



Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires

By Gregory Jerome Hampton

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Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires is a timely text that critically situates Butler's fiction in several fields of study including American, African-American, gender, and science fiction studies. This book attempts to avoid excluding as many readers as possible by evading esoteric jargon while still engaging the interdisciplinary discourses that respond to Butler's fiction. The study asserts that Butler's fiction transforms the way the body is imagined with reference to race and gender. This text examines how Butler's fiction is able to cross several genre boundaries while simultaneously reshaping the genre of science fiction. This book makes the claim that Butler's fiction is crucial for contemporary and future investigations of identity formation. Discussions of race, class, and sex are reoccurring topic that are inextricable to any understanding of body politics and theory. This book is filled with exciting and insightful discussions that raise questions about what constitutes humanity in Butler's fiction and in the real world. Ultimately, the purpose of the text is to add to the scholarship surrounding Butler and to bring her to the attention of audiences that might otherwise overlook her work. This book is an invitation for readers inside and outside of the academy to discover the fiction of Octavia Butler.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is a thorough and well-researched examination of the works of one of our finest 20th Century writers, Octavia E. Butler. Scholar Gregory Jerome Hampton helps us better understand the context of Butler's themes of body transformation in her work, and it is a must-read for anyone who wants a fuller appreciation for Butler's contribution to American literature. (Tananarive Due, American Book Award winner, author of *Blood Colony* and *My Soul To Keep*)

At last, a book worthy of the perspicacity and imagination of one of the most vital authors of our time. Gregory Jerome Hampton's *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires* lifts the veil on Butler's prolific corpus to tell the truth about Butler, her prodigious mind and the incontestable power of a legacy not yet fully realized. Drawing on not only the insights of traditional criticism, critical theory and genre studies, but on the most revelatory interviews with the author herself, *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler* ingeniously extricates Butler from the quicksand debates about her proper place in African American literature and science fiction, and instead highlights the poverty of formal thought and theory until now to situate Butler in the field. Under Hampton's deft hand, Butler's proper place turns out to be, like the question of the body being interrogated in this fine work, situational. Few besides Hampton, whose respect for Butler's extraordinary career is enormous, could have shown this so smartly. *Slaves, Aliens and Vampires* is a luminous book with the lay and expert reader alike in mind. (Maurice Wallace, Duke University)

In *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler*, Gregory Hampton takes readers on a journey through Butler's most significant works, exploring a range of themes, from maternalism, agency, and the Middle Passage in *Wild Seed*, to hybridity and hierarchy, oppression and self-determination, symbiosis and slavery, and the complex role of gender and race that is evident in much of her writing. An especially valuable contribution is Hampton's examination of *Fledgling*, Butler's last novel, a work that has received only little critical attention so far, despite its representing all of these themes. Although scholarship concerning African-American literature and the fantastic has risen in the last decade, at one point there was so little scholarship on this writer, that every volume was a welcome link in an invisible chain. Hampton's work represents a solid addition to an ongoing discussion of a writer whose work we may never tire of examining and celebrating. (Sheree Renée Thomas, editor of *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* and *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones*, winners of)

This work is a nuanced, careful, and interdisciplinary reading of Octavia E. Butler's works. The center of Hampton's analysis is the body, and the ways in which Butler understood and elaborated upon this theme in her many works. Hampton convinces the reader that Butler was successful in arguing for a new way of understanding the body that was radically different and even subversive. This central theme in Butler's works, Hampton argues, includes notions of race, identity and hybridity. Hampton utilizes with ease the insights from many scholars and disciplines to examine his subject matter, using for the works of Foucault, Carby, DuBois, Govan, Lacan, Melzer, and Lefanu, among others. He is able to link Butler to the multiple traditions of science fiction, African American literature and womanism. Butler, because she was situated within these multiple traditions, extended the discourse on race and identity that has existed since the trans-Atlantic Slave trade, to science fiction, which is one of her many contributions. Hampton illustrates his arguments with highly original readings of Butler's works, such as his comparison of Butler to DuBois and Soyinka's fiction. (Hoda Zaki, Hood College)

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...The highlights of this book were more the interviews, mostly because before her unfortunate death from a fall in 2006, I hadn't come across any by her. It is interesting that she points out that she didn't like to be pegged in either the SF or fantasy genres... If you are interested in Octavia Butler, then you will find this book of interest and should be added to your reading list. (SFCrowsnest)

Changing Bodies is a solid, straightforward investigation of Octavia Butler's books and beliefs. Even though it tends to assume that science fiction is a homogeneous field, it has the considerable merit of clearly placing her work in the broader spectrum of African-American and American literature. Moreover, it shows how Butler wrote to empower other people, eventually opening sf up to diverse readerships and, maybe, making it easier for other writers of color to engage in such a "white" genre. (*Science Fiction Studies*)

In the past few years, the black race as a subject in science fiction has gained plenty of attention. Gregory Jerome Hampton's *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires* is reflective of this claim

.... Hampton's book is quirkily structured around what comes after the colon in his title, "Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires," the bodies of which cleverly reflect his personal history of reading Butler as well as his topic concerning the body, its construction, its value, and its marginalization. (*The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*)

From the Back Cover
Empty

About the Author

Gregory Jerome Hampton is associate professor of African American literature at Howard University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joan Stauffer:

The event that you get from Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires is a more deep you excavating the information that hide into the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to be aware of but Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires giving you excitement feeling of reading. The copy writer conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood simply by anyone who read this because the author of this book is well-known enough. This book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this specific Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires instantly.

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