

On Compassion and the Sublime Black Body: Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*

IKEA M. JOHNSON

"It sounds like a combination of Buddhism, existentialism, Sufism and I don't know what else"

(*Parable of the Sower* 234)

"Each of our cells contain the code of an interrelated web of life. This biological phenomenon is constant with the teaching of interbeing voiced in the *Heart Sutra*."

(*Painting Enlightenment: Healing Visions of the Heart Sutra* 37)

There appears to be widespread agreement among literary critics that Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is a prophetic story of speculative fiction. Though, an examination of how and why she creates these tales, interwoven with intersectional issues, Buddhism, and phenomenology, and how that influence emerges in the novel is not offered sufficiently elsewhere. This piece aims to contribute to the explanation of that process by studying the expressed behaviors and beliefs of the protagonist, Lauren, and her new theology, Earthseed. A query into her parable series reveals passages of ontological, social, and political revelation woven into the narrative of a fifteen-year-old African American girl commonly known as Lauren. Through this essay, I will show how this hybrid religion reveals the influences of the Buddhist Theravâda tradition of compassion and the sublime throughout the narrative. Here, the specific concern is the limitless reach of sublime ideas explored in the story like empathy and transformation. These notions are sublime because Lauren exists as an extreme version of herself. Butler's character embodies fluctuating ideas of philosophical explanations of what the sublime means. The hyperempathy syndrome operates as physically and psychologically extreme phenomena that involve a series of resulting changes in the hosts of this hyperempathy and the world around them.

Compassion fuses and impulses love to expand their realm; they blend and instruct deep joy to examine for new sustenance. Therefore, it enables all moments of sublimation to accumulate into truly infinite states (*appamaññā*). Compassion shields equanimity from falling into apathy and protects it from languid or insatiable withdrawal. Until equanimity has entered embodiment, compassion urges its sentient host to come into the planet's trial again, to stand the test, by solidifying and enhancing itself as a power—a superpower. Solidarity is impartiality that cannot wait for collective healing for nation-wide and international healing. This statement could not be made more evident than when witnessing Black Lives Matter protests and the governmental response, support, and lack of appropriate policy reformation to halt the enforced suffering onto the Black body by physical and sublime forces. Engaged Buddhism exemplifies an antidote to the politics

of terror, hate, turmoil, and alienation. Theravāda Buddhist beliefs hinge on human nature as impacting the growth and compression of political participation. Buddhism is a personal strategy; the second noble truth points out that the cause of suffering is in mind rather than out in the world. So, too, must each mind in the novel (*Earth*) recognize inversion of hyperempathy and flow with the billows of change.

The two-fold aim of this project is to: (a) demonstrate one way that sublime states like compassion operate in the literature as “hyperempathy” and (b) how philosophical theories about Black bodies devised by Edmund Burk, Frantz Fanon, and Immanuel Kant combine to explain how societal events affect individuals’ attitudes at different times.¹ Thirdly, this assessment will show how effectively the author’s data-collection methods and narrative in the novel provide the information needed for interpreting the Buddhist influence on sublime states throughout the narrative. The approach used in this study relies on an integration of two theories that will explain how societal conditions affect people’s beliefs and behavior throughout the novel. The first theory links to environmental (behavior systems) factors which with a person interacts. On one level, the novel is about climate change and the erosion of the planet and humanity. On another level, though, the story is about how micro-systems (patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by developing person) affect the individual most intimately (Bronfenbrenner 15). The second theory has, in part, a sociohistorical foundation which explains Lauren’s development in terms of (a) the history and present conditions of the society, (b) the history of her development, and (c) ways that these two histories interact to determine her present and future beliefs, attitudes, and behavior—primarily related to the tenets of *Earthseed*. There are four propositions explored in this study that identify theory components and Lauren’s interaction: (a) social stability and change, (b) time and place, (c) intermediaries, and (d) Lauren’s developmental history. In a study of the relationship between the broader society and Lauren’s individual beliefs, it is useful to understand how her beliefs are not typical of those held in the general population. The information collected by literary analysis is summarized to show how the results enable the researcher to show how comparable and contrasting attitudes of Butler, Burke, Fanon, and others in the past or present-day involve the sublime as a mental or physical force.² This study’s final steps consist of summarizing the analysis results and proposing what those results appear to mean in terms of the bioenvironmental theory and sociohistorical aspects of the narrative.

Through Buddhist parables and Christian stories, Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* culminates in a story that offers a new understanding of some initial evaluations and philosophies of Black bodies’ sublime nature. Butler’s novel also offers opportunities to evaluate the ways laws, policies, historical memory, and science are transcendent notions to consider regarding society in literature. The eyes are crucial to Butler’s work because it is the most useful organ through Lauren’s character in transmitting the sublime ideas. “Sound doesn’t trigger [Lauren’s] sharing. [She must] see another person in pain” (Butler 132).

Likewise, Burke imagined the eyes as sense organs that transmitted sublime states to the seer. It is thus the primary organ through which the aesthetic can synchronize. So, it is overflow linked with the energy, extent, and incomprehensibility of sublime images and concepts. What makes Lauren’s power so much more complex is the psychological nature of her condition. However, Butler has referred to Lauren’s hyperempathy syndrome as a delusion; a delusion which fools her into believing she is experiencing the pain of

others. Her father thought she could overcome this deluded form of suffering. “He has always pretended, or perhaps believed, that my hyperempathy syndrome was something I could shake off and forget about” (Butler 11). Still, the delusion is complex and perplexing that it requires an entirely different set of ideas, customs, and values to overcome the delusional experiences. Delusional thoughts of suffering must become navigated differently to live with the existence of hyperempathy and to recognize its emptiness and relation back to the body. “I can’t do a thing about my hyperempathy, no matter what Dad thinks or wants or wishes. I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe the hyperempathy is what the doctors call an “organic delusional syndrome” (Butler 12).

The eyes are a conduit for Lauren that sends signals to her mind to interpret others’ pain as her own. As Butler has said in other interviews that she inherited certain traits and values from her mother, so too, does Lauren inherit the ability to experience the delusion of hyperempathy from intelligence enhancing drugs her mother took. “Paracetco, the small pill, the Einstein powder” (Butler 12). Furthermore, an apt essay by Anna Hinton, “Making Do with What You Don’t Have: Disabled Black Motherhood in Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*,” describes how Lauren’s hyperempathy is a disability. The burden of hiding an invisible affliction becomes Lauren’s narrative as she navigates the world as an African American with a genetically inherited condition from her mother. The body becomes the conduit for transmitting genetic memory and codes; but, it also becomes the conduit for transmitting a mentally and physically debilitating disease. What is more interesting is to consider the fact that the other sharers in the hyperempathy are also Black and people of color like Lauren. The implication of this collective group of “sharers” is that they all share the same dilemma. The narrative operates with actual perpetrators of compassion and empathy as equally capable of action, ruthlessness, uproar—an unmovable determination to throw off shackles of delusional thinking that they must remain victims of their hyperempathy syndrome.

Although Butler stated elsewhere some titles have nothing to do with the content other than marketing, this title, *Parable of the Sower*, still connects to the tale therein. In a few ways, the title acts as a guide to better understand the origin of delusion and suffering and its connection back to the body. Because Lauren’s hyperempathy is a delusional response to pain, it is, therefore, a sublime notion, tangible only through experience but not demonstrable or easily reconstructed. At first, hyperempathy seems like a positive attribute. Undoubtedly, the ability to empathize on a deep physiological level with other people is good; it would infuse a sort of kindness into the world:

The sharing isn’t real, after all. It isn’t some magic or ESP that allows me to share the pain or the pleasure of other people. It’s delusional. Even I admit that. My brother Keith used to pretend to be hurt just to trick me into sharing his supposed pain. Once he used red ink as fake blood to make me bleed. I was eleven then, and I still bled through the skin when I saw someone else bleeding. (Butler 11)

On another level, though, the hyperempathy is also a crippling aspect, and sometimes it is dangerous. This threat is also apparent when Lauren must protect herself and her group from Pyro users and criminals. For instance, if she shoots somebody and sees it happen with her eyes, she then feels the gunshot wound. As one can imagine, that is incapacitating. Nevertheless, Octavia Butler uses hyperempathy to preserve Lauren and her group because it forces Lauren to see other people as sentient beings with just as essential emotions as hers. This issue results in her being compassionate towards other people. In a world that has become worse in matters of moral humanity and civility, this

helps Lauren to discover stability and power in numbers to grow her team by essentially taking in people from the road. So, hyperempathy may cause readers to consider how one would behave toward other people if one always felt everything they are feeling. As more people become sufferers of natural disasters, the psychological and physical effects of racism and climate change, Lauren's hyperempathy and applying that to one's own life can show how to empathize with others. As a result, empathy may turn into compassion.

In an interview, Butler says she took many influences from Buddhism in the creation of the text. So, from the Buddhist parable and philosophy, I take the ideas of compassion and suffering to explain Lauren's power further; and explain why it is so useful to the Earthseed theology for the society Lauren created. The tale of *Parable of the Sower* is the book as recorded by Lauren. Every entry commences with a verse of Earthseed before diving into descriptions of Lauren's understanding of living in a world that is reeling from the devastating effects of climate change. These effects include wealth inequality, homelessness, decreased access to education, drug craving scourges, and refugee crises. Butler offers this notion through the novel: The world suffers, but most people have their eyes and ears closed to this suffering's origins. Individual grief or joy stalls their sight and deafens their ears to the plight of other people. Constrained by desire, their minds turn narrow. The result, for Butler, is a roving mad world destroyed by unhealthy and capitalistic pursuits. However, it is compassion, Lauren's hyperempathy, that serves to navigate the burden of suffering, unlocks the access to freedom, makes the narrow soul as enormous as the universe. Compassion takes away from the soul the inert tension, the paralyzing heaviness; it confers annexes to those who clench to the construct of self. Through hyperempathy, the fact of suffering remains vividly present to Lauren's mind, even when she is personally free from it. It gives her the experience of enduring suffering, thus enhancing her to meet it equipped with tenets of Earthseed when it does befall her. This debilitating power, this compassion reconciles Lauren to her future by showing her the life of others, often much harder than hers.

Also, compassion is considered a sublime state of mind in Buddhism. In Theravāda Buddhism, *karuṇā* is one of the four "divine abodes" (*brahmavihāra*), along with loving-kindness (Pāli: *mettā*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).³ The Visuddhimagga (IX, 94) states that compassion is considered as supporting the aspect of allaying suffering. Its function dwells in not carrying others' suffering. It becomes demonstrated as non-cruelty. Its immediate trigger is to see the helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It thrives when it makes cruelty diminish, and it weakens when it generates sorrow. One reason for this is because compassion is acting out a sort of hyperempathy in words and deeds. This sort of compassion results from forces of culture and law imposed on, for illustration, Lauren's body even before her conception. Reverence and compassionate understanding help Lauren act from a place of spiritual energy, rather than anxiety and reactivity. Energy becomes wasted fixated on desiring things that existed other than they are. For Lauren, a better solution than resisting reality is to put that power into "shaping change" through the Earthseed philosophy. Alternatively, in Buddhist terms, invest in the actions that belong to her.

Moreover, suffering enters the narrative in many ways, pointedly marked with Lauren's constant references to Job of the Bible: "My favorite book of the Bible is Job. I think it says more about my father's God in particular and gods in general than anything else I've ever read" (15). As someone raised in a Southern Baptist Christian and Roman Catholic

tradition for most of my life, like many African Americans, I recall this story as a staple of justification for unwarranted suffering. Job becomes burdened with tremendous forms of suffering by God and expected to not denounce his faith in God because of his tribulations. Lauren questions this tenet and devises her religion in opposition to such Christian ideas and develops more precise navigation methods of inevitable suffering. Of course, the first clue given to readers about the universality of the Earthseed religion is the title itself, *Parable of the Sower*, because it operates as a universal marker for a few different and similar stories from across the world. On one level, the parable comes from a Christian passage in Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23, and King James Version Luke 8:5-8. On another level, the story originates from a Buddhist proverb when the Buddha answered a man who asked him how he ate, to which he replied, "O Brahmin, I, too, plow and sow, and having plowed and sown, I eat." "Do you profess to be a farmer?" replied the brahmin. "Where, then, are your bullocks? Where are the seeds and the plow?" Buddha replied,

"Faith is the seed I sow: good works are the rain that fertilizes it; wisdom and modesty are the plows; my mind is the guiding-rein; earnestness is the goad I use, and exertion is my draught-ox. This plowing is plowed to destroy the weeds of illusion. The harvest it yields is the immortal fruit of liberation."⁴

The parable is from Bali, mostly in the tradition of Theravâda Buddhism.⁵ Theravâda is the initial school of Buddhism, and the Buddha's disciples proceeded with it after his passing. It centers on the sangha, the community of monks. Theravâda Buddhism proposes that nirvana is possible through reflection and separation from the world wholly. A common stylistic feature of the Buddhist canonical literature is the use of similes and parables. The hermeneutics of two truths are central to Mâdhyamika dialectics and its deconstructive analysis of key metaphysical concepts, including causation, spirit, and the self. In the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Mûlamadhyamakârikâs), Nâgârjuna extends the notion that phenomena lack intrinsic existence to apply to the self, which is usually conceived in dependence upon the five aggregates (MMK, IX, 12). The literature of dharma (wisdom) typically does not define aspects of ordinary life related to its point. This sort of literature generally provided to leaders tends to be speculative, like in-depth knowledge. Dharma literature for a wide-ranging market tends to be nonrepresentational and conventional, like proverbial insight. The stories are uncommon in representing tenets of a venerated teacher in terms of shepherding, horticulture, and other everyday activities.

When considering Lauren's syndrome and its continuity, this parable serves as the marker for transnationalism as it connects to what I call Black-Sublimation. Black-Sublimation forces the Black body and mind to (sometimes unwillingly) shift and transform because they must navigate the crossings of social, climate, and political transitions in a system inherently designed to keep the body of color underneath capitalism's hoof. This indication is expressed through Lauren's hyperempathy as she also discerns that her natural comrades are other people of color. These people include mixed-race couples since they are susceptible to become victims of the violence of white hate groups. Several of the migrants who join Lauren's group and the society she later establishes, Acorn, turn out to be called "sharers," which is the word for others who share the hyperempathy syndrome. As a group, they collectively follow these Tenets of Earthseed and claim, "We do not worship God. We perceive and attend God. We learn from God. With forethought and work, We shape God. In the end, we yield to God. We adapt and endure, For we are Earthseed And God is Change" (17). Butler alleges that

Earthseed was a sort of apogee of many theological beliefs, including Buddhism, Taoism, and other Eastern religions. Some Western readers may mistake some ideas of Eastern religions like resiliency for complacency or passivity. However, she emphasizes these traditions that may often become lost from a Western readers perspective, is summed up in verse from Earthseed:

We are all Godseed, but no more or less so than any other aspect of the universe, Godseed is all there is—all that Changes. Earthseed is all that spreads Earthlife to new earths. The universe is Godseed. Only we are Earthseed. And the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars. (Butler 77)

Since Buddhism is nearly an empirical process, psychological and moral, rather than philosophical or sacred, it may become evaluated by its outcomes. So, Butler emphasizes that one cannot resist change, but must follow change, allow it to arise, grow with the evolution. In doing so, one can also make a unique set of determinations in changing situations that will, in turn, influence the change everyone else is also going through. This idea is not so dissimilar from Gandhi's notion of being the change one wants to see in the world. At the same time, the Earthseed verse is also a central paradox of Earthseed, and it is the inverse of being contented, fragile, submissive, and reticent. As an alternative, it bases on the act of strong-will, acting, traveling through the journey of change, and guiding transformation to better suit the reality one wishes to create. For Lauren, this meant pursuing a better, more peaceful life. In Lauren's preparedness for change, readers also learn to be prepared, but it could be any number of means of engagement with the present for some today. Some of these actions for change include voting for elected officials, fighting to transition gracefully with climate change, making conscientious consumer selections, replanting trees and plants, and opposing/protesting apathy and inaction from administrations and conglomerates peacefully.

Like traditional religions, Earthseed has a God, a change, and a holy book called the Book of Living. The book first started as a series of truths Lauren discovers to be denied by those who latch onto an idea of a peaceful past. Later, Lauren recognizes its potential to become a religion that unifies communities and fosters life. All things mentioned previously considered, a return to the tenets of Earthseed, Lauren's religion, culminates in reflecting some Buddhist tenets' adaptation. There are two main takeaways from Lauren's theology. These are a few central tenets of Earthseed:

I am Earthseed. Anyone can be. Someday, I think there will be a lot of us. And I think we'll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place. I've never felt that I was making any of this up—not the name, Earthseed, not any of it. I mean, I've never felt that it was anything other than real: discovery rather than invention, exploration rather than creation. I wish I could believe it was all supernatural, and that I'm getting messages from God. But then, I don't believe in that kind of God. All I do is observe and take notes, trying to put things down in ways that are as powerful, as simple, and as direct as I feel them... (Butler 78)

Lauren offers the notion that Earthseed is a theology of embodiment and interconnectivity. The "dying place" of Earth, with its bioenvironmental decay and social dealings among humans constantly rotting through violence, forces the body into self-activation. Self-actualization is not a message "from God" but the recognition of theory and practice of mindfulness as a form of compassion. Unfortunately, this form of compassion for Lauren is a two-edged sword, as so is any human's pursuit of making themselves and the world

a better place—it is not always comfortable. Acceptance of this “observation” and “discovery rather than invention” leads to Earthseed theology’s development. Lauren often questions Christian concepts of justice, faith, and morality. She wonders, “Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? it?) care about us? Deists like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson believed God was something that made us, then left us on our own” (Butler 15). This quote implies that the universal epithet people have contrived overtime to justify human dealings beyond theorization leave some with no correct answers. The intangibility of an omnipotent presence that “Deists like Benjamin Franklin” used to create laws and policies still operating today hinge on the belief that people were made by God and left to reconcile their existence alone.⁶ Earthseed challenges this philosophical idea that rejects revelation as a foundation of spiritual understanding. Earthseed also challenges the assertion of deist understanding that reason and observation of the natural world are adequate to determine the presence of a creator of the universe. In chapter seven, Lauren explains the reasoning behind the name Earthseed:

SOMETIMES NAMING A THING—giving it a name or discovering its name—helps one to begin to understand it. Knowing the name of a thing and knowing what that thing is gives me even more of a handle on it. The particular God-is-Change belief system that seems right to me will be called Earthseed. I’ve tried to name it before. Failing that, I’ve tried to leave it unnamed. Neither effort has made me comfortable. Name plus purpose equals focus for me. Well, today, I found the name, found it while I was weeding the back garden and thinking about the way plants seed themselves, windborne, animalborne, waterborne, far from their parent plants. (Butler 77)

Upon discovering the “God-is-Change” belief system, Lauren recognizes that a change must occur in her pattern of thinking articulated in a way that deviates from previously conditioned ideas of what God is or was to people like Franklin, Jefferson, or her father. The “seed” in the name “Earthseed” represents cognitive downpour as an explicit retort to the undertakings toward a balanced explanation of cause and momentariness. To be more clear, a seed in this circumstance of the name of the belief system represents two sets of phenomena: (a) latent tendencies underlying the karmic cycle; and (b) the power of specific causal bonds to induce a reaction. The notion of seeds is used here only in a traditional sense and thus does not establish a real presence, whether correlated with or dissociated from thought. In this manner, the theory of seeds in the theology of Earthseed, considering the mental stream and hyperempathy of Lauren, gives an approach of discoursing about connectedness that does not eliminate unconsciousness and restoration beliefs. By comparing the organic imagery linked with seeds and blooming to reason and cognitive phenomena, the Earthseed system opens the door for awareness of mentation as an active and flexible method. It is not only a planting of ideas from “parent” plants and involves more naturally occurring phenomena, like “windborne” and “waterborne” seeding. A causal description of the cognitive activity is therefore enhanced by a dispositional statement of cognitive states that are not always true-life factors. Also, given the association of purposeful cognitive states with consciousness, cognitive events are heeded as the central force sustaining and immortalizing the hyperempathy syndrome. Lauren and the other sharers’ bodies with their sense organs and numerous additional conditioning aspects are expropriated in consciousness, guaranteeing that mentation, whether in a conscious, subliminal, or indirect cognitive form is constant. In understanding these aspects of the story first, the reader can situate the universality of Earthseed and break down its components related to Lauren’s hyperempathy. Above all,

the tale is about Lauren's compassion for humanity expressed in her religion, Earthseed, and in her powers of hyperempathy. The fact of her blackness and her sublime existence is secondary to this superpower's development, but it is essential in understanding her characterization and journey.

As mentioned earlier in this essay, *the Parable of the Sower* is prophetic in a few ways. An excellent example of this idea is how Butler involves concepts about widespread cohort capitalism with massive technology corporations who bring slavery back into tangible existence through indentured servitude. In Butler's environment, a Presidential candidate named Christopher Donner is appointed based on his pledges to disassemble parliament programs and bring jobs back to the people. He plans to (and I paraphrase from the narrative) make America great again. One must point out the apparent prophetic nature of this Afrofuturistic tale considering the dually divisive and uniting election mantra of the U.S. president in 2020—Make America Great Again. The protagonists' father, a Christian minister and academic refers to the presidential candidate as:

[A] symbol of the past for us to hold on to as we're pushed into the future. He's nothing. No substance. But having him there, the latest in a two-and-a-half-century-long line of American Presidents make people feel that the country, the culture that they grew up with is still here—that we'll get through these bad times and back to normal. (Butler 55)

There is also an upsurge in apparent and overt racism, hate transgressions, and nationalism. There are vast refugee crises of people pushed from Central America and Mexico to the United States. Also, people from the United States are forced towards Canada and to Alaska. With so much calamity present in this novel, one cannot help but see the novel's realism that appeared in society today. Many news outlets of 2020 will show the ways racism, xenophobia, hate, and capitalism are fueling people into protests of human injustice, sentient being degradation, police brutality, algorithmic racism, systemic racism, housing market racism, and other technological, psychological, and physiological forms of discrimination. Shamefully, migrants from other countries entering the U.S. are separated from their children at the border and forced to live in military sanctioned bases on cold floors wrapped in silver, flame retard blankets.

Given these points, through Lauren's hyperempathy, Butler shows how compassion prevents feelings of love, respect, and generous joy from existing while dismissing that there still exist some unpleasant states of suffering on the earth. Lauren's hyperempathy reminds readers that their satisfaction may coexist with measureless suffering. "Every one knows that change is inevitable. From the second law of thermodynamics to Darwinian evolution, from Buddhism's insistence that nothing is permanent and all suffering results from our delusions of permanence to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes ("To everything there is a season") change is part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom. But I don't believe we're dealing with all that that means. We haven't even begun to deal with it" (Butler 25). It symbolizes love and charitable happiness in understanding the suffering in the world impartial to mitigation. After the consequence of this relief has disappeared, fret and injure may still arise until suffering is uprooted completely at the recognition of unanimity. The "sharers" hyperempathy also accomplishes to show that feelings of devotion and thoughtful exhilaration close themselves up against the more abundant earth by restricting themselves to a limited area of existence without connection to other people. This hyperempathy prevents respect and great contentment from swiveling into states of self-satisfied complacency within carefully guarded prosperity.

Through Butler's work and other writers explored throughout this piece, the literature exposes the terrorism of white supremacy and the work that must be done for the non-Black/of color body to recognize and awaken to the implicit and explicit social contract it also signs globally. What also becomes apparent throughout this work is that literature brings the reader's attention to the apparent sublimation of the body of color and the African American body as not only casualties but also unfortunate participants in its perpetuation of destruction. Contemporary African American literature includes strains of black postmodernism, neoslavery, and Afrofuturism, as writers continue to develop innovative forms to complicate existing notions of race and representation through debates over politics and aesthetics, diaspora and transnationalism, and gender and sexuality.

The conversations in the literature surrounding healing of African Americans is objectivity that cannot remain stagnant in the discussion of only what captivity was, but how to better understand the lasting impact of its consequences so that appropriate means of engagement, recognition, and assessment may become incorporated into the teaching and consumption of works of literature that deal with the topic. One can name so many. However, Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Parable of the Sower* are particularly notable in advancing the discussion of how to write the Black body into a history, present, and future that excludes, misappropriates, or abuses its presence. These ideas deserve more discussion and deconstruction of the concept of re-writing history and writing truth to power presently.

Louisiana State University, USA

Notes

- ¹ Edmund Burke offered an inverted notion of sublime as it relates to black bodies. Albeit different methods, of course, there remains a distinct concern for the ways sublime forces operate to build or destroy people. As a comparative approach, I examined this project under the notion of sublime Black bodies Burke devised as a secondary concept in *Enquiry* as he explained what the sublime affected. Burke describes how the sublime forces the mind to move away from itself due to impressions' disorientation. In these moments of movement, the mind may move towards panic or terror aroused by fear, the "ruling principle of the sublime" (*Enquiry*, 58). Sublime things may be viewed as terrible because they are incomprehensible, "dark, uncertain, confused, terrible" (*Enquiry*, 59); They are not the creations of clear visions. For Burke, what stirs terror in these conditions is the understanding of a loss of domination: the mind is startled by the vision's energy and power and can neither plainly understand nor replicate it. Simultaneously, the sublime persuades one since its affection to ambiguity is beyond interpretation.
- ² Contrarily, in his essay "The Fact of Blackness," Fanon expresses the "difficulties in the development of [a] bodily schema," which "the man of color" encounters in "the white world." Fanon gives voice to the dialectical advancement of casts of race and gender, which loiter on the other side of the sublime "effects of blackness" described by Burke. Fanon counteracts the following section to broaden Burke's aesthetic assessments of darkness to blackness on part IV, section XVII, "The effects of BLACKNESS."

- ³ See Rhys Davids, T.W. & William Stede (eds.) (1921-5). *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Chipstead: Pali Text Society and Gethin, Rupert, *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- ⁴ See "Chapter 74: The Sower" of Paul Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha*, Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1894
- ⁵ I am grateful to Evvonne (Yun Wang), Beijing Normal University, whom I met during a seminar with Stephano Evangelista (Oxford University) about citizens of nowhere and post-colonialism during the 10th Harvard International World Literature Institute, for discussing the Bali and Theravāda tradition of this parable with me. The spelling of *karuna* and *appamaññā* are not in the same transliteration style. It seems that *Karuṇa* is in both Sanskrit and Pali, while *apramāṇa* in Sanskrit and *appamaññā* in Pāli. *Karuṇa* is more aligned for *appamaññā*, the Bali original spelling.
- ⁶ To Burke, the sublime was an ethereal experience reached through the vision of a sight of awe and inspiration that caused bewilderment and recognition at an inability to replicate the thing or the feelings it invoked. The "darkness" and "blackness" could not invoke negative feelings without attached notions of negativity because the boy in his example was blind for most of his life, and therefore would have said the sight was the cause because Black bodies are inherently negative beings. This idea is indeed prejudiced and subverts the notion of the sublime in such a way that Fanon's "Fact of Blackness" rebuttals this xenophobic ideology to offer instead that the non-Black mind is inundated with negative images through mind and sight before the Black body has the opportunity to exist without these preconceived notions of identity assigned to it. Through other means of engagement—mind, hearing others speak, language, and social habits—the blind spot of Burke's effects of "BLACKNESS" is revealed.

Works Cited

- Bronfenbrenner, Urie. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste: and Several Other Additions*. London: Printed for A. Robertson & Co, 1824.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2019.
- Hinton, Anna. "Making Do with What You Don't Have: Disabled Black Motherhood in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 12 no. 4, 2018, p. 441-457. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/709539.
- Mahoney, Richard, transcriber, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās of Nāgārjuna: Sanskrit text*. Oxford, North Canterbury: Indica et Buddhica, 2003.
- Phillips, Jerry. "The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler's 'Parable of the Sower.'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 35, no. 2/3, 2002, pp. 299–311. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1346188.
- Wozniak, Robert H, and Kurt W. Fischer. *Development in Context: Acting and Thinking in Specific Environments*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014.