



# The Role of Nature in the Works of Octavia Butler

*Robin Rockensüß*

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Examination Thesis from the year 2008 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,3, University of Dortmund, 67 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The science fiction (SF) writer Octavia Estelle Butler (1947-2006) was a pioneer in many ways. She won several Hugo and Nebula awards and was critically acclaimed as the most successful and most gifted female African-American author in a genre that is still mostly dominated by white males. Butler had been publishing stories since the early 1970s, imaginatively addressing issues such as slavery, race and gender in a science fiction environment – including elements of time traveling as in *Kindred* (1979) and telepathy and extraterrestrials in the *Patternist* series (1976-1984), which is made up of five novels and was republished in 2007 as the compilation *Seed to Harvest*. The *Patternist* stories already contain references to biological alterations of bodies and somatic mutations.

1987 marks the publication of *Dawn*, the first volume of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy which was also republished after Butler's death in the compilation *Lilith's Brood*. The series advances the idea of biological engineering to modern genetics in the same year when a committee of the National Academy of Sciences stated that organisms altered or created by the combination of genes between species pose no hazards to the natural environment and are “virtually risk free or have risk-to-benefit ratios well within acceptable bounds” (Schmeck 1987). Within the next two years, *Dawn* was followed by the sequels *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989). The two novels continued the scenario of a post-apocalyptic civilization and a world controlled by peaceful, yet intrusive extraterrestrial hybrids. In the trilogy Butler considered the overall consequences for nature, humanity and civilization by extrapolating from actual scientific and social developments. This approach can also be detected in the near-future dystopia of the *Parable* series.

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