

ABSTRACT

SIERRA RAELL MOORE. Octavia Butler's Subversive Heroes. (Under the direction of Dr. Shelia Smith-Mckoy.)

The thematic choices that delineate Butler's landscape (speculative fiction, science-fiction and horror) enhance the impact of a multi-dimensional conceptualization of humanity. Distinguished by her exploration of gender, race, ethnicity and class-consciousness—Octavia Butler interweaves these themes within the context of an unforgiving socio-political landscape. Humanity itself is perceived through the eyes of characters that exist in a world of literal and social separation and isolation. Butler's protagonists are separated from society by the ideals they espouse. They can be categorized by three archetypal roles: the superhumanist characters are Lauren of *The Parable of the Sower* and Anyanwu of *Wild Seed* with super human traits of hyperempathy, shapeshifting or other extra-sensory perceptions. The subjected are characters like Gan who must adjust to the realities of taking on non-human responsibilities and navigate foreign situations, Rye the protagonist of "Speech Sounds" also must face the consequences of losing the capacity to speak. The savants are men and women who have exceptional gifts that are both a blessing and a curse like the protagonist of "The Evening the Morning and the Night" who is afflicted by Dureaya-Gode disease.

Octavia Butler's protagonists represent a twist on the traditional story of the outcast hero archetype. Butler's heroes are typically alienated, ostracized and often ignored by society at large. Butler disrupts the traditional science fiction narrative by

designating women and people of color as her heroes. But rather than create heroes that exist as flawless paradigms of truth and justice; they instead are characterized by their vulnerability towards domineering oppressive figures, chaos and their own relentless introspective minds. Butler's heroes deconstruct what it means to be female, people of color, an intuitive and an individualist within an unforgiving dystopian landscape.