



Representation of Hybrid Jacob in Octavia Butler's *Clay's Ark*: A Posthumanistic Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Discussed from a posthumanistic perspective this paper argues for the possibility of a hybrid subject and the acceptance of the same. The discussion revolves around the enhanced characters and the human-animal hybrid Jacob. This paper also examines how human beings are interconnected with different life forms and there is a kinship between animals and humans. Peter Singer's ideas about animal liberation and Nayar's posthumanism are used to support the existence of a hybrid. Butler offers a hybrid that is radically different and possesses human values in a different form. The existence of human-animal hybrid can be found in mythology and science fictions. Rejection of the idea of autonomous self can help us to think about a hybrid in our world.

Keywords: Animal, Hybrid, Kinship, Posthumanism, Posthuman bodies,

I. INTRODUCTION

Octavia Butler in most of her novels offers hybrid characters. Jacob is a human-animal hybrid presented in Butler's novel *Clay's Ark*. This paper presents a posthumanistic analysis of Jacob in *Clay's Ark*. Posthumanism is an umbrella term that embraces the 'Other', accepts kinship across species and also promotes symbiotic relationship by rejecting autonomous status of life forms. In our constantly changing world the relationship between humans and nonhumans is one of the common themes of Butler's novels. Butler puts humans in difficult situations to make the readers think about the relationship between humans and animals. Humans are placed at the top of the food chain and it would be difficult for us to accept an animal or a human-animal hybrid replacing humans. Posthumanism as a critical theory excludes none on the basis of race, gender, origin, categorization and appearance. Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* and P.K.Nayar's book *Posthumanism* are considered as important theoretical frame works for the analysis of Jacob as a hybrid in Butler's novel *Clay's Ark*.

The claim for human subjective as autonomous and self sufficient by humanists allowed posthumanist philosophers to rethink about human-animal relationship. Posthumanism asserts humanity as grounded in kinship, connectedness, alteration and always becoming with different life forms. In Hindu mythology we can find different Gods with human animal amalgamation. Merging and becoming with animals is not an alien concept. At present scientist with the help of genetic engineering creating hybrids that allows crossing species boundaries. Butler's proposed hybrid Jacob destabilizes the traditional concept of body and brings the human and non-human together. This paper also investigates the necessity of a hybrid subject and problems associated with such subjects.

Octavia Butler's novel *Clay's Ark* offers a posthuman world by advocating the idea of human animal hybrid. By doing so Butler promotes crossing species boundaries in our world. Butler's posthuman world rejects the notion of fixed boundaries between human and animals, where humans are claimed to be at the center of everything around them. Butler in her novel *Clay's Ark* attempts to bring these drifted entities together through the clay's ark organism. This organism does not allow either the human or the animal to form the epitome of its own kind. *Clay's Ark* is the story of Asa Elias Doyle an astronaut who survived a spaceship crash but got infected by an unknown virus. He got enhanced senses, power and strength of an animal after the infection. It is irresistible for an infected person to infect the normal humans. Many of the infected people got died and few survived. Eli secretly builds a colony of infected people and in due course he kidnapped a doctor named Blake and his two daughters Rane and Keira. Blake found the infected people are no longer human and the infection has created a new species. Jacob is the one of its kind.

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Necessity of a human-animal hybrid Jacob

Animal studies reject human animal binary as an unethical attitude of humans. Cary Wolfe believes that our cultural practices and different texts helped us to establish human animal boundaries. Posthumanism as a discourse questions the uniqueness of humans and promotes kinship across species. Butler in her work creates the hybrid Jacob and portrays how humans receive such a new creature. This book also says how we ignored connection with animals and accepted human dominance across species. Posthumanism wants us to look at human animal relationship from a fresh perspective. Peter Singer in his book *Animal Liberation* tells us to expand our moral horizons to think about animals. Discrimination on the basis of race, sex and gender is illogical. Vincenzo Natali's directed Canadian-French film *Splice* (2009) portrays a human- non human hybrid that demands human consideration. Many science fiction writers have discussed the challenging problems and differences between humans and nonhumans. All these writers including Octavia Butler do not promote binaries rather promotes kinship across species. A mutual dependency between human and animal is a real fact in our society. Biologist Lynn Margulis sees evolution of life forms as co-evolution. Octavia Butler creates situations in her novels to make human and animal dependent upon each other. In *Clay's Ark* her character Jacob has a human face with animal body. We treat pet animals as a part of our family but we fear to cross species boundaries. We can't tolerate a talking dog inside our house. This species boundary is created on the assumption that humans are superior and intelligent than animals. Among human species disabled and helpless humans are treated as superior in comparison to animals because of their species identity. Butler breaks these notions by offering a hybrid Jacob. Human-animal relationship is based on connectedness and empathy. Greater altruism is necessary to maintain kinship with animals. Peter singer suggests that animals are not inferior. Nayar says that all life forms are connected and evolved in cooperation rather than in competition. Butler tries to eliminate human-animal differences and it is important for us to rethink about human-nonhuman relation.

Posthuman Bodies

By using the concept of Hybridity Octavia Butler brings the 'Other' animal to the forefront. Posthumanism proposes co-evolution of humans with nonhumans and other life forms. The 'pure' human subject is also possible only in relation with other life forms. This indicates that our human body is always and already hybrid. Posthumanists John Harris proposes the enhancement of humans to become a better human. Animals with greater altruism can acquire human subjectivity. Butler's character Jacob is the result of a viral infection. Jacob is considered as beautiful and different by his mother. The novel shows horrors of living and accepting a human-animal hybrid. Octavia Butler has created enhanced humans and human-animal hybrid characters in her novel *Clay's Ark* to question about the sovereignty or uniqueness of human body. Human-animal hybrid Jacob is at the center of discussion from posthumanist point of view. Eli, Meda and many other characters got enhanced due to the virus and become hybrid subjects. We fear people with power and in *Clay's Ark* the hybrid holds power which makes the humans feel like 'Other' in their own world. Humans want to decide their own fate and to maintain their purity as a dominant species. The part human in the hybrid make humans go near to it and the part animal make them fear and feel disgust. Appearance matters to humans as it stabilizes our human identity in this world. Unknown and strange things frighten humans. When Blake and his daughters Rane and Keira met Eli and his people they wondered whether they are animals in human form. Infected humans have enhanced senses, speed, strength and telepathic qualities. Eli considered them only as different but not subordinated. The infected woman Meda says to Blake, "*We're changed, but we have ethics. We aren't animals.*" (Pg-39)

Infected people and hybrids cannot tolerate being caged. Peter Singer says thousands of animals are suffering for the sake of humans in experiments and factory farming. If human beings feel less pain by watching the suffering of animals and feel more pain by watching humans suffering then they are speciesist. Blake and his family represent pure humans and they place Eli and his non- human children outside the sphere of moral consideration. This attitude of humans indicates discrimination against beings on the basis of their species identity. Science fictions as well as in sci-fi movies are crowded with different characters like humans, aliens, robots, clones, human-machine hybrid and human-animal interspecies hybrid. All these hybrid life forms are treated either as friendly or hostile to mankind. Sometimes humanity fights with them to save humanity in films like *War of the Worlds* (2005), *Evolution* (2001), and *Independence Day* (1996) and sometimes we work with them or evolve with them to become more human. Science fiction and movies are the areas where we can question and visualize about bodies of different life forms. As humans our present body is the result of constant and continuous interaction with different non human life forms, machines and our environment. Nayar says in his book *Posthumanism*, "*DNA is now a language that supposedly encapsulates the body. And because it is a language, it is scriptable, reproducible, storable and readable*" (57).

Clones are made from humans and it is difficult for us to accept clones as humans. As derived from human DNA clones hold the right to be treated as humans but we reject them on moral grounds. Jacob in the

novel *Clay's Ark* born out of infected humans but it was rejected by humans as evil and unnatural. Humans reject the hybrid to remain autonomous. But Nayar sees human body as congeries, assemblage of multiple species, machines and organic forms. Our DNA makes us a unique species but according to the evolution theory fragments of our DNA has come from other organisms. Human subjectivity is not bounded to the human subject rather it constantly communicates with the outer. For Nayar losing human subjectivity and autonomy is a vital step towards becoming posthumans. Posthumanist ideology believes that a life form is never autonomous rather it is a result of association and communication of different networks. So here comes the possibility of human's subjectivity to merge with the 'Other' machine, animal and alien.

The bodies of infected humans and the hybrid children like Jacob and Joseph can be assumed as posthuman bodies. Their new posthuman bodies need to interact with the new environment and they have also different responsibilities in a new social order. For a posthuman it does not mean only to carry a new body but also to accept new challenges and responsibilities. Humans need to understand the hybrid and the hybrid need to understand the humans too. Humans hate Jacob because he can replace humans in future. We need to understand that Jacob carries both human and animal elements within him. Humanity will grow but in a different form. Jacob and his kind are not only capable of going both animal and human ways but also they can do things beyond capable of both human and animal.

Challenges for a hybrid

The non human body of Jacob stands as a barrier for the humans to accept him as our fellow species. Humanity hates and fears deformity. Deformity is described in *Clay's Ark* in every subject. The pure human Keira is suffering from a deadly disease known as acute myeloblastic leukemia. For this reason she lost most of her hair and her weight too. One normal human being can see Keira as unnatural though she is a human. Infected by *Clay's Ark* virus Eli and his people look thin eat a lot and they sweat always. This is as well unnatural for humans to consider Eli and his group as humans. Jacob the hybrid has a human face but animal body, make humans difficult to accept it. Jacob is considered as 'animal' and 'thing' by Rane. She feels disgusted to have a child like Jacob. For Rane appearance matters a lot. Posthuman bodies are possible only due to the symbiotic relationship between different species.

Eli sees the virus as a symbiont and for this virus the hybrid Jacob becomes possible. In recent times the body has been treated as a tempting subject in pedagogical discourse. Butler accepts human body but without racial and cultural uniqueness. Jacob saved Keira from the car gang. Jacob stands for crossing fixed human boundary. Keira says, "*Jacob's beautiful...The way he moves-cat like, smooth, graceful, very fast. And he's as bright as or brighter than any other kid his age.*" (68) But her sister Rane categorizes Jacob as animal without showing any tolerance. She doesn't want to see humanity in any other form. Jacob is safe with dangerous animals but not with humans. Jacob didn't cry at the time of his birth and he born with teeth.

In reality hybrids will face a lot of problems in a human world. Eli assumes that people will keep Jacob either in a lab or in a zoo, for this Jacob needs a new world to survive. Jacob is not a human and he also a carrier of the disease. For him uninfected people smells like food and his family need to take care of it. Eli questioned whether Jacob would be stared at, harassed, tormented by normal people. He took time to accept the nonhumans as his children. Keira never wanted Jacob and his kind treated as animals in human society. When the virus spread to different cities Eli said, the kids need us more than ever now. Octavia Butler, towards the end of the novel suggests the beginning of a new world where humans with traditional old human bodies are obsolete. Jacob and his kind are now the future. Humanity will still continue in a different form. Crossing boundaries and always remaining in a position of becoming can allow humanity to continue in a posthuman body. In a posthuman world dominance of a single species or a single subjectivity is denied by Butler and multi species interaction and co evolution is welcomed. By creating a hybrid Butler wants to introduce ideas like: human dependency, sharing, hybridization and a changed world with altered species part human.

II. CONCLUSION

The "animal" can be used as a discourse on which we may find answers to our posthumanistic questions. In between these two extreme poles like; "becoming animal" and "animal" we can get a space to analyze, and answer our questions by destabilizing speciesism. Posthumanistic critics understand the prevailing presence of humans and for this reason they reshape the human-animal relationship and animal's position in human hierarchy. Jacob stands for the process of becoming 'Other' and it never supports fixed identity with levels. Octavia Butler's *Clay's Ark* explores an innovative way of presenting human beings in a new world. It denies fixed boundaries between human beings and animals by taking the help of an organism. *Clay's Ark* offers us a vision to study, how it feels like to be an animal and how it feels to become an animal with human conscience.

Science fiction portrays animals to explore the human animal relationship in our society. Science fiction writers use animals to visualize a society ahead of time where animal acceptance is open and disturbing. The novel ends with the rise of a new species in a world where fixed forms of identity or life remains obsolete. At present human being's body is the legacy of co-evolution, and only due to our symbiotic relationship with other organisms and to our environment we coevolved as a supreme species. Butler created Jacob to bring humans and animals together. Throughout the book it has been observed that no human being is happily or willingly accepts the 'Other' without hesitation. Blake and his family, Meda and her family, Zeriam and Eli himself felt difficult to accept the differences. This attitude of our fellow human beings allows us to raise a question in favor of the animal 'Other'. Is it necessary for the human beings to change/reshape their bodies to think about the animal 'Other'? Can we embrace difference only by becoming different? Butler doesn't not answer what Jacob has in his mind for humanity? Butler writes, "*Its smile seemed almost sly-the unbaby like gesture of one who knew something he was not telling*". (165)

The organism brings animal and human together and as a true symbioant it continues its journey with humanity in the body of Jacob. Human society will feel reluctance to accept Jacob as their counterpart. Jacob needs a posthuman world to survive. Humanism believes in fixed categories whereas posthumanism rejects it. Butler creates Jacob as a result of human animal affinity. In Jacob we find a new subjectivity. Butler through her hybrid represents a futuristic posthuman to solve human animal conflicts.

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