

**Ecofeminism, Motherhood, and the Post-
Apocalyptic Utopia in *Parable of the Sower*,
Parable of the Talents, and *Into the Forest***

Heidi Hutner

We have a beautiful
Mother
Her green lap
immense
Her brown embrace
Eternal
Her blue body
Everything
 We know . . .

—Alice Walker, *Her Blue Body Everything We know*

There is nothing alien
About nature,
Nature
Is all that exists.
It's the earth
And all that's on it.
It's the universe...

—Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, its sequel, *Parable of the Talents*, and Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest*, link the domination of nature with the exploita-

tion and oppression of women. As Karen J. Warren writes, “important connections exist between the treatment of women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of nonhuman nature on the other.”¹ In *Sower, Talents, and Forest*, Butler and Hegland attempt to solve the problem of ecological devastation and the oppression of women (and “others”—for Butler) with the creation of utopian feminized societies based on what Carolyn Merchant calls an egalitarian “partnership ethic” between the “human community and nonhuman nature.”² Both Butler and Hegland seek redemption in tales of new worlds—outside of their violent and corrupt dystopian cultures. For Butler, this *somewhere else* is on other planets; for Hegland, it is in the forest in an idealized female hunter-gatherer society.

In *Reinventing Eden*, Merchant examines those who would seek an idealistic prelapsarian vision in “reinventing paradise” throughout history. She critiques these reinventions of Eden and offers a “partnership ethic” as an alternative to such a potentially damaging narrative. “For many Americans,” writes Merchant, “humanity’s loss of the perfect Garden of Eden is among the most powerful of stories. Consciously at times, unconsciously at others, we search for ways to reclaim our loss. . . . But “mastering” nature to reclaim Eden has nearly destroyed the very nature people have tried to reclaim.”³ What Merchant describes are two primary visions of nature’s history—the version that supports the position that mankind has the right to dominate nature, women, and others, and the declensionist version, held by post-modernists, environmentalists, and feminists, who believe nature is fallen, and that human beings have exploited and denigrated nature. Merchant calls upon us in the present to develop what she describes as an interdependent partnership with the natural world.⁴ This partnership ethic includes the following precepts:

- *Equity between the human and nonhuman communities
- *Moral consideration for both humans and other species
- *Respect for both cultural diversity and biodiversity
- *Inclusion of women, minorities, and nonhuman nature in the code of ethical accountability
- *An ecologically sound management that is consistent with the continued health of both the human and the nonhuman communities⁵

In effect, Merchant’s partnership ethic is founded on a “relational” concept of “care.”⁶ It “is an ethic based on the idea that people are helpers, partners and colleagues and that people and nature are equally important to each other.” This is a “mutually beneficial situation[,]” Merchant states, “[l]ike the Native-American idea of a sacred bundle of relationships and obligations, a partnership ethic is grounded in the ideas of relation and of mutual obligation. . . . Like human partners, the earth and humanity communicate with each other.”⁷

In this essay I want to expand Merchant’s partnership ethic to include the discourses of mothering, as mothers and “mother-nature” are ambivalently ren-

dered by Butler and Hegland, and they figure complexly in the relationship between humans and nonhumans in these novels. Typical of much ecofeminist "mother-earth" rhetoric, where mothers and nature are constructed symbiotically and women become in danger of being essentialized as nurturers,⁸ both the maternal figures and nature are abused in these works. Yet this structure is complicated by Butler and Hegland, as the mothers in *The Parables* and *Forest* are blamed for the daughters' crises in the post-apocalyptic world, and they are portrayed as being "unnaturally" and "monstrously" distanced from the natural environment *and* their children. These novels question what happens when mothers are not conventional nurturers, and/or when they do not put nature first.

The matrophobic crises in *The Parables* and *Forest* draw on an ideology of "intensive mothering" which, as Andrea O'Reilly describes, involves an absolute denial of the mother's identity apart from her child. The intensive (biological) mother must be fully involved with her child at all times—to the exclusion of all other tasks, including work outside the home, domestic labor within the home, and all relationships with those other than her children. These demands result in the denial and "sublimation of the mother's own selfhood and . . . agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority." As O'Reilly argues, the ideology of intensive mothering functions as "backlash discourse" that "regulate[s]" women and constructs all mothers as "failures."⁹

In *Sower* and *Talents*, the protagonist, Lauren, is trapped within the dichotomy of Good/Bad mother O'Reilly's work articulates; she cannot be an intense biological mother figure and a successful environmental and political visionary at the same time. However, in *The Parables*, there is a space for communal mothering, as Patricia Hill Collins (and, many others, such as bell hooks) delineate it in a black female sociological context, within Butler's utopia.¹⁰ Communal mothering (and/or parenting) functions subversively in the novels, and this allows Lauren's unconventional mode of mothering to extend beyond her own biological child to the community at large. For Hegland, the figure of the mother is dangerously distanced from her relationship with nature; later, as mother(s) themselves, the daughters must learn to reconnect with mother earth, and thus they heal both the discordant mother/child bonds as well as the bonds between human and nonhuman nature. Indeed, for Hegland, the partnership ethic is enacted simultaneously as an ideal that might resemble partnership mothering, as well as a human reconnection with nature and the nonhuman world.

Parable of the Sower begins in 2024 in the suburban community of Robledo, twenty miles outside of Los Angeles. The dystopic world is in social, moral, and civil disorder; and the walled-in cul-de-sac community where the fifteen-year old Lauren, the protagonist and narrator lives, is only temporarily safe from the dangers that rage through the outside city.¹¹ As Peter Stillman, among others, points out, the novel's dystopian vision exemplifies the intensified ideologies of the "Reagan years" and the "Republican right."¹² *Sower* is

filled with racial separatism, patriarchal oppression, violence, and environmental degradation. Drug addicts and pyromaniacs called “paints” attack and murder ruthlessly, women are raped repeatedly, and the streets are riddled with corpses, naked bodies, homeless people, and wild dogs that attack and kill humans. There are frequent abductions as well, and people are taken into slavery—sexual and otherwise. As Jim Miller states, the novel “outlines the impact of class polarizations on a local, national, and international level. . . . [T]he rich are out of the picture, above the fray, as the middle class and the desperate poor fight over an ever-shrinking pie.”¹³

In the midst of this dystopian socio-economic chaos, the late-capitalist world is in an environmental crisis on multiple levels. Sylvia Mayer aptly argues that, “Butler confirms the basic notion of the environmental justice movement that social and environmental justice are indivisible,” as *The Parables* focus on a Black female narrator and low-income, marginalized, and oppressed groups.¹⁴ Clean water, for example, is a much sought-after commodity, particularly for the middle class and the poor. Lauren explains the plight of her situation:

The cost of water has gone up again. And I heard on the news today that more water peddlers are being killed. Peddlers sell water to squatters and the street poor—and to people who have managed to hold on to their homes but not to pay their utility bills. Peddlers are being found with their throats cut and their money and their hand trucks stolen. Dad says water now costs several times as much as gasoline. But except for arsonists and the rich, most people have given up buying gasoline . . . It’s a lot harder to give up water.¹⁵

“[P]eople have changed the climate of the world,” Lauren continues, they are responsible for these catastrophic changes in weather.¹⁶ There are earthquakes in California, tornadoes in the southern states, and hurricanes throughout the U.S. In addition to wild weather patterns and drought, the U.S. is riddled with disease and medical epidemics.

Lauren suffers excessively within this broken world in part because of her mother’s neglect and symbolic abandonment. Lauren’s mother took “Paracetco, the small pill, the Einstein power”¹⁷ to sharpen her memory and thought processes, for two years prior to Lauren’s birth. The result is that the daughter has a “hyperempathic” disease; she feels others’ pain (and pleasure) so deeply that it can kill her. Several things are important to note here; the poisoned mother’s body poisoned the daughter, and the mother died in childbirth. Within the context of the novel, the loss of the mother signifies, in part, the death of mother-earth. Yet, perhaps more importantly, the mother’s drug addiction locates this violence as the *mother’s* fault, hence the biological mother in the text is held responsible for the daughter’s pain and subsequent abandonment.

The walled-in community is under constant threat because of the violence in the outside society. Lauren, unlike the other members of her neighborhood, fears they will not survive an attack from the outside looters, and she therefore makes

plans for her future survival—reading books on log cabin building, native plant cultivation and soap making, and she prepares a backpack full of survival material. As Lauren predicts, her neighborhood is attacked and destroyed by thieves and murderers, and Lauren makes her escape, taking her prepared backpack and food from the symbolically fallen garden of her former neighborhood.

Lauren seeks a new, multicultural, interdependent vision of humanity, race, and nature. She leaves Los Angeles and its environs and journeys north, meeting with assorted people who eventually become members of Earthseed, Lauren's spiritual and utopian religion. People of all races and social backgrounds join this Earthseed group: "Black, White, Latino, Asian—and any mixture at all."¹⁸ During this trek, Lauren meets her older lover Bankole, a medical doctor who has unscathed land in Humboldt County, California, with whom she bonds and plans the first of her Earthseed communities: Acorn. Even though the water is uncontaminated on Bankole's property, and the land has a substantial garden, this is not the final destination for Earthseed. "The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars" in living 'Heaven', Lauren says. If they do not escape the contaminated earth, they will become like the "smooth-skinned dinosaurs." They must go "Beyond Mars" to "Other star systems . . . and living worlds."¹⁹ In her utopian vision, then, they must plant new egalitarian societies, and "begin again and do things right this time." Merchant's earthly partnership ethic is impossible to achieve on this lapsarian earth for Lauren, thus she takes an approach of many explorers throughout history—including early European travelers who searched for Eden. Lauren and her Earthseed community will act as "colonists" who reclaim the lost paradise on other planets.²⁰ Paradoxically, when considering the racial and social implications of early European exploration and colonization—one of the first Earthseed ships to take flight at the end of *Talents* is named *The Christopher Columbus*. Given Lauren's status as a powerful black woman, such a provocatively imperialist title seems ironic for her utopian vision.

In the sequel, *The Parable of the Talents*, the daughter's voice functions as an external narrator that ties the mother's (Lauren's) journal entries together. As the journal entries begin in 2032, Lauren's dreams for Earthseed and Acorn take root, and she gives birth to her baby girl, Larkin. Global warming is on the rise, there are major landslides on the coast of California, the land is drying up, and the redwoods are dying. Bankole fears for their child, as the conservative, violent *Christian America* grows in power in the outside world—burning all those who are deemed "different" as witches. "A witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist. . . .A witch may also be an atheist [or] a 'cultist'[,]" Lauren writes.²¹ Bankole begs Lauren to give up Earthseed and put her role as mother first. "Now that you're a mother," he says, "you've got to let go of some of the Earthseed thinking and *think of your child*. I want you to look at Larkin and think of her every time you want to make some grand decision."²² Yet Lauren will not relinquish her community of Acorn, despite the dangers that

surround them. She says, "I'm no more likely to leave Acorn now than I am to leave Larkin."²³ Thus Lauren does not submit to "the ideals of intensive mothering", and instead attempts to balance her role as mother with her role as religious, environmental, and political leader; the result is that the baby Larkin is abducted by soldiers of the *Christian America* militia when the Acorn community is attacked and turned into a horrific internment camp. Larkin is placed with a *Christian America* family for adoption, as are all the Earthseed children, and Bankole dies. Later, after her escape, Lauren tries to find Larkin (who is renamed Asha Vere by her adopted parents), but she is unsuccessful. Near the end of *Talents*, when Larkin/Asha is an adult, mother and child reunite. But while Lauren wants, desperately, to reconnect with Larkin/Asha, the daughter cannot forgive the choices her mother has made.²⁴

Lauren's decision to put her utopian community before her child's immediate safety makes Lauren a "dangerous," cultish, monster to Larkin/Asha. She is an "overwhelming" figure, according to the daughter, "who [wants] to get away from" Lauren when they finally meet. While Lauren's dream for Earthseed to "take root among the stars"²⁵ and create a "partnership with [the] environment[,]"²⁶ may come to fruition at the novel's close, as the first shuttles are launched, they do so without the participation of Larkin/Asha, as Lauren once hoped and dreamed. The daughter despises her mother and her vision for Earthseed—what Larkin/Asha tellingly calls Lauren's, "first 'child,' and in some ways her only 'child'."²⁷ Larkin ridicules her mother's dream and suggests that rather than traveling to other planets, work needs to be done to repair things "here on earth," where there are "so many diseases, [and there is] so much hunger, so much poverty, such suffering."²⁸ The counter-narrative of the daughter's angry voice thus undermines Lauren's potentially ecofeminist utopian vision and begs the following questions: Why not tend to earth first as Larkin/Asha suggests, rather than search for a "distant mythical paradise" somewhere else?²⁹ And, at whose expense are these new worlds to be built? What about the "frozen human and animal embryos" carried aboard the ships?³⁰ What living beings might be harmed by this potentially imperialistic, mechanistic, reproductive project?

While Larkin's implied questions are important to consider, we know that the earth's social and physical ecology may be past all hope for any kind of equitable partnership to take place between humans and nonhuman nature in *The Parables*. We also know there is a counter to Larkin's matriphobic narrative, as a form of communal parenting and an ethic of nurturing has taken place throughout *Sower* and *Talents*, within the community of Earthseed. Patricia Melzer argues that while Lauren herself is not a "conventional" mother, her utopian community offers a compassionate model of care for others that "can give meaning to life and can heal internal wounds." This model contrasts sharply with the alienation and social isolation found in the dominant culture. Although mothering is "fundamental" part of the Earthseed community, "Butler's concept

of mothering rejects the white stereotypical ideal of the nurturing self-sacrificing mother within the patriarchal society. Instead, it embodies involvement and commitment to the community at large that in principle is independent of gender."³¹ In *Sower*, for instance, Natividad breastfeeds her child at the same time as she nurses the baby of a dead woman, and men parent as well as women. Earthseed's ideology of mothering thus functions to "subvert" Larkin/Asha's narrative, as Clara Escoda Agusti suggests.³² Indeed, a large part of the Earthseed project is the protection and nurturing of *all* lost children, of all races and all backgrounds. Shared parenting, and a de-emphasizing of the biologically-linked, nuclear family, is practiced, in this instance, to the service of the greater communal good, and this feeds into Lauren's larger Earthseed partnership ethic:

Partnership is giving, taking
learning, teaching, offering the
greatest possible benefit while doing
the least possible harm. Partnership
is mutualistic symbiosis. Partnership
is life.

Any entity, any process that
cannot or should not be resisted or
avoided must somehow be
partnered. Partner one another.
Partner diverse communities. Partner
life. Partner any world that is your
home. Partner God. Only in
partnership can we thrive, grow,
Change. Only in partnership can we
live.

—Lauren Olamina from *The Earthseed Books*³³

For Butler, partnership parenting or "othermothering," a multicultural ethic of care, and environmentalist partnership ethics are all intertwined and function symbiotically. This ecological and maternal partnership ethic opens a space for a liberating ecofeminist utopian vision of interdependent relations between humans and nonhuman nature. In Lauren's spiritual quest, "*Nature / Is all that exists. / It's the earth / And all that is on it / It's the universe / And all that's in it / It's God, Never at rest . . .*"³⁴ Thus, for Butler, nature is "everything and everywhere," just as the potential for a caring and equal partnership among all living creatures pervades the human capacity to unify and heal the chaotic dystopian world.

In *Into the Forest*, Hegland's dystopian portrait of a post-holocaust society takes place in the near future in Northern California. All technology and mail delivery have failed, and the two main characters, teenagers Nell and Eva, live alone after the deaths of their parents in a house in the woods thirty-two miles

from the nearest town. This novel, like *The Parables*, critiques the damage the human race has done to the earth. Nell writes:

We had been in an oil crisis for at least two generations. There were holes in the ozone, our forests were vanishing, our farmlands were demanding more and more fertilizers and pesticides to yield increasingly less—and more poisonous—food. There was an appalling unemployment rate, an overloaded welfare system, and people in the inner cities were seething with frustration, rage, and despair. Schoolchildren were shooting each other at recess. Teenagers were gunning down motorists on the freeways. Grown-ups were opening fire on strangers in fast-food restaurants.

Now they are surrounded by a world in full-fledged “ruin”; “an earthquake caused one of California’s nuclear reactors to melt down, and the Mississippi River flooded . . . violently.”³⁵ Military groups have bombed the Golden Gate Bridge, wars are being waged all over the world, the White House is burning. Now, “old rules are . . . suspended.”³⁶ No civil order remains in society at large and the natural environment is in grave peril. Like Butler, therefore, Hegland links environmental degradation with sociopolitical conflict.

Into the Forest counters this dystopian social and environmental violence with the promotion of a partnership ethic with nature through the reconfiguring of the mother-nature bond. Nell’s and Eva’s mother is alienated from nature, and the novel suggests that this separation leads to the mother’s death and the potential demise of her daughters. Certainly, the mother’s relationship to nature runs counter to the ecological partnership ethic in the text. Hegland’s novel in the end comes full circle, however, as a new model of communal parenting is put into effect and a reconnection with the mother in nature is found. The narrator, Nell, as well as her sister Eva, are (re)born through a regenerative, ecologically balanced, powerful connection between humans and nonhuman world.

As children, Nell and Eva, have been raised in isolation, home-schooled in the world of the idealized forest. This intense relationship to nature has been forged *against* their mother’s will. When the girls are toddlers, they wander through the woods with their father. They looked at “wildflowers, listened to the birds, and splashed in the clear trickle of the creek. We picked up leaves and poked at centipedes and waterstriders while he towered above us.”³⁷ The father is positioned as a benevolent “tree” as part of the forest he stands near as a guide and aid. In contrast, their mother, a former city dweller and ballerina, fears the wilderness and wants to keep her daughters separated from nature. At six and seven, the girls long to go by themselves into the forest. “Every flower and bird and mysterious crashing beckoned for us to clamber up through the trees and ferns, but our mother insisted that we keep to the road.” The mother tells them, “‘You are too young . . . You’ll get lost. It’s not safe.’” She fears they will be injured by “wild pigs,” “rattlesnakes,” “bears,” and “wild plants.”³⁸ Their father insists that the girls will be safe and they are allowed to enter the forest, *despite*

their mother's opposition. The mother herself never leaves the house or domesticated garden, and she watches the girls play from behind the screen of a large picture window.

Significantly, when the mother contracts cancer, she plants a rim of red tulip bulbs around the edge of their property—marking a space between the family's domesticated yard and the wilderness. Later, while the mother is on her deathbed, the tulips come up and form a "ring of fire. . . a band of red that separated the tame green of [the] lawn from the wild green of the forest."³⁹ After the mother dies, the flowers bloom annually—a reminder of the separation between the mother's domesticated garden and the wilderness.

In the forest, free from their mother's fears, however, and with the encouragement of their father who believes it is in nature that the girls may obtain their best education, they create an imaginary world in harmony with nature. Nell writes:

Ours is a mixed forest, predominantly fir and second-growth redwood but with a smattering of oak and madrone and maple. Father said that before it was logged our land had been covered with redwoods a thousand years old, but all that remained of that mythic place were a few fallen trunks the length and girth of beached whales and several charred stumps the size of small sheds.

When we were about nine or ten, Eva and I discovered one of those stumps about a mile above our house and made it our own. It was hollow, and the space inside was large enough to serve as a fort, castle, teepee, and cottage. A tributary of the creek that borders our clearing ran near it and provided us with water for wading, washing, and mudpie making. We kept a chipped tea set up there along with blankets, dress-up clothes, and broken pans, and there we spent every minute we could steal or wheedle, playing Pretend.

"Pretend" . . . one of us would say as soon as we reached the stump . . . we're Indians." *Or goddesses. Or orphans. Or witches.* "And pretend. . . that we're lost." *That we're stalking deer. That we're going to dance with the fairies. That a bear's coming to get us and we have to hide.*⁴⁰

The forest is portrayed by Nell as an "idyllic" mythic paradise; the ancient stump is reminiscent of an idealized prelapsarian past, the old growth forest, before mankind destroyed the ancient tree. What is left is a beautiful place, hollowed out by time, in which the girls can explore being fairies, witches, feminized pan-like creatures—"wood nymphs." Like "Native Americans" they stalk deer, and interact in partnership with wild creatures. Non-human creatures cannot hurt them—they are untouched by bears, boars, and rattlesnakes and the forest contains "everything" they need.⁴¹ As they grow into adolescence, however, Eva foregoes playing in the forest for her new interest in ballet, and eventually Nell gives in, leaves their natural heaven, and turns to her computer, her academic studies, and her preparations for Harvard.

In a sense, "injured nature" retaliates for what human beings have done to mother-earth—as both parents die from technological or mechanistic forces.

First their mother dies from cancer; the novel implies that the mother is killed by her exposure to the toxic dyes and mordents she used in coloring the yarns for her weavings. Later, their father is killed by his own chainsaw in the forest. After their parents' deaths, the sisters go through many months of mourning and they suffer a major crisis: A male invader searching for "gas" rapes Eva because she refuses to give up their small remaining supply. This event symbolically replicates much ecofeminist theory that links the rape of feminized earth (for oil in this case) with the rape of the female body. Eva suffers deeply as a result of the rape, and she becomes pregnant and nearly dies in childbirth. Nell saves Eva by bringing her sister back to their mythical tree stump in the forest, and it is there where the sisters are each reborn—as mothers in connection with the land.

At first things do not go so smoothly, for the sisters, however. Before the birth, Nell and Eva heal the wounds of rape through an incestuous love scene, and later Nell cares for and nurses Eva's baby Burl/Robert, as Eva is too sick to do so herself. But as Eva heals, she becomes resentful of the bond between Nell and Burl, and she insists that Nell stop nursing the baby. "He doesn't need two mothers," Eva says in a rage.⁴² Nell runs off for a period of time, stops herself from lactating by drinking herbs, and when Nell returns to her sister, she resolves to forego her mothering relationship with the baby. At this point, Eva is forgiving and willing to share her child, and she says that Nell may nurse Burl. Ultimately, however, both sisters decide that neither can possess the baby; just as their mother used to tell them when they were children, Eva says Burl "is his own [person]."⁴³

Nell discovers that it is in the tree stump, in the forest, in nature, that a reunification with the *earth and "the primordial Great mother"*⁴⁴ may be found, and a true healing between humans and nonhuman nature may take place. Near the close of the novel, while in the forest, Nell hears her "*Mother'[s]*" voice—with a capital M.⁴⁵ It turns out to be a female bear that comes to the stump and sleeps next to Nell:

I dreamed she [the bear] bore me from the hot mystery of her womb, squeezing me down the tunnel of herself, until I dropped, helpless and unresisting, to the earth. Blind and mewling, I scaled her huge body, rooting until the nipple filled my throat. Later, her tongue sought me out. Lick by insistent lick, she shaped the naked lump of me, molded my body and senses to fit the rough tug of her intention. Lick by Lick, she birthed me again, and when she was finished, she shambled on, left me—alone and Nell-shaped—in Her forest.⁴⁶

Nell's (re)birth through her symbolic dream-connection with the female bear-as-mother leads her to the realization that she must abandon the dystopian society of the post-apocalyptic world, reconnect with her family members, and live in nature. Nell convinces Eva that they have no chance of survival in what is left of society at large. The sisters then burn down their house with the last of the remaining gasoline, and they "enter the forest for good."⁴⁷

The Parables and *Forest* demonstrate how patriarchal violence has denigrated nature and women's bodies, and Butler's and Hegland's protagonists seek havens outside of their hegemonic dystopian worlds in feminized Edens. Each of these novels explores the need to find a human "partnership ethic" with nature. For Hegland, we are all living in the "fugue" state Nell describes, exploiting nature and foolishly relying on electricity and oil/gas as infinite resources. This time of extreme environmental degradation and exploitation—created out of our need to support our late-capitalist dependency on nonrenewable resources—is only a brief period in human history, and it is time, as Lauren, Eva, and Nell suggest, for us to find a way to live in balance with nature. For Nell and Eva, this is accomplished by ending our dependency on wasteful, mechanistic, and destructive forms of technology. For Lauren Olamina, the future rests in the socially and racially conscious communal partnership relationship, in which a balance between technology, and nonhuman nature and humans may be found for all living beings—on other planets. As Merchant suggests, "a partnership ethic brings human beings and nonhuman nature into a dynamically-balanced, more nearly equal relationship with each other."⁴⁸ It is this partnership ethic that Lauren, Nell and Eva seek.

Notes

1. Karen J. Warren, "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective," *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3.

2. Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 226.

3. Merchant, 3.

4. Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 83.

5. Merchant, 84.

6. Merchant, 85

7. Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, 223.

8. Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, 196.

9. Andrea O'Reilly, *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006), 43.

10. "Community mothering and othermothering . . . emerged in response to black mothers' needs and served to empower black women and enrich lives," O'Reilly explains. It is a mode of collective transformation and political and social activism, in O'Reilly, 112–113. See, also, Patricia Hill Collins, who explains this mode of 'othermothering' in "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-Daughter Relationships," Patricia Bell-Scott and Beverley Guy-Sheftall, eds. *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters* (New York: HarperPerennial Press, 1993), 42–60, and bell hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting." *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 41–49.

11. For relevant criticism on the dystopia/utopia in *The Parables*, see Madhu Dubey, "Folk and Urban Communities in African-American Women's Fiction: Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower," *Studies in American Fiction*, 27, (1999, Spring): 1, 103–28; Patricia Melzer, "'All That You Touch You Change': Utopian Desire and the Concept of Change in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*," *Femspec*, 3 (2002): 2, 31–52; Peter B. Stillman, "Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's 'Parables,'" *Utopian Studies*, 14, (2003): 1, 15–35; Hazel Carby, "Figuring the Future in Los(t) Angeles," *Comparative American Studies*, 1 (2003):1, 19–34; Jim Miller, "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian Utopian Vision," *Science Fiction Studies*, 25 (1988): 2, 336–360. See also, Zaki Hoda, "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler," *Science Fiction Studies*, 17, (1990): 2, 239–251.

12. Stillman, "Dystopian Critiques," 15.

13. Miller, "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping," 349, 351.

14. Sylvia Mayer, "Genre and Environmentalism: Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower, Speculative Fiction, and the African American Slave Narrative," Sylvia Mayer, ed., *Restoring the Connection to the Natural World: Essays on the African American Environmental Imagination* (Münster, Germany: LIT Press, 2003), 176.

15. Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Aspect Press, 1993), 17, 18.

16. Butler, 57.

17. Butler, 12.

18. Butler, *Parable of the Talents* (New York: Aspect, 1998), 47.

19. Butler, *Sower*, 222.

20. Butler, *Talents*, 394.

21. Butler, 20.

22. Butler, 195 (italics mine).

23. Butler, 194.

24. Melzer calls Lauren a rather "'un-motherly' figure in the conventional sense in that she rejects the passivity regarding public/political life associated with the role"⁴¹.

25. Butler, *Talents*, 442.

26. Butler, 442.

27. Butler, 443.

28. Butler, 416.

29. Butler, 419.

30. Butler, 422.

31. Melzer, "'All That You Touch You Change,' 41–42.

32. Clara Escoda, "The Relationship Between Community and Subjectivity in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*," *Extrapolation*, 46 (2005): 3,

33. Butler, *Talents*, 147.

34. Butler, 419.

35. Jean Hegland, *Into the Forest* (New York: Bantam Books Press, 1998), 10.

36. Hegland, 111.

37. Hegland, 50.

38. Hegland, 50–51.

39. Hegland, 47.

40. Hegland, 51 (italics mine).

41. Hegland, 52.

42. Hegland, 226.

43. Hegland, 231.
44. O'Reilly, *Rocking the Cradle*, 95.
45. Hegland, 229.
46. Hegland, 230.
47. Hegland, 241.
48. Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, 84.