but the difference between humans" (650). I do not mean to suggest a lack of sophistication in *Xenogenesis* criticism; indeed, readings of species and racial difference in the trilogy frequently overlap and dialogue productively. In my own grappling with Butler's deeply difficult and ambivalent text, I am indebted to the nuanced postcolonial and cyborg

posthumanist frameworks that they offer. What I am interested in, though, and what I think merits closer attention, is the active and unstable presence of *both* race and species in this trilogy, and the way in which one category uncannily appears in the image of the other. This haunting reflection operates not only through the possibilities made available in an imagined future, but also as apparitions of history that persistently resurface. In this way, while the primary struggle in these texts plays out between species, race constantly resurfaces to muddy the contours of difference, the terms of engagement, and the sense of what is at stake.

In “Speculative Fictions of Slavery,” Madhu Dubey argues that for many African American writers, science fiction offers not so much a vehicle for imagining the future as it does a means of presencing the past. SF, according to Dubey, offers “a unique disposition toward history and historiography” (780) that allows a kind of communion with the past that, in acknowledging its resonances in the present, exceeds the bounds of history. For her, Butler’s early novel *Kindred* represents part of a proliferation of twentieth century slave narratives that use the particular generic possibilities of SF, in this case time travel, to “make possible an unmediated relation to the past as something that has not quite passed into the realm of history” (787). In doing so, SF slave narratives avoid representing slavery as an experience safely ensconced in the past by destabilizing the distance between past, present, and future. As a number of critics have shown, *Xenogenesis* also presences a legacy of slavery in the United States, although this time projected into the future (Haraway, *Simians*; Peppers; Stickgold-Sarah). Haraway points out that as a Black American woman who carries the legacy of slavery, Lilith’s awakening on the Oankali spaceship in *Dawn* “inescapably evoke[s] the terrible Middle

Passage of the Atlantic slave trade that brought Lilith's ancestors to a 'New World'" (*Simians* 228). This echo of slavery, with all its associations of the exercise of power, violence, rape, and coerced cultural interpenetration, reemerges throughout the trilogy through the humans' experience of forced migration and exploitation to colonize new frontiers, and in the hijacking of their bodies for reproduction. However, unlike *Kindred*, which stages a direct, experiential encounter with slavery, *Xenogenesis* frustrates the impulse to read the Oankali-human relationship as a straightforward allegorical transposition for slavery. Rather, the Oankali genuinely love humans and want what they think is best for them, while the human's resistance to the Oankali is in large part founded on extreme xenophobia, often accompanied by violence and oppression amongst themselves. Lilith herself grapples with the nuances of the human-Oankali relationship, telling her construct son Akin that he will experience both the human tendency to fear and persecute difference and the Oankali tendency to crave and seek difference: "When you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference" (*Adulthood Rites* 329). As the trilogy progresses, the narrative of resistance against oppressive hegemony becomes untenable, and as Stickgold-Sarah puts it, "The total control of humanity by aliens comes to appear as a salvation after all" (424). Peppers articulates a similar sentiment in a somewhat more provisional register: "while Lilith's presence doesn't allow us to forget the erotic violence of forced reproduction at the hands of the Oankali, the text still seduces us into a reading dialogue with the alien" (60). Given the strong parallels with a Primary World legacy of slavery, and given the unequivocal injustices perpetrated throughout this legacy, the dialogue that Peppers references makes for a profoundly uncomfortable, conflicted reading experience. As in the case of Tolkien's

work, this conflict has to do with a crisis in a humanism that begins to unravel in the hybrid space in which race and species blur.

The American Declaration of Independence speaks to a particularly American brand of humanism, as we see in the assertion “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (“The Declaration” n.p.). This assertion of equality, freedom, and inclusion that has structured American national identity has, however, always been troubled by the circumstances of exclusion, inequality, and oppression that existed at the time of its making, and that persisted quite healthily in spite of it. As the enslavement of Blacks and the exclusion of women from the democratic process highlight, the conception of the human here not only applies exclusively to white men, but entitles these white men to exploit the *subhuman* Other in their God-given pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. Nevertheless, the discourse of freedom that The Declaration represents has fundamentally determined the American conception of justice, and as a result, struggles against oppression in the United States have taken the form of what Wolfe calls, quoting Nancy Fraser, a “politics of recognition”^{xviii} (*What is Posthumanism* 136). The condition of a discourse of rights accorded to a limited community and at the expense of everyone else means that struggle against oppression has very often entailed a fight to expand the limits of what counts as “men.” This is abundantly clear in the Gettysburg Address, the iconic appeal to a “new birth of freedom” that extends, this time, to Black Americans:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are

created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. (“Gettysburg Address” n.p.)

Edward Said’s characterization of contemporary “liberal or radical” American humanism as a “component of democratic spirit and a continuing search for freedom” (5) builds on this logic of recognition, envisioning a humanism that can achieve justice and fairness through the use of reason and critical thinking. For Said, the hypocrisy that allows the declaration of the “unalienable” rights of all men to coexist with the systemic denial of any rights at all to Black slaves is a case of “the abuse of humanism,” which “discredits some of humanism’s practitioners without discrediting humanism itself” (13). Not only does he call on humanists to follow through on their rhetoric of equality and freedom, he sees the failure to do so as fundamentally incompatible with his own humanist understanding of truth. Embracing a humanist belief in “the power of the human mind of investigating the human mind” (Spitzer qtd. in Said 24) Said argues that through the honest and rigorous exercising of “critical sense of inquiry,” this belief must necessarily come to be applied not only to “the European or Western mind,” but the human mind tout court. This discussion of humanism usefully shows the appeal of a humanist discourse of rights and freedoms in the context of American anti-racist struggle. There is an incredible simplicity and force in demanding that those in a position of power follow the rules that they themselves have made. I want to affirm my deep respect for the power of this logic and the good that has come out of it. It cannot though, as Wolfe would surely point out, do anything about the arbitrary nature of what counts as a human mind. In asserting that “the reader is a central figure of all humanism” (43), Said bumps up against the fact that

the reader, the critical thinker, and the knower is always the one to determine who is entitled to human rights, and that those who do not read, think and know in a recognizable way are systemically left out. As Wolfe discusses, this becomes a sticky problem when it comes to allocating rights to those unreading Others (*Animal Rites* 34). If humanity is really about critical thinking, what makes babies, say, or people with cognitive disabilities, different from animals? Why should babies be accorded human rights when chimpanzees aren't? These decisions around "who lives and dies and how" (*When Species Meet* 38) must either exclude those who are biologically *homo sapiens* from the category of persons or fall back on bald ethnocentric speciesism. A deeper problem with Said's liberal humanism, though, lies in his confidence in the power of the human mind to know the self, the Other, and the difference between them. This is a problem if, as Wolfe insists, the human mind is subject to a "blind spot" precisely *because* of its dependence on the technicity of language (*What is Posthumanism* 28-29). Despite the apparent simplicity of the call to extend human rights to *all* humans, the decision about what counts as human will always be up to the discretion of those in power, and will always permit the expulsion of "*any* social other" whatever (*Animal Rites* 7). The instability of this kind of liberal American humanism can be seen in the emergence of genetics as a dominant discourse that both draws on fantasies of Man as reader and knower, and a site at which the parameters of humanity are at stake. *Xenogenesis* recalls the eugenic violence of antebellum slavery, but as Vint points out, it is also very much concerned with a contemporary genetic discourse (58). Butler's engagement of hybridity needs therefore to be positioned in relation to the coevolution of

modern genetics and the American eugenics movement, a contemporary discourse that turns humans into animals.

3.1 Genetic Humanism, Genetic Racism

Through the rise of the episteme of genetics in the latter half of the twentieth century, the gene has become metonymic both for biology and for a broader discourse on the possibilities and threats that science represents. Exploring the prospect of unlimited genetic engineering, *Xenogenesis* registers the proliferation of anxieties emerging out of genetic interventions that equally promise the elimination of human suffering and raise the specter of genocidal eugenics. Cohen and George articulate the vectors of these anxieties in the introduction to their political analysis of modern genetics:

The reason modern genetics worries, excites, and fascinates the imagination is that we sense that this area of science will affect or even transform the core experiences of being human – such as how we have children, how we experience freedom, and how we face sickness and death. Like no other area of modern science and technology, genetics inspires both dreams and nightmares about the human future with equal passion: the dream of perfect babies, the nightmare of genetic tyranny.

(177-8)

As this passage suggests, the discourse of genes and genetic engineering have been culturally invested with profound implications for how humanness is explained, conceptualized, and defined. In *The Poetics of DNA*, Judith Roof lays out the stakes of this discourse for the institution of the humanist subject:

while our idea of DNA centers the human as the agent of knowledge and the discoverer and decoder of a code that unfolds an orderly structure, DNA's pervasiveness also threatens to de-center humanity as either central or biologically special, making people mere vessels for the perpetuation of a chemical that is a common denominator among species throughout history. (32)

In the same stroke with which we find the formula that makes us ourselves, the beings capable of unlocking "the secret of life," we reduce ourselves to, as it were, life's lowest common denominator. This poses a real threat to the human exceptionalism that invests humans with an exclusive set of rights to life, liberty, and the freedom to exploit the non-human for profit and pleasure. Against this threat, Roof traces the various ways in which genes have been framed for popular consumption to reaffirm the terms that circumscribe humanity. One of the most powerful of these strategies is the metaphorical representation of DNA as language. In the ubiquitous textual metaphors that render genes intelligible in the form of code, book, or map, DNA is conceived not only as an unambiguous source of information out of which human nature can be gleaned, but also as a reiteration of the human, and the values of Western humanism, at our most essential level. These metaphors "of libraries of manuals overseen by a scrivener molecular homunculus" make it possible to ensconce our old origin stories safely in the legitimacy of modern science; "DNA is the animating, originary Word made flesh" (Roof 72-3). Thus, as the litany of characteristics used to define and elevate the human over other animals (possession of a soul, language use, tool use, etc.) are disproven or otherwise discredited, the onus of defining human nature comes to fall wholly on genotype. In this way the formula that equates language with knowledge and knowledge with humanity is

transposed onto the metaphor of DNA as a language that we alone can read and thus know; Man as reader remains the central figure of the humanist subject and the body itself is made to speak of belonging or unbelonging. Rosner and Johnson locate how the Human Genome Project works to canonize who and what counts as human:

Thus, nature is a large communication system and human DNA is one library within that system – “the library of human nature as a master dictionary” (Haraway 1989b, 428 n. 9) – with the Project itself as master librarian. By the choices it makes – the choice of what books to include in the library and in what condition – the Project will determine what is “correct,” what is “real.” It will necessarily set standards, defining and cataloguing what it means to be human, limiting what range of diversity is acceptable; as a result, it will become “a powerful guide to human behaviour, a sort of secular text that will define the natural and moral order” (Nelkin, 1993, B1). (107)

DNA, then, becomes the site at which humanity is determined and at which the boundaries of inclusion or exclusion are delineated and policed. In decoding the sequence of nucleic acids that make up life, we triumphantly access the “manual” to Agamben’s anthropological machine; we find the text in which we can read ourselves and thus finally know ourselves concretely and definitively.

As Roof suggests when she calls DNA “Word made flesh,” genetic discourse recapitulates not only the Western humanist fixation on human as reader, but also the logic of the Western humanist origin story. Against the popular perception that science distances us from religious accounts of ourselves in the world, Haraway points out how biological narratives mirror the Biblical narratives on which modern humanism is

founded in the tales they tell about “origins, about genesis, and about nature” (*Simians* 72). Genetic accounts of human being are always already teleologies, recapitulating an ideology of human supremacy in a hierarchy of nature: “in the beginning was the gene” (73).^{xix}

The considerable stakes of this genetic discourse for establishing a “natural and moral order” (Nelkin and Lindee 39), and for compassing the terrain of the human, manifest in the proliferation of ethical debates around the implications of genetic sequencing and manipulation. As long as the category of the human affords exclusive access to a privileged set of rights and entitlements, the project of establishing who and what it excludes will always also be an act of violence. As the various forms of humanist subjectivity have always done, genetic humanism not only distinguishes between human and animal, it also organizes human groups into hierarchized and valued categories. Even while DNA is frequently hailed as biological evidence that finally puts racialism to rest once and for all, representations of DNA just as often draw on, extend, and further naturalize colonial assumptions about race and hybridity. Representations of DNA are paradoxical in this way; conceived of as both an object of science and a text, DNA is open to various, sometimes contradictory readings even as it is attributed with all the irrefutable authority of scientific empiricism.^{xx} It is this paradox, I want to suggest, that makes genetic discourse particularly capable of absorbing the ambivalences and anxieties already at work in constructions of hybridity. Thus, the same authority that distinguishes human from animal can also make some animals more human, and some humans more animal.

The potential for genetic discourse to dehumanize becomes grimly clear in the history of the American eugenics movement. Indeed, the rhetoric of genetic determinism lends itself fortuitously to the assumptions about heredity already at work in, and necessary to, the logic of eugenics. In *American Eugenics*, Nancy Ordover traces how contemporary arguments for the genetic basis of variation in IQs and criminality in the USA echo and gain potency from the racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric that shaped the myth of a racially pure America throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She argues that contemporary genetic accounts for human behaviour not only repeat, but also take advantage of, the notions rendered common-sensical by the ideology of America's early eugenics movement that attributes "everything from intellect to sexuality to poverty to crime ... to heredity" (xii). Thus, she argues, the racist colonial logic that undergirds late nineteenth century notions of degraded germ plasm,^{xxi} grafting, and blood quantum, reemerge seamlessly in late twentieth century genetic accounts of human difference that racialize intelligence, violence, and sexual behavior. Ordover situates her argument in the context of institutional policy that targets the bodies of women of colour as sites of intervention:

I began my research in the mid-nineties ... I was living in California at the time, where a white judge sentenced an African-American woman to Norplant; where Proposition 187, denying vital and heretofore legally guaranteed services to anyone suspected of being an undocumented immigrant, passed overwhelmingly with the help of a substantial donation from a foundation that backs race-based intelligence research. ...

The long-lasting appeal of eugenics has rested on its protection of the status quo, on its emphasis on individual and group “failings” over analyses of systemic culprits, and on its bedrock insistence on scientific/technological remedies over fundamental social and institutional change. (xiii)

It is significant that these instances of eugenic policy took place in the state that was Butler’s home at the time that she was writing *Xenogenesis*, only a few years after the three books were published. While she could not have known of them at the time she was writing the trilogy, her fiction indicates a keen awareness of the kind of sentiment that made them possible. In this section I have tried to show how the modern genetic discourse that positions DNA as an authoritative account of hybridity, race, and species frequently serves to extend and further naturalize historically constructed assumptions of human exceptionalism and racial hierarchy. In the next section, I examine how *Xenogenesis* reflects and problematizes the fantasy of DNA as self and self knowledge.

3.2 Xenogenetics: Encountering the Signifying Monsters

As a survey of the criticism on the trilogy suggests, genetics represents one of the main objects of speculation in *Xenogenesis* (Jesser; Johns; Peppers; Stickgold-Sarah; Vint; Zaki). Indeed, the trilogy revolves around an encounter with an Other who is defined by, motivated by, and master of DNA. The Oankali are quintessentially genetic engineers; as self-styled “traders” of genetic material, their species name is synonymous with the organelle that is their earliest ancestor – an entity that occupies every cell and that lives by and for genetic trade.^{xxii} Jodahs, Lilith’s son, describes the Oankali organelle as at the core of their origin story:

We were what we were because of that organelle. It made us collectors and traders of life, always learning, always changing in every way but one – that one organelle. Ooloi said we *were* that organelle – that the original Oankali had evolved through that organelle's invasion, acquisition, duplication, and symbiosis. The organelle made or found compatibility with life-forms so completely dissimilar that they were unable even to perceive one another as alive. (*Imago* 544)

Throughout their evolutionary history, the Oankali have shaped themselves and their destiny through selection and manipulation of DNA as they are now intent on doing with the human species. Encountering these aliens, therefore, the humans in the trilogy confront a perfected vision of genetic technology and the perfect realization of the dearly cherished hopes that circulate the discourse and practice of genetic modification.

Ironically, the tension of the trilogy revolves around the desperate resistance that the humans mount, in various forms, against the Oankali's genetic intervention in human bodies and the human species. In order to account for why this might be, it is important to genuinely consider what the Oankali are offering on their side of the gene trade. For a moment then, I want to naively take their offer at face value. From this vantage, it is hard to say why the humans would not be eager to enter into a trade with a species so physically, intellectually, and socially well-appointed. Having assimilated all the useful adaptive strategies they have ever encountered through their whole phylogenic history, the Oanakai are essentially invulnerable to physical threats. They can't be poisoned, are impervious to the elements, can breathe under water, and can only be killed with extreme difficulty. Despite being so robust, the Oankali benefit from incredible sensitivity to those

around them and to their environment; indeed, they build the structures in which they live out of organic matter with which they have a close symbiotic connection. Able to interpret chemical and electrical signals through sensory tentacles, they rapidly adjust to environmental changes, and can communicate telepathically through touch with each other or with their chemically sensitive spaceship, itself a living entity. They are endowed with super powerful memories and the ability to assimilate linguistic and sensory information with great efficiency; thus they learn new languages quickly and without difficulty, and are able to gracefully negotiate new environments almost immediately. Most importantly to the humans who have narrowly survived annihilation by global war, one would think, the Oankali are uncompromisingly peaceful; they organize their society by consensus, revere all life in all forms, and resort to violence only at the most extreme provocation. With the gene trade, they are offering to endow humans with these qualities too. The Oankali gain access to the greater genetic variability and flexibility that they crave and need.^{xxiii} In exchange, humans gain a rehabilitated earth, a much-extended lifespan, increased physical and mental abilities, greatly heightened sensory acuity, and near invincibility to disease, poison, or injury. They are, however, almost without exception horrified by the prospect of the trade, and many are willing to sacrifice anything, from their own lives to the ability to procreate, to avoid it.

This horror arises out of what the humans perceive to be at stake for their identities as a species. Paradoxically, the very qualities that have at various times been held up as the basis for human identity and superiority (language, knowledge, emotion, reason) are extended so far in the Oankali that they become alien. Not only can they acquire new languages better than humans can, they can communicate very effectively

through chemical signals with the unlanguage world around them. Not only can they literally feel each other's feelings, they can actually manipulate emotions, and strive to make other creatures feel good all the time. They understand themselves, others, and their environment minutely, easily incorporating genetic and chemical information. Among the many ways in which the Oankali destabilize human subjectivity, then, one of the most powerful is that they are *too* human; they exceed us in the very ways that are supposed to make us special and set us apart.^{xxiv} While on one level the revulsion the humans feel toward the Oankali stems from a xenophobic reaction to their alien appearance, the Oankali are much better at being "human" than the humans are, and this is what makes them truly monstrous. What the humans are clinging to, then, is their lack – their *inability* to live up to the ideals meant to define them as a species. This lack, further, is genetically determined. In their ability to read the human genome, the Oankali are able to perceive a fatal incompatibility that, to them, explains the war that was almost the end of the world and the species. Humans, according to the Oankali's reading, are genetically disposed to be both intelligent and hierarchical. While either of these characteristics by themselves could be adaptive, the Oankali believe – they know – that in concert these two genetic characteristics will inevitably lead humanity to self-destruct. Because of their love of life, they are unwilling to let what they call "the Contradiction" persist unfettered, and thus deny humans the ability to reproduce independently. As one Oankali puts it, "Could Humans be given back their independent lives and allowed to ride their Contradiction to their deaths? To give them back their independent existence, their fertility, their own territory was to help them breed a new population only to destroy it a second time" (*Adulthood Rites* 469). In this way, *Xenogenesis* takes seriously the crystallization of

human nature into genetic makeup – in this case, a makeup that is inherently flawed and evolutionarily unviable. As all the qualities, behaviours and abilities that we recognize as human become alien, human nature becomes the human genome, which in turn is characterized by a defect. Whereas the humanist tradition defines humanity against the animal, which in turn is defined by lack, in this interspecies encounter the essence of human nature is revealed to be essentially lacking.

Butler thus offers us our fantasy of transparent self-recognition and total self-knowledge, by means of what Wolfe and Derrida identify as the profound horror of being known by the Other. In his introduction to *Animal Rites*, Wolfe quotes Stanley Cavell on the human imperative to know the animal without himself being known. Discussing the uneasiness underlying the human encounter with horses, Cavell refers to “The unwillingness... to make room for their capacity to feel our presence incomparably beyond our ability to feel theirs. ... Our stand, our stance, is of denial. ... We feel our refusals are unrevealed because we keep, we think, our fences invisible.” This stance, Wolfe suggests, is the extreme extension of, or what he calls “the hardest case” of the humanist position of subjecthood in the reduction of the Other to knowledge object; the unwillingness to “be vulnerable to other knowledges in the embodiment of our own, an embodiment that arrives at the site of the other before we do, as our scent reaches the dog’s nose before we round the corner, telling a story we can never wholly script to a present we have not reached” (5). The tradition of Western humanism privileges vision as a means and symbol of knowledge, casting the senses of smell, taste, and touch into the realm of the animal, the sensual, and the instinctual (Derrida, *The Animal* 55; Haraway, *Simians*; Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* 130, 133-4). However, it is through their

chemical and haptic sensitivity that the Oankali are able to know the humans in a way that they themselves never can. The Oankali break down both the “fences” that Cavell writes of and the illusion of their invisibility. Humans are not opaque to this Other; rather, the Other is able to see the human better than it sees itself. In fact, it is through the Other that humans come to truly know themselves and know themselves as inadequate. Through their body chemistry, and cutting to the core, their genetic makeup, human bodies are made transparent texts through which the Oankali can know their flaws, their potential, and their desires.^{xxv} By taking seriously the notion of a basic “human nature,” in this case a flawed, abortive one, Butler displaces her humans from the position of knowing subject to that of knowledge object; a space already familiar to racialized people, people with disabilities, women, and all the Others who have had the gaze of humanist inquiry turned against them.

It is in this abjection, though, that the discourse of the hybrid, and the problem of racialization, emerges in a way that cannot fully be assimilated into a posthumanist framework as it stands. I have discussed so far the way in which the humans’ horror of hybridizing with the Oankali comes out of the threat that the Oankali pose to human identity. I now hope to show how the humans’ investment in their humanness is enmeshed with abject disempowerment, rape, and an overall lack of consent in establishing the terms of the interspecies encounter. Here, the specter of hybridity in the context of slavery returns to deflate the epistemological authority of the gene and, interestingly, to reassert the value of the fences circumscribing human subjectivity. We see this occur in the painful moment when Lilith’s ooloi mate Nikanj privileges the “truth” of Lilith’s body in its decision to impregnate her with a hybrid child in

contravention of the boundaries she articulates in words. Oankali have three genders: male, female, and ooloi. The ooloi act as the lynchpin of Oankali families and the mediating term in Oankali reproduction, and are in charge of engineering Oankali offspring – it is them, therefore, who oversee the creation of a hybrid generation. Nikanj forms an unbreakable chemical bond with Lilith against her will and prevents her from reproducing independently with other humans – even from touching her human partner without its mediation. Having done this, it offers her the consolation that it will not impregnate her until she is ready. *Dawn* ends, however, with Lilith learning that it has made her pregnant without her knowledge. Defending its actions in the face of Lilith’s feelings of betrayal, Nikanj appeals to its reading of her body’s unarticulated desires. It argues that it acted in Lilith’s interest, fulfilling a desire she was not brave enough to ask for (246-7). In a characteristically ambivalent move, Butler entertains the idea that Nikanj’s reading was correct while maintaining that it could never be “right.” In *Adulthood Rites* Lilith explains this paradox in a conversation with a man who will later become a member of her hybrid family. Responding to his question of whether she had really wanted to be pregnant, she asserts, “Oh, yes. But if I had the strength not to ask, it should have had the strength to let me alone” (274). Vint offers a thoughtful analysis of this episode:

Lilith’s dilemma raises the question of relationship between body and subjectivity. Lilith’s body expressed her desire to have a child, but it did not express the full extent of her subjectivity – her simultaneous and contrary desire to resist interbreeding with the Oankali. ...

... If Lilith's body speaks a truth, the question becomes, whose truth does it speak? As a woman and a black person, Lilith already has had the experience of having her body positioned in the discourse of another. (70)

Citing the work of Boulter, Bordo, and Fanon, Vint contextualizes the repression of Lilith's human subjectivity in a violent and oppressive tradition of totalizing Black women by their bodies. What is done to Lilith's body cannot be made sense of or explained outside of the cultural burden of slavery and sterilization that she carries. The Oankali's exploitation of human bodies to further their narrative of progress resonates with the way Black women's reproductive agency was commandeered for profit during slavery. Likewise, their prevention of humans' independent reproduction cannot be made sense of without an understanding of the programmes of involuntary sterilization mounted against racialized, disabled, and otherwise "undesirable" people in America and elsewhere. As Ordoover reminds us, these programmes are so often made possible by a rhetoric of benevolent concern, a strategy that is continually revived to countenance the institutionalized intervention in the bodies of social undesirables.

By presencing these traditions in which a "'reading' of the body's meanings is taken to be more relevant than the self-representation of the subject in the body," Vint argues, Butler warns against a naïve acceptance of body as truth, "and return[s] us to the discourses of genetics and attempts to read human potential or fate through genetic predispositions" (70-71). Nikanj's interpretation of Lilith's body is therefore not only a violation, but also incomplete. In discounting of the fences that Lilith has erected to maintain her experience as an individual human subject, Nikanj misses a significant and ethically relevant part of the equation that makes up their relationship. In this case, in

which the human subject position no longer occupies a position of unchallenged power, and can no longer take for granted its superiority, the fences that Wolfe and Cavell write of become not an unambiguous stance of refusal, but a necessary mediating term in a complex subjectivity. *Xenogenesis* ends with the Oankali conceding that the humans have a right to an unadulterated existence, even though they believe that such an existence is unsustainable. Lilith's hybrid son, Akin, convinces the Oankali to allow the humans who refuse to participate in the gene trade to try to build a new human society on Mars. He is only able to do so, as Nanda points out in her article "Re-writing the Bhabhian 'Mimic Man'", because he is hybrid – especially hybrid. The Oankali who helps him convince the rest tells him, "You're as much of them as you can be and as much of us as your oolan [an ooloi parent] dared make you," (*Adulthood Rites* 475), and this is what allows him to find a way around the stalemate between the resister humans and the Oankali. The passage in which he changes their minds is itself contradictory. He speaks to the entire population of Oankali via a mental and emotional "link" formed through their sentient spaceship. In this way, they are connected beyond language – able to directly communicate inarticulate feelings, impressions, and memories. Despite the seemingly perfect merger of subjectivities that this link enables, Butler denies the possibility of completely knowing the Other: "'Look at the Human-born among you,' [Akin] told them. 'If your flesh knows you've done all you can for Humanity, their flesh should know as mine does that you've done almost nothing'" (470). It is only by alerting them to the existence of a kind of knowledge in their midst that cannot be transmitted or assimilated, and by evoking confusion among the Oankali, that he convinces them to allow humans to continue on as

an independent species. Only through the creation of a hybrid subjectivity, therefore, can the Oankali begin to perceive the limitations of their own knowledge.

What can we take, then, from these explicitly political texts that destabilize the underpinnings of humanism but that refuse to condemn it altogether? It may not be possible, or even necessary, to reconcile Butler's apparent critique of humanism and its foundation of human exceptionalism with her insistence on respectful consideration of the construct of humanity. By presenting a tradition of slavery, eugenics, and rape in her speculative dismantling of humanity, she highlights the horrifying violence that has historically accompanied attempts to blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman. Not only does a tradition of racism haunt the discourse of species in these texts, though; the untenability of specieism constantly returns to inflect the specter of racism. Throughout the trilogy, Butler connects the management of human lives and bodies by other humans to an ideology that permits the hijacking of the lives and bodies of animals by humans. Lilith makes this link in *Dawn* when she awakens to her situation on the Oankali spaceship:

Experimental animal, parent to domestic animals? Or ... nearly extinct animal, part of a captive breeding program? ... Was that what she was headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate motherhood? Fertility drugs and forced 'donations' of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth ... Humans had done these things to captive breeders – all for a higher good, of course. (60)

It matters that Butler does not specify the non-human status of the "captive breeders" who fall victim to the higher good of human judgment, for of course, humans have

inflicted this sort of violent benevolence on each other too. In particular, the forced reproduction and separation of children from mothers that Lilith fears recalls one of the most devastating elements of American slavery. In *Adulthood Rites*, Lilith's construct son Akin, who is sympathetic to the human need for autonomy, says of the Oankali sterilization and breeding strategy, "You controlled both animals and people by controlling their reproduction – controlling it absolutely" (447). This commentary on the exercise of Oankali power speaks both of the human exploitation of animals and of the breeding, eugenic, and anti-miscegenation policy that has characterized the history of white supremacy in the United States.

Even these passages that most powerfully support the resisters' argument for preserving the category of the human also highlight the atrocities committed in the process of delineating who does or does not belong in the category. It would be inaccurate, then, to characterize *Xenogenesis* as refutation of the posthuman or a reassertion of a humanist anti-racism. Rather, the trilogy illustrates why an analysis of race needs to be mobilized in posthumanist engagement with the animal question, and how this might be done. By constructing an interspecies encounter in which the human is utterly decentred, Butler maintains race as an ever-present term. In doing so, she highlights the impossibility of ethically refiguring the relationship between humans and animals without seriously considering race. As long as speciesism exists humans can be dehumanized – but as long as racialization exists, racialized people will have a greater stake in how animality is figured. Race is therefore not an incomplete antecedent to specieism, nor, as Wolfe suggests, a softer case of humanism's endemic problem, but an

integral part of the animal question. Not only does racism animalize people; the racial other is part of what it means to be animal.

4. Conclusion

I began this project with the suspicion that the tradition of SF has something important to contribute to the postcolonial discourse of hybridity, in particular in extending Young's analysis of its imbrications in a racist Victorian ideology that conflates race with species. I set out with the intention of defending the value of the term *hybridity* against a growing sense that it has lost its serviceability in overuse. My notion was that it continues to be useful precisely *because* this ambiguity articulates a latent conflation of race and species that pervades our daily lives; this emerges with particular clarity in works of SF that seem to present less of a threat when they address these kinds of taboo subjects.

What I have discovered in the process of looking at the slippage between racial Others and animal Others in *The Silmarillion* and *Xenogenesis* is that this is only part of what these texts illuminate about hybridity. My original argument continues to be relevant – the struggle to work through the relationship between constructions of race and species in these texts points to a fundamental issue with the structure of Western taxonomy. In this framework, race and species are always already mutually constituting, and the boundary between them is always on the verge of collapse. What I didn't see at first, however, was that the slipperiness of the term hybridity also points to a way of entering into the efforts begun in posthumanist animal studies to build a more honest and ethical way of thinking the relationship between our species and others. By picking up on and probing the ambiguity that already defines this relationship, Tolkien and Butler highlight the role that racial discourse has played historically, and that it continues to play, in a struggle to stake out what it means to be human against the animal Other.

While the term hybridity and the discourse that surrounds it therefore remain useful in their persistent voicing of this struggle, their potential to excavate what an understanding of the racial politics of dehumanization can contribute to the logic of speciesism remains understated. In other words, whereas I originally intended to argue for the particular efficacy of this postcolonial discourse in its association with animality, I am now convinced that its engagement with the question of the animal represents a point at which it hasn't gone far enough. Wolfe cuts to the core of this point in his critique of Bhabha's notion of mimicry in the hybrid "third space." In its preoccupation with (re)iteration and translation, Bhabha excludes the subjectivity of nonhuman others, who are "by-definition" silent. In doing so, Wolfe argues that postcolonial critiques like Bhabha's reinstate the "image of the colonized" in the animal Other: "as one who is mute, whose mimetic ability produces not excess, ambivalence, and reversibility but rather fidelity." This has become for me, as it is for Wolfe, "an important lacuna in any critique of colonialism" (*Animal Rites* 189) because the institution of speciesism, as a precondition of racism, can be used to dehumanize racial Others with devastating consequences.

Both Tolkien and Butler's texts point to the need to rethink justice in a way that acknowledges the subjectivities of animals in spite of their radical difference. What they also point to, though, is that a theory of racialization needs to be seriously and persistently engaged in this process. Both explore what happens at the point where the humanist boundaries between race and species begin to unravel. Both stage an imagined encounter between beings that are fundamentally divided by their biology, and in doing so, they problematize the notion of stable, pure difference while also pointing to the need

to respectfully acknowledge the impossibility of truly knowing the Other. By weaving in their respective Primary World encounters with the brutal dehumanization of racial Others (in Tolkien's case the threat of the Nazi regime of racial purification and in Butler's the legacy of slavery and a contemporary discourse of genetics), they blur the boundary between race and species. In doing so, they expose the fact that race and species are always already blurred, that racialized people have always already been part of the construct of animality, and that therefore rethinking the animal necessarily means rethinking race.

They are able to do this because of the generic conditions in which they work. I want to emphasize the need to give SF a good, hard look in the continuing project of unpacking and rethinking the construction of the human against the animal. It is no coincidence that both Butler and Tolkien explore these problems in a mode that is explicitly speculative; this mode allows them to burrow into the animal question that Young only begins to address at the heart of hybridity. In this genre's alleged remove from "reality," they can approach a new kind of relationship between human and animal in a way that also reorients racial Otherness to both the construct of humanity and the *animot* – without the fear of getting it wrong. Given the stakes for racialized people in how these relationships are conceived, it is dangerous to even begin to unsettle them. The safer, unthreatening space of SF, though, makes it possible to do so even if it is painful, ambivalent, and sometimes clumsy.

A related conclusion that I want to draw has to do with the critical impulse to frame Butler's work as a "writing back" against a tradition of SF coded as white and male. In his essay "Racism in Science Fiction," Samuel Delany expresses concern about

how the category of “African-American Science Fiction” segregates the work of Black SF writers into a perpetually marginalized subgenre, and how it occludes the long and rich history of Black writers in shaping science fiction. By reducing the lineage of SF writing to that of white men, this critical framing delivers SF back to the exclusive authority of white men even as it tries to disrupt the genre’s alleged white-maleness. Likewise, the work of women SF writers of colour, framed this way, is reduced to reaction against the tradition’s dominant agencies, and thus diverts attention from the innovation and dialecticism of SF writers who are women or of colour (Lai, Thaler). It would be both naïve and politically irresponsible, however, to ignore the radically different subject positions that inform Butler’s and Tolkien’s imaginary worlds, as well as the powerful challenges Butler mounts against SF tropes considered to be the purview of white men.

We can see this kind of conscious challenge in the way that Butler intervenes in the science fiction tradition that equates humanness with whiteness. Working within the sci-fi trope of alien encounters that allegorize intercultural and interracial contact zones, she disrupts the truism that the human will always be white and that the alien Other will always be racialized.^{xxvi} The fact that Lilith’s body is the vehicle through which we read the violation of all human bodies deeply unsettles the equation of human=white. Lilith’s Blackness, alongside the Oankali’s position of power, sense of entitlement, and paternalistic attitude, serve at times to turn this equation on its head. It would be overly simplistic to code the Oankali as white in any straightforward sense, but these points of interruption in the white=human narrative expose and derail the inherently dehumanizing

logic that makes it work.

Self-conscious acts of oppositionality and assertions of difference such as this need to remain paramount even while we attend to the continuities between the SF of Butler, a Black woman writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in the United States, and that of Tolkien, a founding father of the venerable tradition of white, male, British colonial SF writers. What I propose, then, in eschewing a “writing back” paradigm, is not to subsume opposition and difference into a project of generic integration; rather, I have worked toward a paradigm of “writing through” that can account for the politics of power that marginalize writers of colour and women in the SF genre while also recognizing their role in shaping the genre. This framework seems to me to better articulate the complex role that women/people of colour have played and continue to play in the development of SF writing. With it, it is possible to acknowledge the presence of women/people of colour *throughout* the history of SF, the ways in which their marginalization oblige them to work *through* the cracks of the genre and through the racist and misogynist tropes that characterize much of it, and finally, in which they work *through* the lens that the genre makes available, seriously engaging but also extending the revisions of reality it has produced. By entertaining an openness to the points of continuity in their hybrid beings, I want to show how Butler takes up, or as I have said, writes through, the genre’s entanglement in the racist humanism that always threatens to undermine the boundaries that it works relentlessly to sustain.

In particular, this is worth thinking about in relation to the Type – the trope of creatures differentiated not quite by race, nor by species, but by something else – as a SF

tradition. This tradition popularized, if not begun, by Tolkien is utterly ubiquitous today, not only in fantasy genre fiction, but also in gaming and RPG culture. As I have tried to show, it also resonates in science fiction, although in a somewhat different form. It seems important to me, given the problems surrounding the boundary between race and species that I have discussed, to think about why this might be. Why, despite its bizarre imprecision, does the Type seem to make so much sense? And what can writers like Butler, whose lives are directly affected by how race is perceived in relation to species, contribute to our understanding of this tradition? Tolkien's use of the Type, despite its moments of openness and dissonance with the idea of purity, is still attached to a highly conservative humanism, always attempting to reinscribe discourses of lineage and hierarchy. What Butler so usefully illuminates about this tradition is its entanglement in vectors of power that can render the productive instability between categories into a defensive, sometimes violent, attachment to the very categories being destabilized. The ambiguity of the Type has the potential to generate thinking about the ambiguities already at work in Western humanist taxonomy, and about how our thinking about difference might change. As we see in *Xenogenesis*, though, changes in the way we think about difference cannot be more ethical without close engagement with the vectors of power that operate along the lines of race and of species, and of the ways in which they interact.

Notes

ⁱ Butler's trilogy, made up of *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, and *Imago*, was originally titled *Xenogenesis*. It was later republished in a collection titled *Lilith's Brood*. I am working from the 2007 edition, which uses the latter title. I refer to the trilogy as *Xenogenesis*, however, as my analysis pertains to otherness and origins. I also use italics, rather than quotation marks, in my references to the three novels individually, as they were originally published on their own.

ⁱⁱ While I want to reflect a consciousness of Darwinism, I am not suggesting that either author is directly addressing Darwin's text.

ⁱⁱⁱ As I will discuss later, this distinction between reality and unreality is problematic but necessary to engage in my discussion of a genre that both relies on and undermines the distinction between what is real and what is not.

^{iv} See Matthew Calarco's discussion of the phrase "the question of the animal" as used in animal studies.

^v *The Location of Culture* represents a foundational text in the critical history of hybridity. However, a number of nonequivalent but related conceptions of cultural intermixture preceded or emerged contemporaneously with Bhabha's. These include the work of E. K. Brathwaite, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Françoise Lionnet and others.

^{vi} To the extent that it is rooted in questions of fertility and reproduction, the concept of hybridity is also deeply enmeshed in questions of sex and gender. I cannot do justice to these questions – which will persistently reemerge to haunt my discussion of animality, race, and science – within the scope of this project. For now, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Western humanist subject is constructed as male, and that the female body is always the site at which the threat of miscegenation is policed and managed.

^{vii} There are, in fact, a number of authors who have taken on "the animal question" from within a postcolonial framework. See Armstrong, Huggan and Tiffin, and Cilano and Deloughrey for some examples.

^{viii} Interestingly, this title was only included in the 1975 edition of *Animal Liberation*. In subsequent editions, it was changed to "All Animals Are Equal, or Why The Ethical Principle on Which Human Equality Rests Requires Us to Extend Equal Consideration to Animals Too."

^{ix} I am not arguing that race is totally absent in posthumanist animal studies, but that *as a discipline* animal studies needs to practice a sustained and intentional consideration of racism in the institution of animal exploitation.

^x I need to acknowledge, here, that the relationships between humanity and animality, and between race and animality, that I am trying to expose and refigure are Eurocentric ones. My own work, then, operates within a Eurocentric framework, and does not attempt to address the range of non-European conceptions of the relationship between humans and animals that have existed and continue to exist. As Armstrong writes, non-European cultural knowledges "that imperialism has attempted to efface continue to pose radical challenges to the dominance of Western value systems" (414). The work of addressing these challenges is important; as Haraway cautions, however, attempts to do so must negotiate the trap of "the cannibalistic western logic that readily constructs other cultural

possibilities as resources for western needs and actions” (“The Bio-politics of a Multicultural Field” 255).

^{xi} This dynamic in which hybridization gives rise to a better, more robust strain, recalls the ways in which discourses of interracial hybridity have taken up the botanical concept of “hybrid vigor.” As this suggests, the way we think about plants, too, has shaped the way we think about race. While I can’t unpack it here, it is worth thinking about how plants figure into the constructions of humanity and animality that I am engaging.

^{xii} See Jane Chance’s book by this name

^{xiii} The term “Tolkien’s *legendarium*” is used to describe the entire body of his published work that is set in this particular Secondary World.

^{xiv} It is also of note that each case involves the marriage of a human man to an Elvin woman. An adequate discussion of why this might be lies beyond the scope of my analysis, but the gendered and sexualized nature of the Man-Elf relation needs to be acknowledged, and could be fruitfully unpacked. This becomes even more urgent in light of Shippey’s comment about how the penetration of Men into the hidden Elf kingdoms consistently carries the “seed of [their] destruction” (*Road to Middle Earth* 253).

^{xv} Tolkien returned to the story of Beren and Luthien many times throughout the development of Middle Earth, writing at least twelve different versions in both verse and prose (*Road to Middle Earth* 257). He also identified with it strongly on a personal level, so much so that he had the names Beren and Luthien inscribed on his and his wife’s tombstones.

^{xvi} Whereas the question of the animal remains to be fully taken up in Tolkien criticism, ecocritical readings of Tolkien’s work have productively engaged the question of “nature” and the environment. See Dickerson and Evan’s *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: the Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* for a comprehensive treatment of this question.

^{xvii} I am, of course, suspicious of the notion of an essential and stable quality of humanness. In *Xenogenesis*, however, humanity does have a defining characteristic, as I discuss below.

^{xviii} Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor used this term in the context of Canadian multiculturalism in 1992.

^{xix} See Nelkin and Lindee’s discussion of how the metaphors of the human genome as Holy Grail, Bible, and Canon refigure DNA in the image of the Christian soul, arranged according to the sacred formula of human essence (39-40).

^{xx} Nelkin and Lindee, again, write perceptively on the paradoxical nature of genetic discourse. Genetic metaphors, they write, “serve to explain human exceptionalism on the basis of different DNA (‘the genes of genius’), but also to claim the rights of animals on the basis of shared DNA (‘A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy’). Genetics can justify social harmony (based on common ancestry) or social divisions (based on race)” (16).

^{xxi} See Nelkin and Lindee on germ plasm (199-200).

^{xxii} This is a particularly interesting aspect of this alien species, and difficult to pin down. There is a striking resemblance between this semi-agentic, teleological organelle and the representation of the gene, as discussed by Haraway and Roof, as the embodiment of the competitive and self-determining humanist, and capitalist, individual. On the other hand, Cathy Peppers points out how this characterization of the organelle destabilizes the humanist myth of the autonomous, independent individual that has lifted himself out of

his natural state by sheer force of will. Thus, Butler recalls Lynn Margulis' "'symbiotic theory of the origin' of species (that posits) that many of the microbiotic components of our cells, like the mitochondria, evolved from free-living species which later entered into symbiotic relationships ... which suggests that 'All of us are walking communities'" (Peppers 54). According to Peppers' view, Butler re-presents the human as a community of organisms working together, along the lines of Haraway's companion species, for whom "interdependence is the name of the worlding game" (*When Species Meet* 19). This is one of the ways in which, according to Haraway, Butler interrogates "the boundaries of what counts as human and into the limits of the concept and the practices of claiming 'property in the self' as the ground of 'human' individuality and selfhood" (*Simians* 226).

^{xxiii} As one Oankali tells Lilith, this is an existential imperative for them: "We trade the essence of ourselves. Our genetic material for yours. ... We must do it. It renews us, enables us to survive as an evolving species instead of specializing ourselves into extinction or stagnation" (*Dawn* 40).

^{xxiv} Here Butler unsettles the *transhumanist* brand of posthumanism critiqued by Katherine Hayles and Wolfe, among others. This brand of posthumanism, Wolfe argues, is actually an intensification of the ideals of rational humanism that imagines the potential to transcend human embodiment through scientific progress. Wolfe sets his own conception of posthumanism against this fantasy of "transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether," proposing rather a "posthumanism [that] ... isn't posthuman at all – in the sense of being 'after' our embodiment has been transcended – but is only *posthumanist*, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself" (*What is Posthumanism* xv). Butler's humans encounter the incarnation of this fantasy of extended longevity, increased physical, mental, and emotional acuity, and unlimited mobility. The Oankali have not transcended embodiment, however; rather, much of their power comes from a deeper connection with the chemical and haptic sensorium, forms of embodiment abjected by humanism as base and animal. Indeed, their sensory tentacles remind the humans of sea slugs and tentacled invertebrates, animals figured in the Western taxonomical hierarchy as most primitive: all body, no mind.

^{xxv} See Bridget Brown's fascinating discussion of how reports of alien abductions have coevolved with the intensification of biotechnology and media representations of biomedicine.

^{xxvi} This trope pervades mainstream science fiction, particularly sci-fi film and television. The *Star Trek* franchise, *Avatar*, *District 9*, and *Predator* are only a few examples.

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