

Opponent's Report

Adéla Korejtková, Hybrid Bodies and Hybrid Identities in the Fiction of Octavia Butler

This very interesting and thoroughly researched and argued thesis focuses on two works of the recent African American writer Octavia Butler. The central theme of hybridity is adequately discussed in relation to the theory of Homi Bhabha and Donna Haraway and also in a broader range of theoretical thought. Bhabha's, and partially also Haraway's, conclusions are effectively used in detailed interpretations of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy and Butler's last novel, *Fledgeling*. As a whole, the thesis represents an original contribution to Butler studies, using great number of relevant criticism.

All this does not imply that the approach is unproblematic: it raises a number of theoretical and methodological questions. I will mention the major ones, which may also serve as points of departure for a discussion during the defence.

1. The connection between Haraway's cyborgs and Bhabha's hybridity is very difficult to make and the thesis relies on a rather vague category of the space "in-between". Unfortunately, the connection is hard to establish even through a pragmatic concept of culture (Clifford Geertz compares culture's regulative functions to computer programs and Wolfgang Iser discusses culture's relation to entropy) because of Haraway's emphasis on hybrid bodies and modifications of organic structures and her lack of focus on discourse. Nonetheless, in *The Location of Culture* Bhabha writes about "corporeal exteriorization of discourse" (also in relation to "mimicry") which seems to be a better notion than that of the "in-between space" (which otherwise should be interpreted as "boundary" understood functionally as "interface"). The unstable nature of space is the feature of modernity as a whole, and Bhabha's rather specific concept should be related to Foucault's notion of "site" (and "heterotopia") and to Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of "deterritorialization". Without these theoretical coordinates, the leap from Bhabha to Haraway on p. 24 is unexplained and makes an impression of intuitive reasoning.
2. The problem of Haraway's approach is the neglect (or ignorance) of Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of machine as an assemblage of fragmentary parts functioning together. Similar to Haraway's cyborgs, this hybrid, dynamic, decentralized and transversal structure is neither mechanic, nor organic. In Haraway's thought, there is still a trace of an essentialist understanding of the body, she may be said merely to negate romantic organicism, while Deleuze and Guattari deconstruct it. Due to this feature, Haraway is better fitting for the interpretation of Butler's novels, but her approach does not reveal Butler's own essentialism, namely the material, rather than discursive nature of her bodies. Here Haraway as well as Octavia Butler should be contrasted with a much more penetrating approach of Judith Butler, who sees the "limits" of body as constructed in discourse. Haraway's approach to language as "infidel heteroglossia" (p. 30) is not based on the knowledge of discourse and performativity; it is a mere inversion of a logocentric concept of language.
3. Deleuze's and Guattari's approach to "becoming" is only cursorily mentioned, while it is evident that such notions as "event" "surface effect" or "simulacrum" (all from Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*) or "rhizome" (from *A Thousand Plateaus*) would greatly help the interpretation of Butler's novels.
4. Butler's references to "genetic technologies" or "engineering" appear general and rather uninformed (perhaps it is my false impression?). How can the Oankali "collect difference" (p. 37), when they do not seem to have any approach to processing genetic information? The same is true about "melanin" as a "generic marker" in *Fledgeling*.

What is called to be a genetic modification looks rather as a chemical or biological intervention in the heroine's organism.

5. The interpretation of the ooloi-human constructs, Jodahs and Akin, resembles that of the "trickster" and is related to Derrida's notion of the structure as "play". However, the problem here is the essentialist relation to the body. Dissolution of the body is "suicidal" for the ooloi. Rather than as an "in-between" space or interface, the ooloi seem to function as an authority based on the essentialization of the hybrid body.
6. On the whole the thesis is carefully edited, only the original German term signifying "the uncanny", should be in the proper form: "*das Unheimliche*" (p. 22).

In spite of these problematic aspects the thesis can be said to exceed the general standard of MA theses defended in our programme. I recommend it to the defence and propose to grade it "výborně".

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