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The Oankali Domination of Living Things

Throughout Octavia Butler's novel *Imago*, the Oankali species value humanity as something to consume in both the development and expansion of their kind. These values lead the Oankali to form a biological dependency on human mates, seducing and genetically manipulating them into codependency. The Oankali cells at their simplest form seek knowledge and information as the ooloi Yashi organ functions to collect and store genetic material. The Yashi operates as an internal impulse for the ooloi that urges them to seek out more forms of life. This compulsive drive is what brought the Oankali to Earth and is what will continue to drive them in their search for other living things throughout the Universe. The Oankali are biologically constructed to value life and evolution of knowledge above all else, which creates a destructive environment for coexisting species such as the human race.

The Oankali have a compulsive addiction to life. Their desperate need for reproductive partners is biological. Without mates, the Oankali lose all sense of self. An ooloi named Aor demonstrates a dispersion of being as it undergoes its second metamorphosis and slowly starts to disintegrate due to the absence of reproductive partners. Its inability to speak or take form suggests that it was reverting to a simpler state of being. As Jodahs watches its sibling decompose, it notes that what Aor was doing could be similarly related to human suicide, despite being technically unachievable. Jodahs states that if Aor were to die “the Oankali organelles in it would find things to do on their own” (734). This shows that the Oankali’s anatomical urge for life is much stronger than any of the Oankali are as individual and independent beings.

The ooloi's desire for living things is due to a genetic organ known as a Yashi, which controls their wants on a cellular level. As Jodahs and Aaor approach a new resistor village, they come across many unfamiliar plants. Jodahs acknowledges the crops as distracting and further elaborates by saying that "Yashi, between my hearts...contracted like a long-empty Human stomach" (701). This demonstrates the power the Yashi has over the ooloi's actions by biologically driving them to desire exploration of unfamiliar life. The Yashi works as a drug, making the ooloi desperate and greedy for living things. The Oankali obsession with existence is exhibited through mating with humans as humans are necessary for construct reproduction and the continuation of life, which is their biggest goal. The extent of their fixation is revealed in the last section of the series when Jodahs recalls a conversation with Nikanj on how the ooloi "feed on them [the humans] every day...they don't always have to know what we are doing" (680). This example illustrates how the instinctual urges of the Oankali, specifically the ooloi, outweigh the importance of choice and consent amongst the humans. Their lack of morality is directly correlated to their rooted desire to explore and cultivate other organisms.

The Oankali are incapable of wasting life due to their respective biological nature. Their instinctual drive to understand all living things leads them to domination over the human species, despite a consistent lack of consent from the humans. The ooloi are determined to preserve life and reproduce, making their bonds with humans even more valuable. Without mates, the Oankali are unable to survive as highly intelligent beings and revert to simpler forms. In addition to the manipulative forms of seduction that are used on the humans to build codependent relationships, the Oankali are able to eat their human partners without them ever knowing. The Oankali's genetic makeup prioritizes the comprehension of living things over retribute and human principle, making them an influential and threatening species.

Work Cited

Butler, Octavia. *Imago*. Course Text.