



Sun Ra Arkestra feat. Shabaka Hutchings, "Love In Outer Space" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arh3rRYyBL8

The Evolution of Earthseed

-What is the purpose of the discussion with Travis in Chap 18?

There's hope in understanding the nature of God—not punishing or jealous, but infinitely malleable. There's comfort in realizing that everyone and everything yields to God. There's power in knowing that God can be focused, diverted, shaped by anyone at all. But there's no power in having strength and brains, and yet waiting for God to fix things for you or take revenge for you. You know that. You knew it when you took your family and got the hell out of your boss's house. God will shape us all every day of our lives. Best to understand that and return the effort: Shape God." (Aug 8, 2027; Chap 18; 220)

Travis: "Why personify change by calling it God? Since change is just an idea, why not call it that? Just say change is important."

"Because after a while, it won't be important!" I told him. "People forget ideas. They're more likely to remember God—especially when they're scared or desperate."

"Then they're supposed to do what?" he demanded. "Read a poem?"

"Or remember a truth or a comfort or a reminder to action," I said. "People do that all the time. They reach back to the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, or some other religious book that helps them deal with the frightening changes that happen in life." (Aug 8, 2027; Chap 18; 221)

- Purpose? emphasizes adaptation, resilience, and the necessity of change
- a path forward in a world where the old ways are no longer sustainable
- -How does Earthseed resist conventional Christianity?
- -What is godshaping?
- -what kind of religion is this?
- -ideas vs stories
- -how does this distinction speak to Butler's larger project?

The Destiny of Earthseed

"The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars," I said. "That's the ultimate Earthseed aim, and the ultimate human change short of death. It's a destiny we'd better pursue if we hope to be anything other than smooth-skinned dinosaurs—here today, gone tomorrow, our bones mixed with the bones and ashes of our cities, and so what?"

"Space?" [Travis] said. "Mars?"

"Beyond Mars," I said. "Other star systems. Living worlds."

"You're crazy as hell," he said, but I like the soft, quiet way he said it—with amazement rather than ridicule. (222)

-the interplanetary aspect?

-Effect of these discussions with Travis and Bankole? Draws out and attempts to disarms the reader's skepticism

-cf. to the opening scene of the novel in Lauren's dream of flying

"The essentials [of Earthseed]," I answered, "are to learn to shape God with forethought, care, and work; to educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves; and to contribute to the fulfillment of the Destiny."

"And why should people bother about the Destiny, farfetched as it is? What's in it for them?" "A unifying, purposeful life here on Earth, and the hope of heaven for themselves and their children. A real heaven, not mythology or philosophy. A heaven that will be theirs to shape." (Chap 21; 261)



- -Earthseed's interplanetarity aspect is part of the novel's Afrofuturism
- -Afrofuturism= a genre that centers Black history and culture and incorporates science-fiction, technology, and futuristic elements (*Black Panther*, Sun Ra Arkestra)
- -a vision of the future where Black people are at the forefront of innovation and are liberated from historical legacies of marginalization and oppression
- -Butler is often referred to as the "Mother of Afrofuturism"

A New Community Arises from the Ashes

Bankole owns this land, free and clear. There's a huge, half ruined garden plus citrus trees full of unripe fruit. We've already been pulling carrots and digging potatoes here. There are plenty of other fruit and nut trees plus wild pines, redwoods, and Douglas firs. None of these last were very big. This area was logged sometime before Bankole bought it. Bankole says it was clear-cut back in the 1980s or 1990s, but we can make use of the trees that have grown since then, and we can plant more. We can build a shelter, put in a winter garden from the seed I've been carrying and collecting since we left home. (Chap 25; 318)

- -Bankole's land in Humboldt CA
- -it is both a horror story and a forest eden
- -the land holds both slow and spectacular violence
- -an integral part of Lauren's Earthseed vision is the founding of a multiracial community in the north
 - -the danger from whoever burned out Bankole's sister's family
 - -the choices that the group faces in trying to decide whether to stay here or go further north?
- -Isolation vs jobs
- -trust in each other
- -Private property vs. communal living

Acorn: The Ending

So today we remembered the friends and the family members we've lost. We spoke our individual memories and quoted Bible passages, Earthseed verses, and bits of songs and poems that were favorites of the living or the dead.

Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees.

Afterward, we sat together and talked and ate a meal and decided to call this place Acorn.

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit an hundredfold. (Luke 8: 5-8) (Chap 25; 328-9)

- -what kind of ending is this?
- -what does the parable of the sower mean at the end?
- -what role does Lauren play in this parable?

Afrofuturism and Environmentalism Utopia or Dystopia?





- -What models of going to the stars do we have?
- -The Destiny? The interplanetary vision of Octavia Butler vs. Elon Musk
- -What do they share? How are they different?

- Is the interplanetary aspect utopian or dystopian? Is it a rebirth or a giving up?
- -is it reproducing the logic of settler colonialism in outerspace?

Conclusion: What environmental models arise out of Butler's novel?

- -environment is not background but an active agent in the story (cf. the fire along the highway, the landscape of Bankole's land in Humboldt)
- -this challenges Western ideas about control and mastery over the environment
- -what happens when there is a loss of this fantasy of mastery?
- -the environment is both literal disaster and a metaphor
- -ecological collapse is inseparable from social and moral disorder

In class writing: Jesmyn Ward's Salvage the Bones and Butler's Parable of the Sower

Work with a partner but write down your answers separately with your name on it so you can turn it in at the end of class (unless you are both in the same section).

Consider the ways in which Ward and Butler each dramatize the effects of natural disaster and climate change.

- 1. Which novel did you enjoy reading more?
- 2. Which novel do you think is more effective at getting people to recognize the social and environmental costs of climate change? Why?

Choose a specific passage to illustrate your view and include its page number. (If you don't have Ward's novel with you, you can just describe the passage).