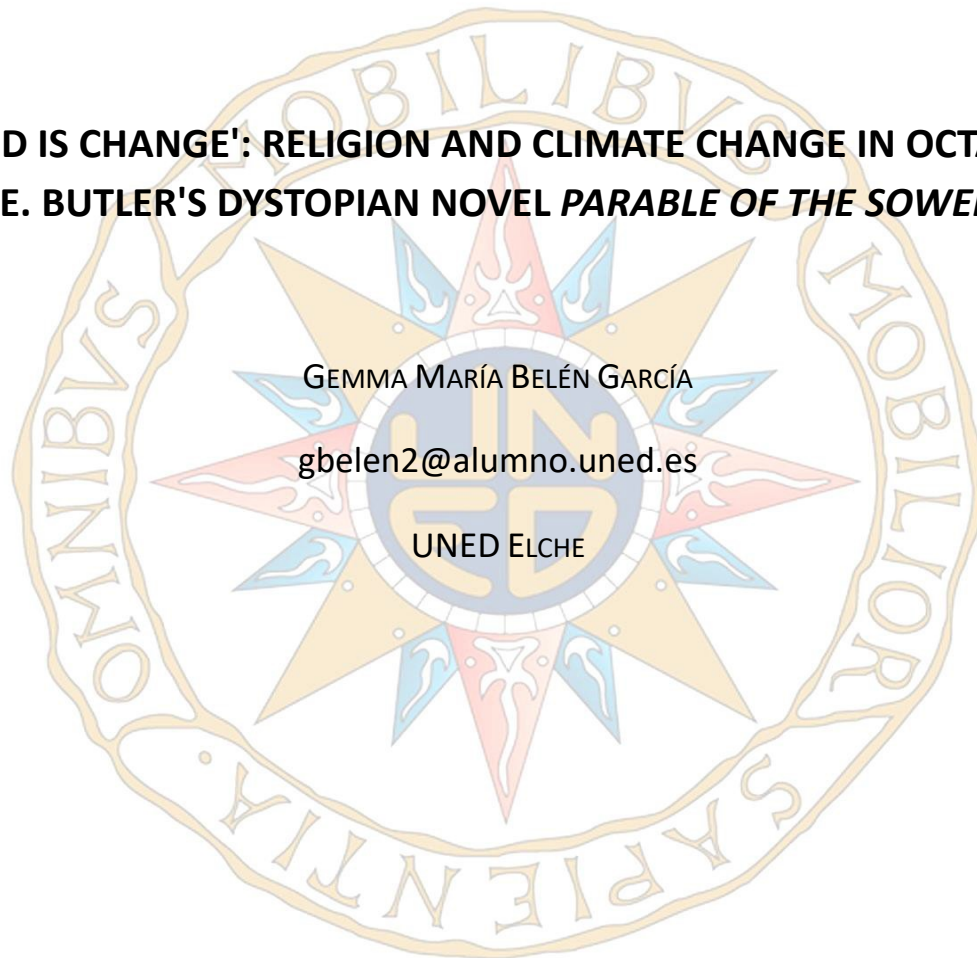




TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA, LITERATURA Y
CULTURA**

**'GOD IS CHANGE': RELIGION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN OCTAVIA
E. BUTLER'S DYSTOPIAN NOVEL *PARABLE OF THE SOWER***



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Abstract:

The purpose of this work is to study religion and climate change in Octavia E. Butler's science fiction novel *Parable of the Sower* and confirm that it is a prototypical example of an ecologically oriented fiction (eco-fiction), more specifically environment-oriented since it uncovers human impacts on nature. It also analyzes the conception and birth of a new belief system after a civilizational collapse caused by natural disasters and climate change, among other reasons.

Keywords: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, science fiction, eco-dystopian narrative, climate change, religion

1. Introduction	4
1.1. Motivation and relevance of the topic	4
1.2. State of the art.....	5
1.3. Methodology.....	7
2. Contextualization	9
2.1. Postmodernism and eco-dystopian narratives	9
2.2. The author: Octavia E. Butler's place in 20 th century literature.....	11
2.3. The importance of <i>Parable of the Sower</i> in its time and now	13
2.4. Literary and non-literary influences	17
3. Diving deeper: Religion and climate change in <i>Parable of the Sower</i>, 'God is Change'	20
3.1. Old religions and new belief systems in an apocalyptic changing world, what is Earthseed?.....	20
3.1.1. Symbols.....	24
3.1.2. God.....	25
3.2. Nature and climate change in the novel	26
4. Conclusion	31
5. Bibliography	34

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation and relevance of the topic

This work has a triple objective, on one hand, to delve into one of the most fascinating literary subgenres of literature after 1945: "dystopian literature"; on the other, to bring to the front one of the dystopian authors of the 20th century, Octavia E. Butler; and finally, to analyze concepts such as religion and climate change within one of her most acclaimed works *Parable of the Sower*. It is also its object of study to take a deeper look at eco-fictions within dystopian literature, being *Parable of the Sower* an outstanding example of this type of fiction.

This work aims to prove that *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is a prototypical example of an ecologically oriented fiction (eco-fiction), more specifically environment-oriented since it uncovers human impacts on nature. I will also analyze the conception and birth of a new belief system after a civilizational collapse caused by natural disasters and climate change, among other reasons.

For this purpose, the thesis will be structured in two parts. The first one intends to be more general and descriptive. It seeks to contextualize the novel, that is, to justify to which period, literary movement, and/or author it belongs. It will also define what eco-dystopian narratives are, stating their characteristics and identify them in *Parable*; analyze the importance of the novel in its time and in the present, study its literary influences, and the impact of the novel and the author on later literature. The second part focuses on two of the novel's themes: religion and climate change; the first postulate of Earthseed (*Parable's* fictional religion) "God is Change," will be studied in detail. What does "God is Change" mean? What role does religion play in the book? And climate change? Can we find similarities between the philosophical principles of authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson or the ideas of Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* about nature, spirituality, God, Man... and Lauren's Earthseed? Can this new religion and conception of the world face such a devastating and destructive panorama that the book presents us with and give comfort and hope to human beings? Was Octavia E. Butler a visionary, portraying in 1993 the consequences of climate change and nature abuse on society, the main threat facing the world today, subjected - as in

the novel - to constant fires, floods, and other extreme weather events? All these questions will be addressed in this thesis.

1.2. State of the art

The Cambridge History of African American Literature affirms that Octavia E. Butler together with Maya Angelou (1928-2014), Albert Murray (1916-2013), Toni Morrison (1930-2019), Ernest J. Gaines (1933-2019), Audre Lorde (1934-1992) and Alice Walker (1944) are the main references of the black popular fiction and have been canonized by the academic community. It states that these "popular writers and, subsequently, the 'popular literature' they produce, though, continue to make an indelible impact on changing parameters of African American literary studies, African American readers, and American culture" (Maryemma and Ward 656); and anthologies such as *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* have helped in the construction of the African American literary canon by including these authors (Maryemma and Ward 655).

Butler rejected labels,¹ as she stated in an interview given to Randall Kenan: "I don't like them, they're marketing tools, and I certainly don't worry about them when I write" (495). However, scholars such as Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, Jr. consider her "the most well-known African American science fiction writer for mainstream readers" (669). They state that "the popularity (critical and commercial) of Butler's *Kindred* paved the way for contemporary black speculative fiction writers" (Maryemma and Ward 669).

Her army of fans keeps growing year after year. Such is the importance and popularity that it is gaining nowadays that not only did *Parable* manage to appear in the NYTimes list of best-seller books in September 2020, but a few months later, in July 2021, the American independent entertainment company A24 bought the rights of the book for its movie adaptation. NASA even named the landing site of the agency's Mars Perseverance rover "Octavia E. Butler Landing" in 2021, after the science fiction author.

The studies that deal with Butler have been growing through the years, especially those that approach the author and her work from a gender

¹ When she was asked if she preferred to call her work speculative fiction, as opposed to science fiction or fantasy.

perspective, since the author herself stood out for her feminist awareness. Although gender issues are not going to be dealt with in this thesis, some of these texts will be used to have a more complete vision of the author and her work.

The "Género y Literatura en los países de habla inglesa"'s syllabus has been a good starting point, and also *Feminism and Women's Writing. An introduction* (2018) which includes the author in the chapter dedicated to science fiction.

The author's biography *Star Child: A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler* (2022) by novelist Ibi Zoboi helped to have a deeper insight into Butler and her unique universe. By reading this and other books about the author, I have been able to discover interesting information about Butler, like how lost she felt when she started writing because she had no one to compare herself with, and no one was writing about the topics that interested her (61). Also, she wrote most of her novels on a Remington typewriter her mother bought her when she was 10 years old (88).

Particularly interesting seems also *God is Change: Religious Practices and Ideologies in the Works of Octavia Butler* (2021) edited by Aparajita Nanda and Shelby L. Crosby, since it deals with one of the main themes on which this thesis focuses, religion in Butler's work.

Eco-fiction as a literary genre also has a place in this thesis. It has been a surprise to discover its existence and all that has been written about it to date. Also, to see the relevance it is gaining within literary criticism - as fiction - with important studies from scholars such as Lawrence Buell and Greg Garrad. This kind of fiction reflects realities that are increasingly similar to the world we are living in.

Although *Parable* was written in the 1990s and set in the 2020s, Butler's vision of the future – with society facing an environmental catastrophe and extreme climate change – seems premonitory. Hence the relevance and resurgence of her work at present.

1.3. Methodology

The main idea is to use a top-down method to develop this thesis, that is, I will go from postmodernism and dystopic fiction to the novel and the author and two specific topics: I will begin with the contextualization of the novel and the author in a specific literary period (postmodernism), and within it in the subgenre of science fiction and eco-dystopias. It is also intended to analyze the importance of *Parable* in its time and nowadays, without forgetting the literary influences that the novel may have had. Once contextualized, the analysis will lead to a particular focus, being the source of study two transversal themes on which the work revolves: religion and climate change. A phrase that is repeated throughout the work "God is Change" will be taken as a starting point in which these two themes are intertwined. The role that nature and climate change play in the novel and how the author develops the birth of a new religion or belief (Earthseed) in an apocalyptic and chaotic changing world will be studied in more detail.

The research starts from the basic bibliography of the degree subject "Literatura norteamericana de los siglos XX y XX", together with the book *Feminism and Women's Writing: An Introduction*, which is part of the bibliography of "Género y Literatura en los países de habla inglesa". These books have served as a first approximation to postmodernism, science fiction, and the author.

Regarding the resources, the main source of information has been the UNED Library search engine <https://buscador.biblioteca.uned.es/> which allowed free access to many interesting documents (essays and articles) to develop the Work; also e-SpacioUNED, and databases such as JSTOR and ProQuest.

There is a large number of documents available about the author, the novel, and the topics of study. They are both available online and also open access; with some exceptions such as the novel under study, *Parable of the Sower*, and Gerry Canavan's and Ibi Zoboi's biographies of the author Octavia Butler, which were purchased in e-book format.

The General Library of the University of Alicante was of great help. It has a large catalog of English literature study books of all genres including science fiction. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler* edited by Gregory J. Hampton and Kendra R. Parker was very useful for this thesis.

The website dedicated to the writer was also consulted (<https://www.octaviabutler.com/>), and it was helpful to discover more about the personal and professional life of the author and to find out the latest news related to her and her work.

Delving into the genre of science fiction and dystopian literature has allowed the discovery of the existence of subgenres such as eco-fiction or eco-narrative, within which the novel under study fits perfectly.

2. Contextualization

2.1. Postmodernism and eco-dystopian narratives

Environmental issues go beyond the scope of natural sciences and have been the object of study by philosophers, artists and writers with an interest in explaining the relationship between human beings and nature.

The American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), for instance, in his essay *Walden* (1854) - where he talks about his experience living in a cabin in the woods next to Lake Walden in Massachusetts - criticized consumerism and industrialization, and defended a bohemian lifestyle simpler and closer to nature at a time when the term ecology did not even exist.

This term originated a few years after the publication of *Walden*. In 1866, the German scientist Ernst Haeckel combined the Greek words "oikos" ("home" or "place to live") and "logos" ("study of"), to create the word "Ökologie" ("study of the home"). Ecology as a scientific discipline developed throughout the 20th century, with the work of pioneers such as the American ecologists Eugene Odum (1913-2002) and George Evelyn Hutchinson (1903-1991) and the marine biologist Rachel Carson (1907-1964), among others.

The term "eco-fiction" is relatively recent and is used to describe literary works that focus on the environment and ecology and explore topics such as global warming, climate change, pollution, species extinction, and environmental degradation. It started gaining popularity in the 2000s, especially in the context of literature and pop culture, and has become a topic of growing interest in the field of environmental studies and literature.

According to the dictionary, eco-fiction is "the fiction that deals with environmental issues and the relationship between humanity and the physical environment" (WordSense). It is also a literary subgenre within science fiction that focuses on representing possible futures, generally dark and apocalyptic, resulting from the impact of harmful human actions on the environment and nature.

In the 1960s we find the first examples of written works that discuss the negative impact of human beings on nature, with the publication of *Silent Spring*

(1962) by Rachel Carson and *The Population Bomb* (1968) by Paul R. Ehrlich (1932). These works started a worldwide debate on the issues of the effects of pollution on the environment (*Silent Spring*) and overpopulation (*The Population Bomb*).

Eco-dystopian literature began to become popular in the 1970s, with works such as *The Sheep Look Up* (1972) by the British writer John Brunner (1934-1995) and *Ecotopia* (1975) by the American Ernest Callenbach (1929-2012), which presented apocalyptic visions of a future where nature had been destroyed by humans. Since then, the subgenre has continued to evolve, becoming a popular way to explore the environmental and social concerns of today's world. Other outstanding eco-dystopian narratives are *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2006) and *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler (1993), the novel on which this thesis is focused.

Under the umbrella of postmodernism – the cultural and literary movement that emerged in the second half of the 20th century - we find dystopian and eco-dystopian literature. Both share characteristics that are listed by María M^a García Lorenzo and Ana I. Zamorano Rueda in their book *Modern and Contemporary American Literature*, and briefly summarized below:

- Both have a critical attitude towards modernity and technological progress. They see it as a form of alienation and environmental destruction.
- They challenge traditional narratives about progress, civilization and the role of humans in nature.
- They question the notion that there is only one truth or reality and suggest that the world is uncertain and complex.
- The human being is not the center of the universe, and they explore the relationship and interdependence between human beings, nature and the rest of the world.
- They experiment with the literary form, using techniques such as intertextuality, fragmentation and ambiguity to question traditional narratives and explore new narrative forms. In *Parable*, for instance, grand narratives such as the Bible are questioned. Lauren doubts about the validity of the main dominant religious narrative "The Bible" where she is

unable to find an explanation for the apocalyptic world in which she is living, hence the need to look for God elsewhere (14-15).

About the relation between postmodernism and the environment crisis that we are living in, Arran Gare thinks that there is a disjunction between literature and science: “Books on postmodernism are found in bookshops on shelves devoted to the theory of literature, while books on the environment tend to be found along with books on science” (1). He argues that:

“The fragmentation of experience, disorientation and loss of overarching perspectives and grand narratives associated with postmodernity are threats to the efforts of environmentalists who are struggling to develop and proselytize a global perspective on environmental destruction. Clearly postmodernism and environmentalism are of great significance to each other. Yet little effort has been made to relate the discourse on postmodernity with the discourse on the environmental crisis” (1).

Besides Gare’s opinion, many writers such as Butler has worked on a comunion of the environment and postmodern fiction and have included in their writings the environment problem driven by their own social conscience. The popularity that this type of fiction is gaining nowadays, due to the growing of the climate crisis, makes us think that eco-fiction (dystopian or not) has still a long way to go.

2.2. The author: Octavia E. Butler’s place in 20th century literature

“One of the most significant literary artists of the twentieth century. One cannot exaggerate the impact she has had”. Junot Diaz

Science fiction has been a very fruitful genre for the second wave (the 1960s-1980s) and third wave (1990s-2013) of feminism. Writers like Octavia Butler and Margaret Atwood addressed this type of literature to change it and open it up to new questions and themes such as women's position in society (the challenges they still had to face in the 1990s) and environmental awareness.

Octavia Estelle Butler (June 22, 1947 – February 24, 2006) was not just an American science fiction writer, but a pioneer of her genre. She was born in Pasadena, California, in a humble family: Her father was a shoeshiner and died

when she was only four years old. She was raised by her mother - who worked as a housemaid for white wealthy people - and her grandmother.

Butler began writing at a young age, mainly because of her isolation as a bullied child due to her dyslexia and, by the age of ten, she started writing science fiction stories and, by twelve, she was already submitting these stories to science fiction magazines. She attended Pasadena City College and later the California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where she took writing classes.

After her university years, Butler combined writing with different temporary jobs that allowed her to survive and spend time on what she really wanted to be, a science fiction writer. Her writing explored themes of race, gender, power and environmental issues, as we can see in novels such as *Patternmaster* (1976), the well-known and highly regarded *Kindred* (1979), and the duology *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998); also, in short stories like "Bloodchild" (1995).

Butler is regarded as an influential author in the fields of Sci-Fi and speculative fiction: She was the first science fiction writer to receive a MacArthur "Genius" Grant (1995); and was the recipient of many other awards including the Lotus (1985), Hugo (given by the fans, in 1984 and 1985) and Nebula (given by science fiction writers, in 1984 and 1999) and a PEN Lifetime Achievement Award (2000), that recognized her professional career as a writer. Her trilogy *Xenogenesis* even influenced Donna J. Haraway's theorization of the cyborg (64²).³

Nowadays her work continues to be recognized and studied around the world. Her books are often read in schools, colleges and universities as part of literature and writing courses on American and African American literature and science fiction. Since September 2022 a school has been named after her: the Octavia E. Butler Magnet, a Middle School in Northwest Pasadena with a diverse and multicultural community and a dual-language immersion program.

² Duvall, John N. *The Cambridge Companion to American fiction after 1945*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

³ *Xenogenesis Series* or *Lilith's Brood: Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989).

In addition to this the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship Award, sponsored by the Carl Brandon Society, was created to support students of color to attend one of the Clarion writing workshops, as she did in her beginnings.

There is no doubt her popularity is still high because last year “Kindred” became the first TV adaptation of Butler's works. The series was produced by FX Productions and released on December 13, 2022, on the Internet streaming service Hulu. Although in January 2023 it was canceled after one season, its director Branden Jacobs-Jenkins is in negotiations with other outlets to continue the show. TV adaptations of her novels *Dawn* (1980) and *Wild Seed* (1987) are also being developed.

In 1991 she was asked to give some advice to young writers and her words were “I have advice in just a few words. The first, of course, is to read... And the second is to write, every day, whether you like it or not... I don’t feel that I have any particular literary talent at all. It was all what I wanted to do and I followed what I wanted to do” (Kenan 504).

Despite her talent and her success, she was an unpretentious person, but the truth is that Butler changed the literary scene in her time and managed to find her place in a genre (science fiction) dominated by white authors and white characters, and be recognized for it.

2.3. The importance of *Parable of the Sower* in its time and now

Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* is a dystopian novel set in a “near” future United States where society has collapsed and violence, crime and starvation have taken over the streets. The protagonist, Lauren Oya Olamina, is an African-American teenage girl who lives in a gated community in Robledo, 20 miles far from Los Angeles (California), and has a psychological dysfunction called hyperempathy that allows her to feel empathy for the suffering of any living being, person or animal. She feels the pain of the other.

It can be considered a Bildungsroman (Fiskio 12) because of the significant personal transformation that the main female character undergoes

facing the challenges of living in a dystopian society threatened by climate change, the lack of food and water, social breakdown and political collapse.

The novel is written as a journal. Lauren writes her experiences in an apocalyptic future that goes from 2024 to 2027. Although the use of the diary format is not a proper characteristic of postmodernism since it has been used in literature for a long time, how Butler uses it is novel, addressing issues such as religion and the environment from the hand of a 15-year-old girl in a context of destruction and survival.

Lauren is aware of the degradation of the world in which she lives and given the impossibility of finding an explanation in the different existing religions, she decides to create a new belief system that will help her understand what is happening and find a solution or a way out. She calls it Earthseed and is based on the premise that "God is Change", this belief is what allows her to survive.

When her community is destroyed and engulfed in flames, Lauren leaves with two friends and becomes the leader of a group of followers that she finds on her long pilgrimage. All together start a dangerous journey north looking for a place to settle and start living according to Earthseed's principles.

During this pilgrimage, new people join Lauren and her friends, although they face all kinds of challenges, Lauren manages to keep the community spirit high thanks to her teachings and the vision of Earthseed.

The book ends with their arrival at the place where they decide to settle down and build Acord, a new community based on Earthseed's principles.

"If there is one thing scarier than a dystopian novel about the future, it's one written in the past that has already begun to come true. This is what makes *Parable* even more impressive than it was when first published". As Gloria Steinem rightly points out on the book back cover, one of the most impressive things about this novel is that the future it imagines is not far from the current reality we are living in, because It addresses important social, environmental and political issues that are still relevant today, such as:

- *Economic inequality*: There is a great gap between rich and poor which leads many people to live almost in slavery. For instance, the novel refers to companies like Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton and Company (KSF) as powerful and oppressive entities that exploit workers. Some see them as a way to escape poverty but as Lauren's father tells his wife when she insists on going to Olivar, the coastal city where KSF is going to settle: "Don't hope for it, Cory. There's nothing safe about slavery" (Butler 113).
Violence and crime are always present, law and order have disintegrated, and the protagonist, Lauren Olamina, must learn to defend herself to survive. "Dad tries to shield us from what goes on in the world, but he can't. Knowing that, he also tries to teach us to shield ourselves" (Butler 35).
- Religion: The novel presents a new belief system created by Lauren Olamina, (Earthseed) that is based on the idea that God is Change, and that every human being has the power to change the world. "The only lasting truth is Change. God is Change" (Butler 3).
- Climate change: It appears as a major contributing factor to the collapse of society in the world portrayed in the novel. Drought and forest fires are frequent, and storms are becoming more intense and destructive. People face food and water shortages, which have led to conflict and violence. Lauren is aware of the severity of climate change and thinks that conditions will get worse in the future: "People have changed the climate of the world ... We can't make the climate change back, no matter why it changed in the first place" (Butler 52). To alleviate and reverse these effects, she advocates restarting farming: "I brought tree seeds too...They won't do us any good for a few years, but they're a hell of an investment in the future" (Butler 305).
- Political issues: In the novel, the central government has disintegrated, and each state has led to the creation of isolated

communities whose main concern is their own survival. As Lauren tells Bankole, her 57-year-old boyfriend: "I have begged him not to go, not to trust any police or government official. It seemed to me such people were no better than gangs with their robbing and slaving" (Butler 300). There is a general climate of discontent and distrust in the institutions and their representatives: "He's the only person I know who's going to vote at all. Most people have given up on politicians" (Butler 20).

For all these reasons, it is considered a visionary novel. It was published in 1993 and is set in a "near" future (2024-2027) where characters face a series of challenges that seem familiar nowadays. Butler's ability to anticipate many of the problems deserves praise. The author stated in an interview with Susan Palwich in 1999 that she did an important research when working on *Parable* – as with all her works – and issues such as environment, religion and global warming were of great interest to her (154, 160).

Such is the popularity gained in recent years, that in 2020 *Parable* appeared in The New York Times Best Sellers Book, 27 years after its publication and 14 after the author's death. It was the year of the covid pandemic and at that time many people turned to science fiction either to find an explanation for what was happening or simply to escape from reality.

In 1994, one year after its publication, *Parable* was nominated for a Nebula Award (this prize recognizes the best US science fiction or fantasy works published and it is organized by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, SFWA), but he did not get it until 1999 with the sequel *Parable of the Talents*.

Thanks to works like this, Butler is considered one of the main exponents of "afrofuturism"⁴ a cultural, artistic and literary movement that combines elements of African culture with science fiction and fantasy. It is often used as a

⁴ This term was coined by the American author, lecturer and cultural critic Mark Dery in his essay "Black to the Future" in the anthology *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Duke University Press, 1994).

form of resistance and empowerment for black and marginalized communities and it addresses race, gender, identity and social justice issues in alternative futures for black communities.

Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek point out in *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century* that “the speculative fiction of pioneers Octavia E. Butler, Jewelle Gomez, and the black women writers that followed extended this cultural project to incorporate exploration of a genre that previously rendered them invisible” (44). They do it by turning black women into protagonists of their own stories “rather than objects and set pieces in those of others” (Lavender and Yaszek 44).

2.4. Literary and non-literary influences

Octavia Butler's influences are varied and complex; and include a wide range of sources. In an interview published in the literary magazine *Callaloo* in the spring of 1991, the author was asked about the literary or non-literary sources that affected her work and Butler was clear in her answer: “Every place I’ve lived is a nonliterary influence, everyplace and every person who has impressed me enough to keep my attention for a while” (Butler 503).

Although her influences go beyond this answer: her work is inspired not just by classic science fiction stories. It was after seeing the Sci-Fi movie *Devil Girl From Mars* (1954) that she decided to become a writer of this genre-; but she is also influenced by African-American history. It is not a coincidence the book refers to Frederick Douglass, an important African-American writer and speaker who fought to abolish slavery in the United States during the 19th century, of whom Lauren keeps a photo (Butler 311). As Douglass did in his time, she assumes a leading role in the search for freedom and survival. According to Janet Fiskio in her essay on narratives in global climate change discourse, the reference to Frederick Douglass is a wink at “American literary motifs, including the slave narrative and *Huckleberry Finn*” (Fiskio 13). In addition to Douglass, we find two other allusions in the book: to Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).

Another great influence for the author is that of the social movements developed in the 1960-90s, especially feminism, where she left an indelible mark. In fact, science fiction, was used during the second and third feminism waves as a tool to explore and question gender norms and women's role in society. This type of literature is open to social criticism because it allows imagining all possible scenarios, without boundaries. Feminist science fiction writers created strong, empowered female characters (Copley 53-54). Lauren, the protagonist of *Parable* is a good example. Her youth and inexperience do not prevent her from leading a community and fighting for what she believes in; even if to do it she has to pass as a man to look less vulnerable during the long journey she undertakes.

Regarding the issues *Parable* deal with, the environment has an important role in the novel. Butler's concern for nature is also observed in other feminist authors of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, such as Ursula K. Le Guin – *The Word of the World is Forest* (1972) – and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003, 2009, 2013). They all coincide in time, so we can say that the influence was mutual. Their voices join those of many who warn of global warming and environmental pollution consequences.

It was in the 1990s when climate issues started being on the Governments' agenda: the first UN Climate Change Conference was held in 1995 in Berlin; and three years before, in 1992, countries joined an international treaty (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) to combat together climate change and to try to stop the global temperature increase.

This literary interest in natural resources and the environment was already seen in authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who stood out for their environmental activism in the 19th century. Both authors influenced *Parable* in different aspects: Their transcendentalist philosophy, which emphasizes the connection of human beings with nature and the importance of a simpler and more self-sufficient life, is reflected in Lauren's teachings on Earthseed and Acord, the naturalist community that she wants to create, a utopia in a dystopian world.

For Lauren, the community is very important. She believes that by being together and supporting each other they will survive. This is another theme that

Butler might have taken from Emerson and Thoreau, who always advocated for society's transformation through collective action. We also see a parallelism between their ideas of non-violence and peaceful resistance and those of Lauren herself, who cannot cause any harm to others due to her hyperempathy.

In addition to the environmental topic, the religious theme has a great weight in the novel. It includes many quotes and references to the Bible, perhaps due to the religious background of the author who was raised as a Baptist in her youth, although she would later define herself as an agnostic.

Like Butler, Lauren is also raised in Baptism (a religious cult that belongs to the Protestant Church, unlike Christianity, only people who have professed Baptist faith can be baptized), and her father is also the community's minister. That is why it is not surprising the number of allusions that we find in the book to this religion. But there are not only allusions to the Bible, but also to other religions and cults, such as Buddhism and its principle of impermanence (Butler 246), that might have been an inspiration for Butler and "God is Change" principle.

The book is also open to philosophical reflections. For instance, Lauren sometimes wonders: "Is any of this real?" (Butler 25). The only true thing, she argues, is that change is inevitable (Butler 25). All the processes that occur in the universe cause great disorder and entropy⁵ (Butler 205).

The law of thermodynamics is even compared to God in a conversation between Lauren and Travis (Butler 205), Darwin's evolution of species (Butler 25), and the Buddhist conception that nothing is permanent (Butler 246), all these concepts are mentioned in the novel, and have something in common, they imply change. These elements help give birth to Butler's world and provide *Parable* more realism and connection with readers.

⁵ Entropy is a concept that has always fascinated American postmodernism authors, such as Thomas Pynchon with his short story "Entropy" (1937).

3. Diving deeper: Religion and climate change in *Parable of the Sower*, 'God is Change'

3.1. Old religions and new belief systems in an apocalyptic changing world, what is Earthseed?

All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God is Change.
EARTHSEED: THE BOOK OF THE
LIVING (qtd. in Butler 3)

Octavia Butler was raised Baptist, and belonged to a very strict religious community where things like dancing or watching tv were forbidden. Her first years will be spent reading The Bible, she had to read it every day as a child. The stories collected in it were her main entertainment, so it is inevitable to see allusions to them in her writings such as *Parable of the Sower*.

The Bible plays an important role in the novel: The Old Testament and its books of Job (Butler 15) and Nehemiah (Butler 66,67) or the book of Revelation (Butler 135) and the Gospel of Luke (Butler 126,311) in the New Testament are mentioned. It is precisely in the last one where we find the parable of the sower that gives the novel its title (we can also find it in Matthew, Mark and Thomas' Gospels): It tells the story of a farmer that sows his fields, depending on where seeds fall, they will germinate or die. Like Lauren's attempts to share her vision of Earthseed: Sometimes it is rejected (people distrust her words) but other times it takes root and blooms.

Not only in the title do we find parallels with The Bible but, *Parable* is also full of similarities with this holy book: Lauren's own escape resembles the stories

in the Bible about the promised land or Noah's Ark. The God of Moses and Noah did not make it easy for them. Neither will Lauren's God.

Lauren is the main character. This African-American young woman can even be compared with Jesus Christ. Like him, during her journey, she meets people that decide to join the group inspired by her teachings and become followers/disciples (we can call them Earthseeders), perhaps moved by despair since the real panorama is so devastating that anything seems better than it or at least a chance of salvation.

But are they all fully convinced? Some express their doubts at the beginning: "Do we have to join your cult if we travel with you?" (Butler 223), asks one of the two sisters they come across (Allison and Jillian Gilchrist). She doesn't believe in any faith, "I think religion is a dog shit" (Butler 223).

Bankole, the 57-year-old African-American doctor they encounter before the Gilchrist sisters, and with whom Lauren starts a relationship, is also skeptical. Although he declares not having any religion, he is interested in Earthseed, and believes that it is a combination of Buddhism, existentialism, Sufism (Butler 246). Although Lauren recognizes that some of these ideas may have a place in her belief system, "none of them are Earthseed, they go off in their own directions" (Butler 246). Together, they have deep religious-philosophical conversations that will also help Lauren to deepen and shape her new cult.

Zahra is another character who does not care much about Earthseed, but she still gives it a thought: "... plants... have no ability at all to travel great distances..., and yet, they do travel. Even they don't have to just sit in one place and wait to be wiped out. There are islands thousands of miles from anywhere ... where plants seeded themselves and grew long before any humans arrived" (Butler 73-74).

Lauren has the soul of a leader. She is a teacher and a learner at the same time, like Butler did in her life, she finds inspiration everywhere and from anybody. She is always eager to know: "Everyone who's surviving out here knows things that I need to know... I'll watch them, I'll listen to them, I'll learn from them" (Butler 162).

As it has been mentioned throughout this work, spirituality is important in *Parable*, besides the religious reference in its title. Butler not only refers to Christianity in the novel, but also to Buddhism and other religious beliefs. None of them, however, is enough for Lauren who decides to create her own religion and call it Earthseed, based on those ideas that she has been writing down in verses since she was 12 years old and that will later become “The Book of the Living”. She compares it with other holy references: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* - related to Buddhism – that talks about how to liberate our soul when we die – and the Egyptian one – an ancient funerary text – that helps the deceased to overcome the judgment of Osiris, judge of the Dead (Butler 117).

Earthseed’s main belief is that “God is Change.” Lauren embodies Change in God, and as she explains to her travel partners, she does it because people forget ideas, but they don’t forget God (Butler 208), especially when they need him most. Lauren compares her “book of poems” with sacred books like the Bible, the Talmud or the Koran (Butler 208), and like these, her book also serves to find relief and comfort in difficult times.

The “God is Change” tenet is not completely new. It sounds similar to “There is nothing permanent except change”: This idea that everything flows (“Panta rei”) and that nothing is permanent was developed by ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus 2,500 years ago. According to Heraclitus, everything is in constant change and movement, and change is the only constant in the universe, which is always evolving. This idea is expressed in his famous quote “No man steps twice in the same river, because it is not the same river and it is not the same man”, which means that even if someone goes twice into the same river, the water and the person himself will have changed. This principle has had a major impact on Western philosophy and science. It has been a source of inspiration for philosophers, scientists and, of course, writers from all times. It’s probably that Butler knew about it and agreed with it.

The world is constantly changing and following a self-destruction path due to the abuse of human beings, so Lauren believes that it is her duty to work with this change to create a better future for the community and the new generations to come. Religion is also seen as a survival tool and a powerful force: Lauren’s

faith gives her strength to endure difficult times and helps her stay focused on what's most important. Additionally, she also stresses the importance of sharing one's faith, so that more people can experience its blessings.

But what exactly is Earthseed? Is it a religion? A philosophy? Menne states that "what Lauren comes to develop as a religion is in fact a mode of representing the space she inhabits within a total system" (Menne 724). Lauren herself called it "belief system" (Butler 73) early on the novel. In the beginning, she cannot find a proper name for her new credo and decides to leave it unnamed, but she changes her mind because "giving it a name or discovering its name helps one to begin to understand it" (Butler 73). The name helps her to focus on her purpose and work on it.

The answer to these questions is on Butler's mind. Earthseed was not just an idea or a vision, it was a whole project in which Butler believed. *Parable of the Sower* was the first of the 6 books that Butler had in mind,⁶ It was the beginning of everything, which is why it takes place on Earth, but she wanted to transfer these communities to other planets in the different sequels she had planned for the book. "The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars" (Butler 73), says Lauren. Earthseed's ultimate goal is to prepare its communities to colonize new worlds, new earths, because Lauren is aware that resources and life on Earth are running out due to neoliberal privatization and ecological collapse (Canavan 20).

Like Butler, Lauren is raised as a Baptist. Her father is the community's preacher. But she soon starts having doubts about the Bible's teachings and loses her faith in the Christian God because he allows the horrors she sees around her: Robberies, murders, rapes, drugs, corruption, all kind of abuses... in a society living in total anarchy.

"How many are going to starve later because of destroyed crops? That's nature. Is it God? Most of the dead are the street poor who have nowhere to go and who don't hear the warnings until it's too late for their feet to take them to safety. Where's safety for them anyway? Is it a sin against God to be poor? We're almost poor ourselves. There are fewer and fewer jobs among us, more of us being born, more kids growing up with nothing to look forward to. One way or another, we'll all be poor some day. The adults say things will

⁶ Butler wanted to write four Parables sequels: *Parable of the Trickster*, *Parable of the Teacher*, *Parable of Chaos* and *Parable of Clay*.

get better, but they never have. How will God – my father's God- behave towards us when we're poor?" (Butler 14-15)

When her father disappears, it is a hard blow for the community, since he was in charge of keeping it together, of giving comfort and relief. What can sheep do without a shepherd? Lauren knows this, which is why, consciously or unconsciously, she takes on the role of her father and one of the days that the community is in the church, she "preaches" a sermon about perseverance and how even weak people can become strong if they persist: "I mean to give them something they could take home – something that might make them feel that enough had been said for today" (Butler 126).

3.1.1. Symbols

Regarding the symbols in the novel, fire plays an important role. Spiritually, fire is seen as an element that destroys all evil, and purifies and cleanses the soul, in the Christian religion it also represents hell where go the souls of people who die in sin. In *Parable*, fire is destruction. There is a synthetic drug called pyro – "short for pyromania" (Butler 135) – that has become very popular and causes an irresistible impulse to set fire and destroy everything around. This reference to fire is not by chance in the novel. When Butler was a child her grandmother's chicken ranch burned (Zoboi 30-32), seeing the house engulfed in flames had a huge impact on her. In fact, the turning point of the novel is when someone sets fire to the gathered community where Lauren lives, which makes her run away and start her Earthseed Project. So, fire is not just destruction, but also marks a new beginning.

Seeds are another important element in the novel. We find many references to them, the main one in Lauren's belief system, which is a composed noun of Earth + Seed. They represent a new beginning, growth, and fertility, they are also a symbol of life and the future. That is Earthseeders' main goal, a better and sustainable destiny.

Real seeds appear the first time when Lauren starts preparing her survival pack, where she puts water, food, clothing, other survival items, edible seeds and her Earthseed notes (Butler 75). Later, during her trip she keeps carrying and

collecting them (302), aware of their importance in the future of the community and the Earthseed Project. At the end of the novel, once they all arrive at Bankole's land, she can finally plant all those seeds and start her project of life and survival.

3.1.2. God

The figure of God is another of the great protagonists of the novel. At the beginning, Lauren reflects on what people believe: some believe that it is a "super-person": a "big-daddy-God", a "big-cop-God" or a big-king-God. Others relate it to "nature", or "a spirit, a force, an ultimate reality" (Butler 14). Lauren even questions its existence. "Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? it?) care about us?" (Butler 15) and begins to consider that all these beliefs can be wrong and that God can be "something else altogether" (Butler 15).

Sandra Govan in "The *Parable of the Sower* as rendered by Octavia Butler: Lessons for our changing times" analyzes Lauren's idea of God:

"Her God is, in fact, gender neutral; the God of Earthseed is an idea, and abstraction personified as "God" and made viable through human intercourse, that is through recognition of the impact human beings can have in molding or configuring God, paradoxically redefining God as a force which can neither be "resisted or stopped" yet can be adapted and changed. Lauren believes that God exists to be "shaped or focused", that prayer is not required by God and is useful only to the person performing the act" (1).

Lauren reaches to this conclusion after a tragic event in her neighborhood (Mrs. Sims' suicide). This is when she feels the necessity to write about what she believes (Butler 23) and her idea of God. For her, the "literal true" is that "God is Change": "God exists to be shaped./ God is Change." (Butler 24). Her God doesn't love, hate or judge, has no loyalties to anybody, it's not attached to anything; and doesn't care about one more than another. This is the idea of God that Lauren shapes and embraces; and on which the entire philosophy of Earthseed is based.

3.2. Nature and climate change in the novel

“Climate change is everything, a story and a calamity bigger than any other. It’s the whole planet for the whole foreseeable future, the entire atmosphere, all the oceans, the poles; it’s weather and crop failure and famine and tropical diseases heading north and desertification and the uncertain fate of species on earth.” (Solnit 13-14)

Climate change has become a central topic in contemporary literature, being approached by some works from an apocalyptic perspective. For Frederick Buell in “Global Warming as Literary Narrative” the new narratives have opened up to a collection of new themes - and new characters - such as pollution, environmental and climate injustice, environmental politics, science politics, capitalism criticism, different ecological damages, etc. *Parable* is a good example of this, where dealing with crises becomes the protagonist's way of life. Lauren together with her fellow travelers become environmental refugees (Buell 268).

In this apocalyptic context, Lauren, according to Buell, pleads for a return to a pretechnological world, that's why she carries seeds in her journey north, hoping to find a place to plant them and start a new life in direct contact with the earth, working it and living off what it produces.

In her essay "Apocalypse and Ecotopia: Narratives in global climate change discourse" Janet Fiskio highlights two dominant narratives in eco-fiction: "the life boat" and "the collective" (1). The first one is more selfish and Darwinist (only the strongest or those who best adapt to change will succeed), and it puts the individual and his survival at the center of everything; the second one is more collaborative, it focuses on the community, if they stay close, they will survive: “If we’re a good pack, and we work together, we have a chance” (Butler 172). Fiskio states that "in both of these narratives, the collapse of civilization following the apocalypse of climate change allows for the rebirth as a utopian community" (2). Both ideas are reflected in *Parable*.

On the one hand, we see how the world has been filled with "lone wolves" who are capable of anything to survive (kill, steal...); on the other side, Lauren believes in the power of the community, and thus lets her group of followers know that they will only survive if they work together and support each other. This second narrative form is the one that Butler wants to prevail and as Fiskio says

in her writing, the novel is "an ecotopian work and a collective narrative, one that complications both genres" (Butler 13).

Peter G. Stillman agrees with this idea:

"Olamina does not look to individualism... because individuals on their own are too weak and too vulnerable to survive and prosper for long. She wishes to form a small community, but that community cannot be a collection of disconnected people unified primarily by place or property, like her Robledo neighborhood; rather, the community must be a collective project based on the conscious interdependence and agreement of its members, who must know, trust, and be able to work with each other for shared purposes" (22).

Soraya Copley article about eco-feminist perspective on nature and technology (2013) focuses on Marge Pierce and Margaret Atwood's speculative novels, and her conclusions can also be applied to *Parable*. Lauren's utopian attitude towards the environment fits perfectly in Copley's description of Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1975) and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) female main characters: "Their shared attitude is characterized by an acute awareness of the limitations of natural resources and a sincere commitment to acting responsibly in the light of this awareness" (43). Like them, Lauren also thinks that recycling is fundamental to survive, "anything that could be reused or sold had been gathered" (Butler 145), like her father's old books about California plants, shooting, medical emergencies and survival in the wilderness.

These books mentioned above are Lauren's weapon to survive, knowledge is a powerful concept and that is why she is constantly reading and even gives books to her friends. Besides, after her escape she's scared: "I am one of the street poor. Not as poor as some, but homeless, alone, full of books and ignorant of reality" (Butler 146). With this clear antithesis, a contrast is created between the accumulation of knowledge in books and the lack of knowledge in real life. Lauren knows the theory, but she lacks practice, and is aware of that.

Nature and Climate change play an important role in Butler's *Parable*. The novel takes place in a future where global warming has caused massive droughts, floods, and other environmental disasters. If humanity wants to survive in this environment something should be done. Lauren has it clear, that's why she put her faith in embracing change and adapting to circumstances, instead of trying to

fight them. “Out here, you adapt to your surroundings or you get killed” (Butler 172).

“People have changed the climate of the world” (Butler 52). That is what scientists have proved and also Lauren believes in. Others instead, like her father, think that “only God could change the world in such an important way” (Butler 52). Butler collects here the two “climate change” versions: On the one hand, the one that is supported by the scientific community and that affirms that the threat is real and that it is caused by human action; and on the other, the one that ensures that it is a lie because Earth’s climate has always changed.

In any case, climate change is a real threat, both in the novel and nowadays: In 1993, when Butler published the book, and in our 2023 world. It was precisely in the 1990s when began to gain more strength the idea that climate change was a threat and man had a real influence on it. Supported by scientific evidence, governments decided to include the climate issue in their agendas and public opinion began to become aware of it.

Now in 2023, we suffer more and more its effects. The main one is the increase of Earth's global temperature⁷ - which causes secondary effects such as glaciers and poles melting-; we also find changes in rainfall that can trigger drought in some areas and torrential rains in others; also in agriculture and food production and biodiversity loss.

It seems that our 2020s are getting similar to the future that Butler imagined back in 1993: “There’s a big, early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico... How many people has it hurt? How many are going to starve because of destroyed crops? That’s nature” (Butler 14).

In this context of destruction and apocalypse, Lauren hopes to find opportunities to survive and develop her Earthseed Project. She teaches her followers –the Earthseeders- that humans must learn how to adapt to the changing environment and that these changes can bring positive outcomes if managed properly. “All successful life is / Adaptable, / Opportunistic, / Tenacious,

⁷ According to the UN World Meteorological Organization reports, the global average temperature in 2020 was about 1,2°C above pre-industrial levels, close to the 1.5°C limit that is considered the turning point to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

/ Interconnected, and / Fecund, / Understand this. / Use it / Shape God” (Butler 117).

Janet Fiskio also relates climate change to enslavement in *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice*. For her, Butler’s novels remember the resourcefulness of enslaved people and her Parable series:

“Intervene in environmental justice and climate discourse by utilizing the form of the enslave narrative to depict the structures of enslavement that persist through a white supremacist and hyperprivatized state. Butler’s speculative neoslave narratives offer this insight: that neither enslavement nor climate change chaos are as distant as they might appear; and that they are inextricably intertwined” (66).

This reference to slavery becomes evident in chapter eleven when Olivar is mentioned: a community that a large multinational is going to create near the coast, and that is advertised as a safe paradise, where those who go will have a house, food, and work. Lauren and her father doubt it, "something new is beginning - or perhaps something old and nasty is reviving" (Butler 111). What they think is going to revive is slavery and when Cory insists on giving Olivar a chance, Lauren's father is blunt, "'Don't hope for it Cory. There's nothing safe about slavery'" (Butler 113). Fiskio agrees that this is just evidence that new forms of enslavement emerge under climate disruption (Butler 71).

Scholars such as Delia Shahnnavaz have analyzed *Parable* from an ecofeminist perspective, exploring the connection between Mother Earth and the stifling patriarchy. In “Earthseed Planted: Ecofeminist Teachings in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower” Shahnnavaz affirms that the white capitalist patriarchy is responsible for the world’s destruction portrayed in the novel (2). Butler's response and solution for this apocalyptic situation is Lauren, a young black woman that will fight for the reunification of all the earth’s inhabitants, and Earthseed (Shahnnavaz 41). Shahnnavaz states that Earthseed is built on the grounds of ecofeminism because Woman and Nature are the same thing, and Butler’s ultimate action is to return women to Earth (45).

Jessica Hawkes, in her thesis "Climate Change and Cultural Anxieties: An Exploration of Dystopian Novels from Before and After Global Warming" (2018), believes that "science fiction seems more willing to engage questions of climate change" (3) since it helps to explore and reflect on this topic in a more imaginative

and critical way and set (im-)possible futuristic scenarios. It allows readers to know the impacts that it will have on their life and their future (94) and writers to emphasize social problems (72). In *Parable* we see it in the disintegration of the Robledo's community and other communities, and the fall into poverty or death - in some cases- of its members.

Hawkes also quotes ecocritic Kate Rigby that claims that "nature is only thematic in literature when it becomes a problem in reality" (2, 72). This quote implies that literature plays an important role in bringing attention to and raising awareness about environmental problems. This was - in some way – one of Butler's aims after the *Parable* series, since she was always very concerned about environmental issues and global warming, although she was aware that these "big problems" were not "sexy", but still she kept them "in the background" (502).

4. Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates the importance of Octavia E. Butler in 20th century U.S. literature, both in the science fiction genre and in the eco-dystopian literature subgenre. Not only was she the first woman to break into a genre until then reserved for white men; but she was also an inspiration for a generation of young black writers.

In her small community of Pasadena, she spent her time as a child writing and imagining strange new worlds. While great science fiction writers like Isaac Asimov, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell or Ray Bradbury succeeded, she was convinced that one day she would also be like them. She trusted herself, just as Lauren trusts herself and her Earthseed's purpose, so we can say that Lauren's character is somewhat autobiographical.

Her novels fit perfectly in the postmodernism movement and in the science fiction genre because they question and subvert the boundaries between past, present and future (also between fiction and reality). Butler uses a variety of text forms to build her narrative world; and in *Parable*, she questions the idea that there is a single objective truth and also the great narratives such as the Bible and the Koran. She gives more importance to an invented religion than to these sacred books. For her, fiction knowledge can be as useful as non-fiction. She will need both to survive "out there", once she decides to set out on her journey. That is why Lauren tells her friend Joanne to look for "any kind of survival information from encyclopedias, biographies, anything that helps you learn to live off the land and defend ourselves. Even some fiction will be useful" (Butler 54).

The main source of information/inspiration for Butler's writing was the world that surrounded her. Thus, we can see this in the novel's bellicose tone (perhaps influenced by the Cold War that Butler lived), and the references to a Mars mission and space travel that could refer to the arrival of man to the moon: "That's what space program is about these days, at least for politicians. Hey, we can run a space station, a station on the moon, and soon, a colony on Mars. That proves still a great, forward-looking, powerful nation, right?" (Butler 20).

Although the initial idea of this work was to analyze religion and climate change equally in the book, *Earthseed*, Lauren's new belief system is the

backbone of the entire novel, so that we can conclude that the greatest weight falls on religion. Butler acknowledged in an interview with Susan Palwick in 1999 that she had done a great amount of research on religion to prepare herself to write the *Parable* series.

Religion prevails over the environmental theme, but they complement each other. Lauren's religious doubts, lack of faith, and the need to create a new religion are a consequence of the situation that they are experiencing due to climate change and global warming.

Parable is filled with uncertainty, but Lauren's courage and conviction are a breath of optimism. There is no solution or turning back to the disaster they are living through, only a flight forward, off the planet, into the stars, which is why Lauren wants to prepare the Earthseed communities to colonize new worlds. She is aware that resources are running out and that the Earth countdown has begun.

“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 and ashes of our cities, and so what?’

‘Space?’ he said. ‘Mars?’

‘Beyond Mars’, I said. ‘Other star systems. Living worlds.’” (Butler 208-209)

Earthseed is more concerned with survival rather than salvation, like other conventional religions. The idea of the Apocalypse is present in the mind of the reader throughout *Parable*, although it is not quoted literally, the situations that are described and that the characters experience leads us to think that the world is ending. Although Butler does not mention the Apocalypse directly, she does it indirectly with, for example, the allusion to the book of Revelation, the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament. It is when Cory, Lauren's father's wife, after hearing the news about what people do when take pyro, the fire drug, begins to quote one of its verses: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils...” (Butler 135).

When the community is already settled in the place where the first community of Earthseed will take root, everyone meets to talk, together with the verses, songs, and poems of Earthseed, passages from the Bible are read (Butler

310-311), which makes us think that perhaps Lauren is not embracing her new belief system to get rid of her old religion and faith. Both will coexist, Lauren not only talks about his Earthseed but also quotes the Bible, she also does it at the end of the novel when all the community is sitting together: Its last lines are Saint Luke's parable of the sower. Although Lauren has created a religion, it does not seem that she is going to forget her old beliefs.

Climate change is a complex issue. Butler wants us to think critically about our relationship with nature and about the impact that our actions and behaviors can have on it. Additionally, she reminds us that we have a responsibility toward future generations who will be affected by our current choices.

Parable of the Sower is an important novel in the Eco Sci-Fi landscape, but it is not the only one, and more are about to come in the future. For Frederick Buell eco-fiction has a long life ahead. He predicts that "as climate change and the politics surrounding it proceed and create new contexts, new narratives will appear, suggesting intellectual and cultural pathways that are not now visible as such" (Buell 287-288).

To conclude, whatever will happen in the years to come, one thing is for sure, knowledge will be of great help, whatever kind, fictional or non-fictional, and as Lauren tells her best friend when she insists that "books aren't going to save us", "use your imagination", "look at home for any book that may be useful, from encyclopedias to biographies, everything can be useful to survive, "even some fiction might be useful" (Butler 54).

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