HISTORICISING AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S KINDRED AND FLEDGLING

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Abstract
The people of African descent in the United States have a traumatic history, which this work sets out to interrogate through Octavia Butler's Kindred and Fledgling. It employs a qualitative critical literary approach, by combining close reading, historical contextualisation and theoretical critiques to interpret the primary texts in an attempt to explore the history and psychological effect of slavery on the perception of African Americans as well as the survival strategies they employed to overcome slavery and marginalisation. From a New Historicist perspective, the trauma of Black history of the slave trade, the yearning for a distinctive Black culture, the struggle with poverty and lack of identity are brought under scrutiny. In the context of this work, New Historicism explores how the socio-economic context of Octavia Butler and peculiar happenings in society affect the interpretation of Kindred and Fledgling. The study therefore reveals that our uniqueness comes from our differences and accepting such differences determines our growth as a society because beyond racial classification, there are no real differences in human essence.

Keywords: African American, Trauma, New Historicism, Neo-slave Narrative, Marginalisation.

Introduction

African American history is the account of a people who came to the United States as slaves and became constituent members of that society at emancipation, but they are still struggling for determination because of the contradictions in America's racial politics. In the 16th and 17th centuries, people from Africa were forcibly taken as slaves to Spanish America and English colonies in North America through the trans-Atlantic slave route or the Atlantic Ocean. According to Davis (1966) and Gray (1975), although slavery had existed in Western tradition for about two thousand years before Africa's encounter with the West, it was nothing compared to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The largest number of slaves transported across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World was from West Africa. Before the Atlantic slave trade, there were already people of African descent in America because some countries in Africa would buy, sell and trade with other enslaved Africans, who were often prisoners of war, with the Europeans (Franklin, 1978; Sertima, 1976). According to Carson, et al (2011), the people of Mali and Benin were known for partaking in the events of selling their prisoners of war and other unwanted people off as slaves.

According to Jordan (1969) and Uya (1992), slavery became an economic enterprise when Europeans had contact with Africans in the coastal towns of West Africa. Initially, the plantations in America were cultivated by Native Indians and White indentured labourers "who were limited both in number and the level of manpower they could provide", but

Africans were stronger than the white indentured labourers and their supply was inexhaustible (Emenyi, 2004: p1). As Miller and Smith (1988) and McColley (1974) reveal, the trans-Atlantic slave trade is officially linked with the events in which a Dutch ship sold 19 Blacks as indentured servants (not slaves) to Englishmen at Point Comfort (now known as Fort Monroe), thirty miles downstream from Jamestown, Virginia. Though indentured servants were released after a number of years, the practice was gradually replaced by the system of race-based slavery used in the Caribbean in 1640. As servants were freed, there was a need for replacement; and with time, the difficulty in using any other group of people as forced servants led to the relegation of Blacks into slavery, which institutionalised by law in the 1660s.

African American Literature has captured all the happenings of these periods: first in the works of the 18th century writer, Phyllis Wheatley, slave narratives of Equiano and Douglass, and autobiographical spiritual narratives. Since slaves had no access to formal education, they used orature to assert their humanity and spoke from a silenced margin to the centre of slave culture and ideology with its exploitation and mechanism. By this, African American literature began from tradition, which involves songs about physical activities on the plantation and progressed to Negro spirituals, blues, ballads, sermons, stories and hip-hop songs. African American women who wrote spiritual narratives had to negotiate the precarious positions of being Black and being women in early America because the setting made them double slaves and objects of sexual gratification; first to the American society, the white men and then to the black men too (Wade-Gayles, 1971).

The emergence of women writers such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, among others in the 1970s and 1980s ushered in the era for daughters who sought to live above the stereotype which the American society imposed on their mothers. In the 1990s, there was the struggle for identity, as many families were matriarchal in nature. There were sons who opposed their fathers while struggling to bring themselves into prominence. One prominent writer of this era was John Widerman as seen in his Fatheralong. The 1990s laid the foundation for the queer theory, while the 2000s was a period of multi-culturalism and pluralism as there was a rise of ethnic voices to promote their cultures since America is seen as a cultural melting pot. In the 21st century, African Americans have re-written the history of slavery, servitude and racism through the genre of Science Fiction. Science Fiction is a genre of speculative fiction, typically dealing with imaginative concepts such as advanced science and technology, genetic engineering, space flight, time travel and extraterrestrial life. Black Science Fiction, also known as black speculative fiction, is an umbrella term that covers a variety of activities within the science fiction, fantasy and horror genres, in which African Americans feature. Its defining characteristics include a critique of the social structures that sustain black oppression and an investment in social change.

This research employs New Historicism to unearth the historical, cultural and social events that produced Octavia Butler's Kindred and Fledgling and its impacts on the psychology of the Blacks. New Historicism is a school of literary criticism that developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily through the work of Stephen Greenblatt. Its goal is to understand history through literature, and literature through its cultural context. This theory is a derivation from the Old Historicism, which considers history as the central or sole element in literary analysis and the core determinant of meaning in a literary text. New Historicists are of the notion that history is a subjective element and cannot be depended upon as the exclusive criterion for literary analysis because it ends in the subjective

evaluation of a text. Their aim simultaneously is to understand a work of art through historical context as well as how to relate with cultural and intellectual history through literature. Thus, every writer presents his/her work based on personal understanding of the time or an era, and so does the critic. New Historicism is mainly interested in the stories of people who lack political or social power, whose discourses are excluded and silenced in recorded history or master narrative canonised by persons of power.

It is in this view that history cannot be relied upon that Bressler (1994: p128) observes that New Historicism declares that "all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affected their interpretation of the past". "History", asserts, New Historicism, "can never provide us with the 'truth' or give us a totally accurate picture of past events". Bressler (1994) argues further that history is one of the many ways through which the world is examined. Consequently, the literary work is a reflection of the happenings in the world. New Historicists hold it that the assemblage of several elements such as history, politics, current happenings, authorial background, religion, cultures and belief system, etc., hold great significance in the evaluation of a text. New Historicism deals primarily with the historical and cultural conditions that produce a literary text as well as its meanings, effects, and also its later critical interpretations and evaluations. The theory conceives of literary text as situated within the totality of the institutions, social practices and discourse that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes. Therefore, New Historicism pays a close attention to the historical context of literary works. The use of New Historicism suits the subject of this study since Octavia Butler's works, Kindred and Fledgling, are products of America's history of slavery, racism, servitude, class distinction and colour segregation and the writer's personal experiences, which she presents by introducing the characteristics of science and technology as products of the 21st century scientific expansion into literature. These experiences have persistent psychological impact on the modern time, which in turn affects our perception of society.

Critical reviews on Octavia Butler's Kindred centre on the story of a young African American woman who was constantly pulled back in time to a slave plantation before the Civil War. While Spillers (1987) analyses Kindred's portrayal of slavery's psychological and physical brutality, Hooks (1994) discusses how Kindred challenges dominant narratives of slavery and its legacy. From these two authors, there is a clear acceptance of the existence of slavery and the damage the horror of slavery wrought on the minds of the Blacks. To Goyal (2010), Butler's novel subverts traditional historical narratives. Canavan (2016) opines that Butler saw not race but men – masculinity, not just on the level of ideology, but also on the level of biology – as the real problem to be solved. In her journals, she reports that Butler wrote about mixed racial couples for the same reason she wrote about sexually egalitarian societies: an effort to imagine, not utopias, but societies in which women do as they please. Through the two interracial couples who form the emotional core of the story, the novel also explores the intersection of power, gender, and race issues, and speculates on the prospects of future egalitarianism.

To Sheremet (2018), the problem of Octavia Butler's Kindred is the treatment of ideas; how she handles her themes so didactically and without nuance such that Kindred simply cannot be real literature, only functional, moralising prose. He opines that her plots are simple, the symbolism obvious, the moralising, heavy-handed, and the purpose, clear. This is a work of a critic, whose interest is in concentrating on the weaknesses of this work, rather than dealing with the central message of both Blacks and Whites accepting each

other and existing together in peace. Christian (1988) explores the novel's portrayal of intersectional identity, particularly Dana's experience as a Black woman by dwelling more on the psychological and emotional impact of slavery. While Dubey (1994) analyses how Kindred critiques essentialised notions of identity, Jones (2010) discusses how Butler's novel explores the complexities of identity performance. Both authors are interested with the issues of identity.

Govan (1986: p79-80) traces how Butler's novel follows the classic patterns of the slave narrative genre: "loss of innocence, harsh punishment, strategies of resistance, life in the slave quarters, struggle for education, experience of sexual abuse, realisation of white religious hypocrisy and attempts to escape with ultimate success". Crossley (2004: p279) notes how Butler's intense first person narration deliberately echoes the ex-slave memories, thereby giving the story "a degree of authenticity and seriousness". Re-echoing the experience of slavery, Butler brings to the readers a clear picture of that time and the pains it bred through a firsthand experience. Yaszek (2009) sees Dana's visceral firsthand account as a deliberate criticism of earlier commercialised depictions of slavery, such as the book and film Gone with the Wind, produced largely by the Whites, and even the television miniseries Roots, based on the book by African American writer, Alex Haley. While Butler-Evans (1987) examines how Kindred portrays resistance and survival strategies under slavery, Ferguson (2004) analyses the novel's critique of patriarchal structures and Keaton (2010) discusses how Butler's novel highlights the intersection of racism and sexism. Bedore (2010: p2) notes that while Rufus seems to hold all the power in his relationship with Alice, she never wholly surrenders to him. Alice's suicide is her way of ending her struggle with Rufus with a "final upsetting to their power balance", an escape through death. By placing Kindred in comparison to other Butler novels, Bedore (2002: p73) explores the bond between Dana and Rufus as re-envisioning slavery as a "symbiotic" interaction between slaves and masters: since neither character can exist without the other's help and guidance, they are continually forced to collaborate in order to survive.

Scholarship on Kindred often touches on its critique of the official history of the formation of the United States as an erasure of the raw facts of slavery. Yaszek (2003: p1057) places Kindred as emanating from two decades of heated discussion over what constitutes American history, with series of scholars pursuing the study of African American historical sources to create a "more inclusive novels of memory". Blacks had been tortured for too long in America before Butler recounted their experiences in Kindred. While McCoy (2013) examines how Butler's novel informs social justice education, Smith (2015) analyses how Kindred can be used to teach thinking and empathy. Kubitschek (1991) argues that Butler sets the story during the bi-centennial of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the United States to suggest that the Nation should review its history in order to resolve its current racial strife. To Rushdy (1993: p135), Dana's memories of her enslavement is a record of the "unwritten history" of African Americans, a "recovery of a coherent story explaining Dana's various losses". By living these memories, Dana is enabled to make the connections between slavery and current social situations, including the exploitation of blue-collar workers, police violence, rape, domestic abuse, and segregation.

Vint (2007) and Bould (2010) believe that Butler's Kindred is a reiteration of the perpetuation of racial discrimination into the present and, perhaps, the future of America. Vint (2007: p243) insists that "we cannot escape or repress our racist history, but instead must confront it and thereby reduce its power to pull us back, unthinkingly, to earlier modes of consciousness and interaction". By this, Blacks can only heal by confronting their past and

living above it. To Hollinger (2006), Fledgling analyses the exploration of female agency and desire. While Geyh (2006) discusses how Fledgling challenges traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, Thomas (2014) examines the novel's portrayal of queer relationships and identities. But as Bast (2010) argues, Butler's novel is a typical African American narrative where the victim of a racially motivated crime is in quest for the truth about her former self, about the agony that she has endured and about her assailant's identity. Westfahl (2005: p1120) observes that the title of the text refers to "the genealogical links between its modern-day protagonist, the slave-holding Weylins, and both the free and bonded Greenwoods; at its most universal, it points to the kinship of all Americans regardless of ethnic background". Since Butler's novel challenges readers to come to terms with slavery and its legacy, one significant meaning of the term "kindred" is the United States' history of miscegenation and its denial by official discourses. This kinship of Blacks and Whites must be acknowledged if America is to move into a better future. Both black and white Americans have to reconcile and face the country's racist past together so that they can learn to co-exist as kindred.

Through the use of a vampire protagonist, Butler presents the issues of race, gender and acceptance in her vampire narrative, Fledgling. Sanchez-Taylor (2014) discusses how Fledgling critiques racialised power structure and challenges dominant discourse on race. Here, we realise that racism has created a power structure that makes one race greater than the other. Crawford (2017) argues that Butler's novel exposes the intersections of racism and patriarchy. Here, not only does racism affect the activities of the characters, patriarchy also becomes a problem as the male also subverts the female. To Reid (2010), Fledgling subverts traditional vampire narratives and challenges racist stereotypes. One of the most commented aspects of Fledgling is its unusual type of vampire, the result of Butler's fusion of vampire fiction with science fiction. According to Sanchez-Taylor (2014), the traditional vampire's monstrosity and abnormality routinely symbolises deviant sexuality and decadence, and serves as a foil for humanity, or is a projection of repressed sexual desire or fear of sexual or racial contamination. As Nayar (2011) observes, Butler creates an alternate history where humans and Ina have always coexisted in non-hierarchic, inter-dependent and unified ecosystems.

According to Reid (2010), Fledgling challenges traditional notions of identity, community, and power; explores the complexities of race, gender and sexuality, and subverts dominance discourse on American history and culture. Morris (2012) argues that Shori's hybrid identity handles traditional notions of identity and performance. While Dubey (2011) examines how Shori's identity performance reflects the complexities of African American experiences, Jones (2015) analyses how Fledgling explores the tension between essentialised and performative identities. These scholars seem to concentrate on Shori's identity issue as the "other" different from other members of her race. Butler narrates the power struggle in America between the Whites and the Blacks using the vampire story. While Johnson (2013) argues that Fledgling critiques power structures related to race, gender and sexuality, Thompson (2016) examines how Butler's novel explores the complexities of power and oppression.

However, Crawford (2017) sees Fledgling as challenging dominant discourse on power and privilege. Some critics view Butler's decision to endow her protagonist with a large dose of melanin than what is normal for the Ina as a metaphor for how the concept of race is created. Brox (2008: p391) points out that Shori is not just "made black biologically, but also socially when the Ina fixated on her difference". Thus, Shori's skin colour forces her

to defend herself from a hostile world before she has even learned about institutional hierarchies. As Strong (2011) remarks, the relationship between Shori and her symbionts is mutual, which is why Horton-Stallings (2015: p131-132) describes Shori's memory loss at the beginning of the novel as involving "the erasure of the physical and collective memory through Transatlantic Slavery". The reason for ignoring discourses on American racism by White supremacists is an attempt to deny the history of subjugation and dehumanisation as shown by Hollinger (2006) who sees Fledgling as the exploration of female agency and desire and Geyh (2006) who believes that the work is used to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. But as Bast (2010) argues, Butler's novel is a typical African American narrative in which the victim of a racially motivated crime is in quest for the truth about her former self, about the agony that she has endured and about her assailant's identity.

Black History in Octavia Butler's Kindred and Fledgling

The traumatic history of the American past can be seen in the depiction of slavery and slave communities in Kindred. In the words of Govan (1986: p80), Kindred is an accurate fictional account of slave experiences as there probably is no more vivid description of life on an Eastern Shore Plantation than that found in Kindred. Through Kindred, we have a first-hand account of slave life during the plantation period, and the physical and psychological abuses faced by these slaves. The slave community is depicted as a rich human society, who are concerned with the pains experienced by each member. Dana is transported across time to relive slavery in the Antebellum South, with the accompanying threat to the overall existence of the black man.

Dana's first encounter with the past when Rufus dragged her across time is that of horror. After saving the drowning child, she is nearly killed by the unappreciative Weylin who considers the presence of a black woman by the riverside so close to his son dangerous; her second visit is not any better. After putting out the fire, she expects to be transported back to the 1976 California, since "her first trip had ended as soon as the boy was safe – had ended just in time to keep me safe" (Butler, 1979: p20). When this is not forthcoming, she goes to the Greenwoods, only to see how inhumane Alice's father, the Weylin slave, is severely beaten for leaving the plantation to visit his family, while obscenities are thrown at his wife stripped naked, as they ask: "What do you think you've got that we haven't seen before?" (Butler, 1979: p37). He is dragged back to the plantation by a moving horse and he could hardly revolt because "blacks were not allowed to fight back" (Butler, 1979: p46). This traumatises Dana as she figures out that she has to fight for her survival or be taken in as a slave.

Violence in the plantation was much intense, except where a freed black had papers to attest to his freedom, which was not easily earned, and survival was a matter of strength and endurance. Slaves were not supposed to call Whites by their names, including white children. They were not to stare back at their masters or it was considered a form of hostility; they were only allowed to feed from wooden bowls using wooden spoons and in some other plantations, kids were "being rounded up and fed from troughs like pigs" (Butler, 1979: p72). The only real meal the slaves ate was corn meal mush, except for the remnants from the master's table, as Dana reports, "we get better food later on after the white folks eat, we get whatever they leave" (Butler, 1979: p73). Even among the slaves, one is treated with resentment, if he/she dresses more like the white folks than like a slave. Also, an educated

slave was usually considered a threat because he/she could start "putting freedom ideas" into the heads of the slaves (Butler, 1979: p74).

Bould and Vint (2011) place Kindred as a key science fiction literary text of the 1960s and 1970s Black consciousness period, noting that Butler uses the time travel trope to underscore the perpetuation of past racial discrimination into the present and, perhaps, the future of America. The lesson of Dana's trips to the past is that "we cannot escape or repress our racist history but instead must confront it and thereby reduce its power to pull back, unthinking, to earlier modes of consciousness and interaction" (Vint, 2007: p248). With this, we must learn to live above a past we cannot change. Similarly, Dana and Kevin's prolonged stay in the past "reframes their modern attitudes" and affects their perception of the 1976 California (Hood and Reid, 2009: p46). To this, they had to seek the modern day representation of the past they had lived in order to keep their sanity. Butler's depiction of her principal character as an independent, self possessed, educated African American woman defies slavery's racist and sexist objectification of Blacks and women (Paulin, 1997). At the same time, their relationship extends the concept of "community from people related by ethnicity to people related by experience" (Kubitschek, 1991: p39). In these new communities, Whites and Blacks may "acknowledge their common racist past and learn to live together" (Mitchell, 2001: p53). Rufus, who grows up in 19th century America, finds Dana and Kevin's relationship shocking, exclaiming: "Niggers can't marry white people!" (Butler, 1979: p60).

Kindred reveals the repressed trauma which slavery inflicted on the Blacks in their collective memory of America. To Butler, this trauma partly comes from attempts to forget America's dark past and their inability to walk past the pains. Amnesia refers to the loss of memories, including facts, information and experiences. Here, some historical facts are deleted from memory or history intentionally or unintentionally. From missing sources and perspectivism in past and present, Dana is confronted with a lack of historical sources about her family's fate. Before her time travel, Dana can only dimly recall her family history through a "large Bible in an ornately carved, wooden chest," in which Hagar "had begun keeping family records" (Butler, 1979: p28). This symbolic entombment mirrors "the way history is handled and ignored rather than used in Dana's modern world" (Wagers, 2009: p29).

When Hagar passed away in 1880, most of the information about her life "had died with her," Dana regrets, "at least it had died before it filtered down to me" (Butler, 1979: p28). On her travel to Maryland in order to search for records of her ancestors, she just finds "an old newspaper article" and a "notice of the sale of the slaves" (Butler, 1979: p262). The only traceable information is the mysterious death of the master, Mr. Rufus Weylin. Her African American ancestors are briefly mentioned as the "slaves from Mr. Rufus Weylin's estate" and "listed by their first names with their approximate ages and their skills given" (Butler, 1979: p262). Consequently, Dana is left trying to piece together their fates from an auction advertisement. There is also the contemporary silencing of the historical past. The date of Dana's final return to Los Angeles is not coincidentally on the bicentennial of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Whereas the nation is looking proudly upon its history, Dana and Kevin spend the day of the 200th anniversary isolated in hospital dealing with the injuries of America's slaveholding past. In this context, Mitchell (2001: p53) points out that "using the bicentennial in conversation with slavery reveals inherent contradictions in American history".

Dana's assertion of herself starts with her reaction to Rufus' mother after saving the drowning boy: "I turned and managed to catch her pounding fists. Stop it! I shouted, putting all the authority I could into my voice" (Butler, 1979: p14). She is yet to come to terms with the new environment she finds herself and tends to shout at a White woman, which is contrary to the principles of the 19th century England. Again, when she time travelled the second time, she declares herself a free woman: "I'm free, born free, intending to stay free" (Butler, 1979: p38). By now, she understands the complexities of her new environment and by all means intends to survive. During her first encounter with the patrollers, Dana sounds indignant and earns a slap from one of the patrollers as such was not known in Antebellum South. He screams, "You got no manners, nigger, I'll teach you some!", but she fights to escape being turned in as a runaway: "I dug the nails of my free hand into his arm and tore the flesh from the elbow to wrist" (Butler, 1979: p41). Contrary to how women behaved, Dana prepares for survival as she has a well-arranged tote bag with some immediate necessities in case she is called back again. This shows that she is unwilling to be totally marred by her past.

Dana's education is also a challenge. She speaks clear English with no southern accent, which surprises the black folks. Nigel asks her, "Why you try to talk like white folks?" (Butler, 1979: p74). Dana is considered 'too educated' and this gets her into trouble with Mr Weylin. Kevin warns her, "Weylin doesn't like the way you talk. I don't think he's had much education himself, and he resents you" (Butler, 1979: p80). This coincides with the belief of the area that an educated slave is dangerous and could start bringing freedom ideas to the minds of the slaves. For all her abuses, Dana gets off easier than many other slaves, partly because the privilege of her education allows her to almost entirely escape working in the field, and largely because she can time travel. She soon defaults, reads to Rufus and starts teaching Nigel, which earns her a terrible beating. Kindred challenges traditional notions of historical narrative by highlighting the importance of Black perspectives and experiences.

In Fledgling, Butler grapples with the issue of racism and race relations. Shori is a victim of prejudice because of her genetically engineered body and dark skin colour. In order to ensure that her form of Ina would never reproduce, the Silks murder her family and attempt to murder her as well. Her dark skin colour allows her to withstand the sun, even though many Ina consider humans as lesser beings. Shori's human DNA does not replace her strength and agility, and her melanin makes her more resistant to the sun and therefore capable of staying awake in the day, and this is considered a threat to the white Ina. Although this novel takes place in a world where vampires exist, it is used as a metaphor to depict the existence of prejudice and discrimination in our own society. Morris (2012: p61) opines that "Butler's Ina transgress conventional vampire tropes not only by being mortal but also by experiencing (and succumbing to) hierarchical divisions, such as those of racism, mirroring the violent systems of oppression that are the foundation of much of the human world". Some of the similarities that the Ina share with human beings are their involvement in social class divisions, their oppression as a result of prejudice, and their ability to die. Butler's decision to endow her protagonist with a larger dose of melanin than what is normal for the Ina is a metaphor for how the concept of race is created. Brox (2008) points out that Shori is not just "made black" biologically, but also socially when Ina fixates on her difference. Thus, Shori's skin colour forces her to defend herself from a hostile world before she understands what institutionalised hierarchies are. Shori has been genetically enhanced. While the Ina are stereotypically white, as is traditional for vampires, Shori's genetic makeup

includes human melanin, which renders her skin brown, a necessary trait for her kind to be able to survive exposure to the sun.

At the beginning of the novel, Shori wakes up to discover that she is covered in scars as she reports: “My skin was scarred, badly scarred over every part of my body that I could see. The scars were broad, creased, shiny patches of mottled red-brown skin” (Butler, 2005: p4). This recalls the scars on the bodies of enslaved Africans in America from the wounds inflicted on them by the slave masters. Horton-Stallings (2015: p131) describes Shori’s memory loss at the beginning of the novel as “invoking the erasure of physical and collective memory through Transatlantic slavery”. It therefore serves as “a metaphor for the experience of New World black subjects whose physical and cultural memory of affection and relationships have been erased or colonized” (Horton-Stallings, 2015: p132). When the novel opens, we are not aware of the race of the narrator because she has forgotten about the social concept of race, which is first raised in the novel when Wright asks Shori: “Ordinary sun exposure burns your skin even though you’re black?” Shori responds: “I’m … I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant” (Butler, 2005: p37). This immediately triggers another memory as Shori reveals to Wright: “I think I’m an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than … others of my kind” (Butler, 2005: p37). In this sequence, the concept of human racial categories is connected with the theme of genetic experimentation and racial difference among the Ina.

Shori feeds on the blood of her symbionts, such that the genetic and biological nourishment of the symbionts occur in conjunction with the material and physical nourishment of the vampires. The conflict that acts as the engine for Fledgling is racial discrimination, and Shori’s skin colour creates political factions and feuds among the elite vampire families. As the melanin allows her to survive in the light of the day, it threatens the purity of the Ina/vampire race as well as presents the possibility of racial evolution. Although Shori is not aware of the hierarchy that exists among her people as it deals with age and purity, she soon discovers that to be of pure blood is a basic tenet that the Ina hold dear. There are peculiar stylistic devices employed by Octavia Butler to embellish her works. In Kindred, while Dana uses the educated standard English of the 1976 California, Rufus and the rest of the people on the plantation use old Southern accent as seen in the scenes where he is eating with Dana: “Daddy’d do some cussing if he came in here and found us eating together” (Butler, 1979: p134). The old Southern accent reflects historical authenticity through the use of antiquated language; cultural identity by exploring African American cultural heritage and resilience; social commentary by critiquing historical and contemporary racial tension and timelessness as the language bridges the past and present, and emphasises ongoing struggles.

The narrative’s non-linear structure, facilitated by language, underscores the past’s ongoing influence on the present. Butler in Fledgling employs simple, direct language to convey Shori's innocence and naivety: “I was hungry. I was alone. I was scared” (Butler, 2005: p12). Butler employs vivid sensory details to describe Shori's experiences, creating an immersive and intimate atmosphere. She also employs fragmented sentences to convey Shori's disjointed thoughts and emotions. There are a lot of repetition to emphasise Shori's obsessions and fears, and metaphors and similes to create vivid and powerful descriptions. Both works make use of visual language to recreate the African American past, reinforce thematic concerns, create vivid imagery, convey emotional intensity and challenge the reader’s perspective.

Dana and Kevin's interracial relationship can be read as a metaphor for how America may be healed from tortured racial relations. Other instances of metaphor include the children's game of "auction" and "slavery", information about other atrocities happening in the world and Dana's dual existence in the past and the present. In Fledgling, metaphor is seen in the comparison of vampires to insects and animals. The character of Shori also serves as a metaphor for the theme of identity, and the vampire community in Fledgling serves as a metaphor for marginalised communities. In Kindred, allusion is made to the Compromise of 1820, President John Quincy Adams, the abolitionist, and the Emancipation Proclamation; in Fledgling, Butler employs allusion to draw connections between her vampire world and the human world, as well as to explore themes of history, culture, and identity. Shori is compared to Isis, while Wright is compared to the Greek hero, Odysseus. The symbols used in Kindred include whips, birthdays, maps, and damaged bodies, which are all relevant to being a slave. Symbols in Fledgling include the character of Shori herself, who represents the theme of identity, the vampire's bite, which represents the theme of community and the character of Wright, which represents the theme of power. Also, blood and the house are symbols of life, nourishment and safety.

Conclusion

Kindred and Fledgling offer powerful historicising of African American literature, one that challenges traditional narratives and offers fresh perspective on the experiences of Black people in America. The novels also offer powerful vision of resistance and liberation by highlighting the ways in which Black people have resisted oppression and fought for their freedom and humanity throughout history. In addition, they are necessary reminders of the importance of community and the ways in which Black people have come together to resist oppression and fight for their freedom despite existing limitations. Through this, Butler presents a clearer picture of the ways in which community has been a source of strength and resilience for Black people throughout history. This work, therefore, concludes that our uniqueness can be seen in our differences and the best way for survival is building on the footprints of the past while avoiding its mistakes.

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