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Constructing Posthuman Text Worlds: A Comparative Text-World Analysis of Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* and Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*

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Abstract— *This article compares how Octavia E. Butler's Dawn (1987) and Jeff VanderMeer's Annihilation (2014) use language to build fictional worlds where the line between human and nonhuman breaks down. Both novels place a lone human focaliser inside an environment that she cannot fully read. Both make that environment act on her body. Yet they reach a posthuman condition by different routes. Butler builds her world through alien intervention, genetic exchange and the negotiation of consent and power. VanderMeer builds his through ecological transformation, perceptual instability and the gradual collapse of the distance between observer and observed. Using Text-World Theory (Werth; Gavins) as its primary framework and posthumanist theory (Braidotti; Haraway; Wolfe; Barad; Bennett) as its interpretive support, the article analyses world-builders, function-advancing propositions and world-switches in selected passages from both novels. It argues that Dawn produces a negotiated posthuman text world, in which the reader's mental model is revised through dialogue, disclosure and the redistribution of knowledge, while Annihilation produces a dissolving posthuman text world, in which the reader's model is eroded by unreliable reference, contradictory spatial deixis and the narrator's own transformation. The comparison shows that Text-World Theory can explain not only what posthuman fiction represents but how it makes readers construct, doubt and rebuild a world that no longer centres the human.*

Keywords— ***Text-World Theory; posthumanism; cognitive poetics; Octavia E. Butler; Jeff VanderMeer; speculative fiction; new weird; ecological alterity; human–nonhuman boundaries***

I. INTRODUCTION

Speculative fiction has long tested the category of "the human" under pressure. Darko Suvin defined science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" (4): a mode that presents a world recognisably continuous with our own but altered by a *novum*, a new element that forces the reader to see familiar assumptions from outside. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, that estranging pressure has increasingly fallen on the human body and its place in a wider ecology. Donna Haraway's observation that "the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached" (*Simians* 152) and Cary Wolfe's claim that posthumanism "comes both before and after humanism" (xv) describe a theoretical shift that much speculative fiction had already begun to dramatise.

Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* and Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* are two of the most widely discussed narratives of that shift. *Dawn*, the first novel of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy (later collected as *Lilith's Brood*), opens two and a half centuries after a nuclear war. Lilith Iyapo wakes in a sealed room aboard a living ship controlled by the Oankali, an alien species that survives by

"trade," the exchange of genetic material with other life forms. The Oankali have rescued what remains of humanity, but their rescue is conditional: humans may return to Earth only as partners in a merger that will end humanity as a separate species. *Annihilation* follows the twelfth expedition into Area X, a coastal zone that has been sealed off after an unexplained event. Its narrator, identified only as "the biologist," records her team's descent into a structure she insists on calling a tower, her exposure to spores, and her growing recognition that Area X rewrites the organisms within it, herself included, as well as the landscape they inhabit.

The two novels are rarely read together. They belong to different moments, different subgenres and different critical conversations. *Dawn* is usually discussed through race, gender, slavery, colonialism and reproductive coercion; *Annihilation* through the new weird, the Anthropocene and ecological horror. Yet they share a striking structural premise. In each, a woman scientist or quasi-scientist (Lilith is an anthropology student; VanderMeer's narrator is a field biologist) becomes the cognitive centre of a world that she cannot classify with the tools she brings to it. The nonhuman, meanwhile, studies, alters and incorporates the human observer who came to study it. The reader's understanding of each fictional world is assembled almost entirely through that observer's limited perceptions.

This shared premise makes the novels an ideal test case for a cognitive-linguistic account of posthuman fiction. Most posthumanist criticism asks what a text says about the human. This article asks a prior question: how does a text get readers to construct a world in which the human is no longer the organising centre, and what happens to that mental construction as the narrative proceeds? To answer it, the article draws on Text-World Theory, a framework that models discourse as the building of mental representations, or text-worlds, from the linguistic cues a text provides (Werth; Gavins). Text-World Theory offers a precise vocabulary for the elements that build a fictional world (time, place, participants and objects), the propositions that move it forward, and the switches that open alternative worlds of memory, hypothesis and perception.

The central argument is that both novels construct posthuman text worlds by destabilising the boundaries between human and nonhuman identity, biological existence, consciousness and environmental agency, but that they use opposite cognitive strategies to do so. Butler's world is *negotiated*: it is built through dialogue, disclosure and contested knowledge, and the reader's mental model is revised each time Lilith learns, or is told, something new. VanderMeer's world is *dissolving*: it is built through unreliable reference and perceptual drift, and the reader's mental model is not so much revised as eroded. The sections that follow review existing scholarship, identify the research gap, set out the theoretical framework and methodology, and then analyse the two novels across five comparative dimensions.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Butler's *Dawn* and the politics of the hybrid body

Criticism of *Dawn* has developed along three main lines. The first reads the novel through race, slavery and colonial encounter. Hoda Zaki placed Butler's fiction in the tradition of utopian and dystopian writing and argued that it is shaped by a pessimistic view of human nature that sits uneasily with its progressive politics. Later critics extended this into the novel's echoes of the Middle Passage: an African American woman wakes captive, is examined without consent and is assigned to "breed" with her captors, and Lilith's own comparison, "Animals get treated like this" (Butler 105), makes the analogy explicit. Gerry Canavan's monograph situates the trilogy within Butler's lifelong concern with domination, survival and the cost of adaptation, drawing on her archived notes to show how deliberately she withheld easy resolutions.

The second line reads *Dawn* through gender, sexuality and reproduction. Michelle Erica Green and Cathy Peppers both examine how the third-sexed ooloi disrupt binary sex and how Lilith's role as a reluctant "mother" of a new species revises the biblical and sociobiological origin stories that the novel cites. Peppers shows that Butler's narrative is "dialogic": it sets competing origin myths against each other rather than endorsing any one of them. Jeffrey Allen Tucker focuses on the Oankali diagnosis of the "Human Contradiction," the lethal combination of intelligence and hierarchical behaviour, and asks whether the trilogy accepts or questions that essentialist account of human nature.

The third line, most relevant here, reads *Dawn* as a posthumanist text. Haraway discussed the *Xenogenesis* novels in *Primate Visions* as fictions of monstrous kinship that refuse the purity of origins. Naomi Jacobs argues that Butler's hybrid bodies unsettle liberal humanist ideas of autonomy, since the Oankali alter human bodies at the cellular level and claim to read human desire more accurately than humans can. Sherryl Vint similarly reads the trilogy as a study of embodied subjectivity, in which identity is inseparable from biological and social connection. What unites this third line is the recognition that Butler's posthumanism is ethically ambivalent: it offers survival through difference but also enacts a form of biological colonisation.

2.2 VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, the new weird and ecological alterity

Scholarship on *Annihilation* is younger but has grown quickly. Benjamin J. Robertson's *None of This Is Normal* reads the *Southern Reach* trilogy as fiction that resists the human scale of narrative itself, presenting Area X as something that cannot be made fully legible to human description. Gry Ulstein reads the novel as an example of the "new weird" that uses monstrosity to figure the Anthropocene, arguing that its horror arises less from threat than from the collapse of categories. Mark Fisher's broader account of the weird as "that which does not belong" (10) has also been widely applied to Area X, whose tower, lighthouse and moaning creature are present in the landscape without fitting its logic.

A second strand connects *Annihilation* to material ecocriticism. Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality, the idea that "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (2), describes the biologist's situation closely: she breathes in spores and becomes part of the system she has come to study. Jon Hegglund brings narrative theory into this conversation, reading the novel's strange story world through unnatural narratology and arguing that its descriptive strategies push readers toward a non-anthropocentric realism.

2.3 Text-World Theory and speculative fiction

Text-World Theory originated with Paul Werth and was systematised by Joanna Gavins. It has been applied to poetry (Giovanelli), absurdist prose (Gavins, *Reading the Absurd*) and dystopian fiction (Norledge), and the essays in Gavins and Lahey's *World Building* demonstrate its range across literary and non-literary discourse. Peter Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics* and his earlier *The Poetics of Science Fiction* established that science fiction is particularly suited to cognitive analysis, because it asks readers to build worlds whose parameters diverge sharply from their background knowledge. Related work in cognitive narratology, notably David Herman's account of "storyworlds" and Erin James's econarratology, has shown how narrative comprehension and environmental imagination intersect.

Taken together, this scholarship establishes that both novels are central texts for posthumanist and ecocritical reading, and that Text-World Theory is a mature, tested framework for analysing literary world-building. It does not yet bring the two together.

III. RESEARCH GAP, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

3.1 Research gap

Three gaps follow from the review. First, posthumanist readings of both novels are overwhelmingly thematic. They establish *that* the texts unsettle the human but rarely show, at the level of language, *how* readers are led to construct and then revise a world in which the human is decentred. Second, Text-World Theory has been applied to dystopia, absurdism and poetry, but it has not been applied systematically to posthuman fiction, where the core challenge is precisely the reader's difficulty in classifying participants as human or nonhuman, agent or environment. Third, *Dawn* and *Annihilation* have not been compared, even though they share an unusually close premise: a solitary woman observer, a nonhuman agency that acts on her body, and a narrative filtered almost entirely through her limited cognition. A comparative text-world analysis can therefore connect linguistic world-building with posthumanist interpretation in a way neither field has yet done for these texts.

3.2 Research objectives

- To examine how Butler and VanderMeer construct posthuman text worlds through linguistic, narrative and descriptive strategies.
- To analyse the relationship between world-building elements and the construction of human and nonhuman identities.
- To investigate how spatial, temporal and referential shifts transform readers' cognitive representations of the fictional worlds.
- To explore how biological and ecological transformations destabilise conventional human–nonhuman boundaries.
- To compare the cognitive and textual mechanisms through which the two novels represent posthuman existence.

3.3 Research questions

- How do *Dawn* and *Annihilation* construct posthuman text worlds through language and narrative representation?
- How do world-building elements such as participants, objects, settings, time and spatial relations contribute to the construction of posthuman identities?
- How do linguistic expressions of biological transformation and ecological alterity modify readers' mental representations of the fictional worlds?

- How do shifts in perspective, spatial orientation and referentiality create uncertainty about the boundaries between human and nonhuman entities?
- In what ways do the two novels differ in their cognitive and textual construction of posthuman realities?

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TEXT-WORLD THEORY AND POSTHUMANISM

4.1 Text-World Theory

Text-World Theory models discourse as the joint construction of mental representations by participants in a communicative situation. Werth describes a text-world as "a deictic space, defined initially by the discourse itself" (51): it is built from the deictic and referential cues a text supplies and filled out with the reader's background knowledge. Gavins refined Werth's model into an accessible analytical method and emphasised that text-worlds are dynamic, continually updated as a discourse proceeds. The framework operates on three levels: Discourse world, Text-world and World-switch.

Within a text-world, Gavins distinguishes two types of linguistic information. *World-builders* establish the world's parameters: time, location, enactors (the participants who populate the world) and objects. *Function-advancers* are propositions that move the world forward through actions, events, states and processes. Text-worlds are not fixed. When a text introduces a flashback, a hypothetical, a modal judgement or a change of focaliser, a *world-switch* creates a new world, and readers must track its relation to the one they left. When new information contradicts what readers have already built, they must revise or replace their representation, a process Gavins and others discuss under the heading of world repair and world replacement.

This dynamic dimension matters for posthuman fiction. A posthuman text world is one whose world-builders and function-advancers repeatedly prevent the reader from stabilising the categories "human" and "nonhuman"; the mere presence of nonhuman beings is not enough. Text-World Theory allows us to locate those points of instability precisely: in an enactor who cannot be named, a location that contradicts its own description, a verb that assigns agency to an environment, or a world-switch that reveals that the focaliser's perceptions were themselves altered.

4.2 Posthumanist theory

Where Text-World Theory explains how worlds are built, posthumanist theory explains what is at stake in the worlds these novels build. Five concepts are used here.

Rosi Braidotti's account of the posthuman subject rejects the humanist ideal of a bounded, rational, self-identical individual in favour of a relational subject embedded in networks of life. Her term for the ethical consequence of this shift, "zoe-centred egalitarianism" (60), names a refusal to treat human life as categorically superior to other forms of life. Haraway's work on companion species and multispecies kinship insists that "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with" (*Staying* 12) and proposes kin-making across species lines, compressed in the slogan "Make kin not babies!" (*Staying* 102). Wolfe's critique of human exceptionalism argues that posthumanism is not a stage beyond the human but a way of thinking that exposes the human as already constituted through its relations with animals, technologies and environments.

Karen Barad's concept of intra-action replaces the idea of separate entities that then interact. For Barad, intra-action "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (33): entities emerge through their relations rather than preceding them. Jane Bennett's "vibrant materiality" attributes to matter the capacity "to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii). Barad and Bennett are particularly useful for *Annihilation*, where the landscape itself acts; Braidotti and Haraway are particularly useful for *Dawn*, where the central issue is kinship, reproduction and the ethics of merger.

4.3 Integrating the frameworks

The two frameworks are combined in a sequence. Text-World Theory is the primary analytical tool, describing the linguistic and cognitive construction of each fictional world. Posthumanist theory supplies the interpretive framework, explaining how the human–nonhuman relations those worlds encode challenge anthropocentric assumptions. The analytical outcome is the concept of the *posthuman text world*: a mental representation whose world-building elements and world-switches are organised to decentre the human enactor and redistribute agency to nonhuman participants and environments.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative, comparative and text-centred method: cognitive textual analysis informed by Text-World Theory, with interpretation guided by posthumanist theory. The analysis proceeds in six steps:

- Selecting significant passages from both novels, prioritising openings, first encounters with nonhuman participants, moments of bodily transformation, and endings.

- Identifying world-building elements in each passage: time, location, enactors and objects.
- Identifying function-advancing propositions and world-switches, with attention to transitivity (who acts on whom) and modality.
- Examining the linguistic construction of biological and ecological transformation.
- Interpreting the resulting text-worlds through posthumanist concepts.
- Comparing similarities and differences in the two novels' construction of posthuman realities.

Two methodological principles guide the analysis. First, Text-World Theory is not a mere classification of nouns and verbs; the aim is to show how linguistic choices shape the reader's construction and revision of mental representations. Second, because both novels are tightly focalised, the analysis distinguishes between the text-world the focaliser holds and the text-world the reader is invited to build, which may diverge. Quotations follow the editions listed in the Works Cited; page references to *Dawn* use the standalone novel, not the *Lilith's Brood* omnibus.

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Constructing the initial text worlds: deprivation and contradiction

Openings matter disproportionately in Text-World Theory, because they supply the first world-builders from which readers construct an initial representation. Both novels exploit this by withholding or corrupting those world-builders.

Dawn opens with three fragments: "Alive! Still alive. Alive … again" (Butler 3). There is no location, no time reference, no second enactor and no object. The only world-builder is an implied enactor reduced to a bare biological state. The next sentence, "Awakening was hard, as always" (3), adds a temporal cue, but it is iterative rather than locating: "as always" tells the reader that this has happened before, in a series of worlds the reader has not seen. The capitalised noun that later names this process, as when an Oankali asks Lilith "What do you think you've eaten each time we've Awakened you?" (53), confirms that "Awakening" is an institutional procedure performed on her rather than an act she performs. The initial text world, in other words, is a world of deprivation. Lilith's sealed room has no visible door, and her complaint that "Humans need one another" (18) registers the absence of the social world-builders through which humans normally locate themselves.

When the first nonhuman enactor appears, the reader's representation must be rebuilt from scratch. Jdahya is at first perceived through human categories of body and threat; Lilith reads the sensory tentacles on his head as something like Medusa's hair. Her question, "Can you sting with any of your tentacles?" and his answer, "With all of them" (29), redefine the tentacles from a figure of horror into a functional organ. His reassurance that he has "been trained all my life to keep them alive" (29) reverses the expected roles of the first-contact frame: the alien is a caretaker, and the human is a patient.

Annihilation opens with the opposite problem. Its first sentence, "The tower, which was not supposed to be there, plunges into the earth" (VanderMeer 3), supplies abundant world-builders: an object, a location and a present-tense process. But each undermines the others. The definite article in "The tower" presents the object as already known, while the relative clause denies that it should exist. The verb "plunges" contradicts the vertical upward orientation that the noun "tower" activates in the reader's background knowledge. The narrator soon admits the arbitrariness of the label: "At first, only I saw it as a tower," and "I don't know why the word tower came to me" (6). Reference itself becomes a choice made by an unreliable observer rather than a fact about the world.

The enactors are similarly unstable. The expedition members are identified only by role nouns: the biologist, the psychologist, the surveyor, the anthropologist. Meanwhile, a nonhuman enactor enters the world only as sound: "a low, powerful moaning at dusk" (5–6), a sensory world-builder with no body to which it can be attached. *Dawn* begins with too little world; *Annihilation* begins with a world whose elements contradict one another. In both cases the effect is the same: the reader's familiar frames for interpreting environment and inhabitant become inadequate from the first page.

6.2 World-builders and the construction of posthuman identity

In both the novels, identity is constructed through world-building choices that blur the categories of enactor, object and location.

In *Dawn*, the key mechanism is reclassification through knowledge. Jdahya tells Lilith that the Oankali have identified in her body "a talent for cancer" (22). The phrase converts a human pathology, which killed members of Lilith's family, into an aptitude the Oankali value and intend to acquire. Lilith's reply, "I wouldn't call it a talent. A curse, maybe" (22), stages a conflict between two text-worlds: a human world in which cancer is disease, and an Oankali world in which it is genetic material for trade. Her

identity is being rewritten by a nonhuman reading of her body.

The same reclassification operates on location. The Oankali ship is alive, so the walls that enclose Lilith are not inert objects but parts of a living enactor. One sentence crystallises the consequence: "The long wall opposite the bathrooms concealed eighty sleeping human beings" (130). Grammatically, the wall is the subject and the humans are the stored object. Humans have shifted from the enactor category into the object category of the text world.

Pronoun choice performs a similar function for the ooloi, the third sex of the Oankali, which are referred to as "it." When Lilith insists that "Nikanj isn't male" (192), she is correcting other humans who try to map the ooloi onto a binary they understand. Yet the narrative also keeps forcing human frames onto Nikanj: it speaks to Lilith "in a tone that reminded her of a human mother speaking to her five-year-old" (70). The simile renders the nonhuman enactor intelligible through a human parental schema, while simultaneously positioning Lilith as the child. Identity, in Haraway's terms, emerges through uncomfortable kinship rather than through any stable human essence.

In *Annihilation*, the mechanism is de-naming and the materialisation of signs. The biologist's identity is professional and partial; she withholds her name and gradually reveals her history through her husband, who belonged to the previous expedition. The most important nonhuman enactor, the Crawler, is first encountered as text: a line of words growing on the tower wall, beginning "Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner" (18). The words are formed from living organic matter. Here the categories of sign, object and organism merge into one world-builder. Later in the novel, human-shaped growths of moss in an abandoned village suggest that previous expedition members have become part of the landscape. Barad's notion of intra-action describes this world precisely: the biologist, the tower, the writing and the organisms that form it do not exist as separate units that then interact, but emerge through their entanglement.

Butler constructs posthuman identity by *reassigning* enactors to new categories through the authority of nonhuman knowledge. VanderMeer constructs it by *dissolving* the category of the enactor altogether, so that persons, words and landscapes become continuous.

6.3 Function-advancing propositions: transformation and the grammar of agency

Function-advancers carry a text world forward through processes and events. Their transitivity patterns, who acts and who is acted upon, are a direct index of how agency is distributed across human and nonhuman participants.

In *Dawn*, the Oankali consistently occupy the Actor role in material processes, and humans the Goal role. They Awaken, examine, feed, alter and impregnate. The novel's climactic disclosure is grammatically unambiguous: "I have made you pregnant with Joseph's child" (281). Nikanj is the Actor, "made" is the material process, and Lilith is the Goal. Reproduction, conventionally the domain of human agency, is relocated to a nonhuman agent. Lilith's own agency appears mainly in modal and conditional constructions. Her protest that "A rebirth for us can only happen if you let us alone!" (45) opens a hypothetical world that depends entirely on Oankali consent.

Butler also naturalises Oankali agency. Jdahya explains: "We are as committed to the trade as your body is to breathing" (45). The simile maps the Oankali drive for genetic exchange onto an involuntary bodily process, presenting it not as a choice that could be refused but as a biological necessity. The effect is double-edged. It undercuts the reader's instinct to judge the Oankali as villains, since their behaviour is as "natural" as respiration; but it also forecloses negotiation, since one cannot argue with breathing. Lilith's comparison, "Animals get treated like this" (105), reasserts the human frame of domination and captivity. The text world holds both readings in tension.

In *Annihilation*, agency migrates from persons to things and processes. When the biologist discovers that she has inhaled spores from the tower wall, she records "one way in which the spores had affected me" (18). The spores are the Actor and the human narrator is the Goal. The effect she later names "the brightness" works on her from within. Other function-advancers assign motion and creation to abstractions and places. The psychologist reports that "The border is advancing" (129–30): a boundary, normally a static spatial world-builder, becomes an agent in motion. The biologist later imagines the tower as an entity that "makes and remakes the world inside the border" (192). The iterative verb pair turns a location into a creator.

This is Bennett's vibrant matter rendered as grammar. Where Butler's nonhuman Actors are persons with speech, intention and ethics, VanderMeer's are spores, borders, towers and the landscape itself. Transformation in *Dawn* is mediated through interspecies negotiation; in *Annihilation* it is an ecological process that requires no interlocutor.

6.4 World-switches, perception and cognitive uncertainty

World-switches are where the two novels diverge most sharply. Both multiply alternative worlds of memory,

belief and hypothesis, but they relate those worlds to the main text world in opposite ways.

In *Dawn*, world-switches arise primarily through dialogue. Each time an Oankali tells Lilith something, an epistemic world-switch opens, and its content usually replaces an assumption she, and the reader, had held. The clearest example is the Oankali diagnosis of the Human Contradiction. Lilith asks what the two incompatible characteristics are, and Jdahya answers in two parallel clauses: "You are intelligent," and "You are hierarchical. That's the older and more entrenched characteristic" (41). This exchange constructs, from a nonhuman perspective, a text world in which humanity itself is the object of study. The second-person pronoun extends beyond Lilith to the human reader in the discourse-world, who is invited to see the species from outside.

Other world-switches project into time. Nikanj's remark, "Your children will know us, Lilith. You never will" (125), is a proleptic switch that splits the narrative into two temporal worlds: a posthuman future that Lilith will produce and a present from which she is permanently excluded. Belief worlds also proliferate among the humans Lilith Awakens. When they train in an artificial forest aboard the ship, one of them insists, "I believe we'll find a wall over there" (239), and another dismisses the Oankali account with "All because the Oankali said so" (239). Here competing belief worlds collide, and the question of who controls knowledge becomes the question of who controls reality. Lilith's own trajectory ends in an imperative and a conditional. Her private resolution, "Learn and run!" (283), opens a deontic world of resistance, and the novel's last movement shifts into hypothesis: "If she were lost, others did not have to be. Humanity did not have to be" (283). Humanity survives at the close of *Dawn* only as a modal possibility. Throughout, Butler's world-switches are resolved by world repair: new information is supplied, often by the Oankali, and the reader's representation is revised accordingly. The uncertainty is political rather than perceptual. It concerns what Lilith is permitted to know, not whether she can trust her senses.

Annihilation reverses this. Its world-switches undermine the reliability of the main text world itself. Early in the descent, the biologist reflects, "You can't see what is there, I thought" (42), and later she finds it "baffling" that "what we had seen below could coexist with the mundane" (68). Two incompatible worlds are asserted to exist at once. The decisive switch comes when the biologist learns that the psychologist has been using hypnotic suggestion to control the team. The psychologist's question, "How many of your memories do you think are implanted?" (126–27), opens an epistemic world that retroactively destabilises every memory-world the narrative has presented so far. The biologist's response is telling: "I am sure of the here and now, this moment, and the next" (126–27). She retreats to the deictic centre, the only world-builder she can still trust.

The novel's many memory switches, to the biologist's childhood observation of tidal pools, to an abandoned urban lot she studied before her marriage, to the husband who returned from Area X changed, do not supply stable background. They mirror Area X instead. She recalls "thousands of transitional environments" (157) like the lot, so that memory becomes a rehearsal of the zone. A sighting of dolphins whose eyes seem disturbingly human produces "almost as vivid a dislocation as that first descent into the Tower" (97–98). Present and past, human and animal, collapse into one another.

The climax pushes this to a logical limit. After descending to the bottom of the tower, the biologist lists its contents in verbless noun phrases: "A swimming pool. A rocky bay. An empty lot. A tower. A lighthouse" (189). These are pure world-builders without function-advancers, objects with no event to connect them. Then comes an explicit contradiction: "These things are real and not real" (189). No world repair is possible here. Earlier, the biologist had recognised that there is "a limit to thinking about even a small piece of something monumental" (93); at the end, the reader is left holding an impossible world that cannot be reconciled with the categories of the discourse-world.

Both the novels, then, construct cognitive uncertainty. Butler foregrounds the negotiation of knowledge and power, and the reader's model is revised through disclosure. VanderMeer foregrounds the instability of perception and environmental interpretation, and the reader's model is eroded rather than corrected.

6.5 From anthropocentric to posthuman text worlds: A critical focus

The preceding analysis can now be drawn together around five questions.

In both, the human focaliser loses control of the world-builders. Lilith cannot see doors, choose her location or determine when she wakes; the biologist cannot trust the labels she gives things or the memories she holds. In Text-World Theory terms, the deictic centre remains human, but the authority to establish the world's parameters passes to nonhuman agents.

In *Dawn*, through speech: the Oankali explain, diagnose and predict, and their discourse builds the most authoritative world-switches in the novel. In *Annihilation*, through process: spores, borders and towers act without speaking, and their significance lies in what they do to the matter around them.

Butler's world reassigns the human body to a network of genetic exchange; Braidotti's "zoe-centred egalitarianism" (60) is enacted, but under conditions of coercion that the novel refuses to resolve. VanderMeer's world absorbs the human body into an ecology; Alaimo's trans-corporeality is literalised in the biologist's inhalation of spores and in the human-shaped growths of the abandoned village.

By being placed, through focalisation, in the position of a human who is no longer exceptional. The reader experiences Lilith's captivity and the biologist's disorientation from inside the text world. In both cases, the discourse-world assumption that humans are the knowers and the environment the known is inverted.

Dawn ends with Lilith pregnant with a child that will be neither human nor Oankali: the future is hybrid kinship, Haraway's "Make kin" (*Staying* 102) realised without consent. *Annihilation* ends with the biologist relinquishing "the burning compulsion I had to know everything" (194) and deciding: "I plan to continue on into Area X, to go as far as I can" (194–95). The scientific will to classify, the founding gesture of anthropocentric knowledge, is surrendered, and the human chooses to enter the nonhuman world on its terms.

A comparative analysis of the construction of posthuman text worlds in Octavia E. Butler's Dawn and Jeff VanderMeer's Annihilation gives us substantial data. It demonstrates two distinct modes of posthuman transformation. In Dawn, the initial world of deprivation and human isolation is progressively reconstructed through the intervention of nonhuman agents, particularly the Oankali and the ooloi. Genetic transformation, interspecies negotiation, and the acquisition of nonhuman knowledge facilitate the reclassification of identity and the emergence of hybrid subjectivities. Consequently, readers engage in a process of world repair, revising their initial understanding as new information is disclosed. The resulting text world is fundamentally negotiated and relational.

In contrast, Annihilation constructs a contradictory and increasingly unstable text world in which conventional processes of perception, identification and meaning-making are continuously disrupted. Nonhuman agencies, including spores, the Border and the Tower, facilitate ecological absorption, bodily mutation and environmental transformation. Through perceptual shifts, implanted memories and ontological contradictions, the protagonist's identity and the reader's mental representation of the fictional world gradually become destabilised. This produces a process of world erosion, in which cognitive reconstruction becomes increasingly difficult. The resulting posthuman text world is dissolving and indeterminate.

Overall, the comparison establishes that while Dawn imagines posthuman existence through negotiation, biological hybridity and relational kinship, Annihilation explores it through ecological entanglement, material agency and the dissolution of anthropocentric boundaries. Drawing on the posthumanist perspectives of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett and Stacy Alaimo, the comparison demonstrates how both novels challenge human-centred conceptions of identity, agency and subjectivity, albeit through different narrative and cognitive processes.

VII. CONCLUSION

It is evident that Butler constructs a posthuman text world through alien intervention, genetic exchange and the negotiation of biological identity. Her world-builders are sparse at the outset and are supplied progressively by nonhuman enactors whose discourse holds epistemic authority. VanderMeer constructs a posthuman text world through ecological transformation, nonhuman agency and perceptual instability. His world-builders are abundant but contradictory, and his nonhuman Actors are processes and places rather than persons. Both authors destabilise anthropocentric assumptions, but through opposite cognitive strategies: *Dawn* produces a negotiated text world revised through world repair, while *Annihilation* produces a dissolving text world in which repair ultimately fails. Text-World Theory provides an effective means of explaining how readers construct unfamiliar biological and ecological realities, because it can locate the precise linguistic points at which the categories of enactor, object and location give way. In both novels, posthuman identity emerges as relational and environmentally situated rather than self-contained.

Thus, for posthumanist criticism, it shows that these novels decentre the human through language as well as theme: transitivity patterns, pronoun choices, verbless noun phrases and contradictory deixis together engineer the reader's cognitive experience. For Text-World Theory, it extends the framework to posthuman fiction and proposes the *posthuman text world* as an analytical category, distinguishing negotiated from dissolving variants.

The study has limitations too. It focuses on selected passages rather than complete novels, and it treats each book independently of its trilogy. Future research could extend the analysis to *Adulthood Rites*, *Imago*, *Authority* and *Acceptance*, where shifts in focalisation, including Butler's move to hybrid narrators, would test the model further. Empirical reader-response studies could also examine whether actual readers build the representations

this analysis predicts. Such work would show more fully how speculative fiction, in depicting a world beyond the human, also trains its readers to inhabit one.

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