

Reading Octavia E. Butler with Gerry Canavan

Octavia E. Butler's literary and cultural reputation has only grown in the fifteen years since her untimely death in 2006, as her paradigm-shattering importance in the science fiction genre has become more widely recognized and as the world (for better and for worse) seems more like an Octavia E. Butler every day. Over a decade after her death, she finally achieved her dream of appearing on the New York Times bestsellers list; nearly every novel she wrote is now under development as a film or a television series, somewhere in the culture industry; prestige editions from the Library of America are being published alongside beautiful and stunningly inventive comic-book adaptations. On Twitter, haunting hashtags like #OctaviaToTellUs and #OctaviaKnew in response to the news not only prove the ongoing relevance of her fiction but show us how she has come to circulate almost as a sort of prophet, predicting a future that has somehow gone bad and inspiring all of us to find ways to survive it and thrive in it.

This four-week lecture and discussion series will focus on her four most important and most influential novels: *Kindred*, *Wild Seed*, *Dawn*, and *Parable of the Sower*. From grim time travel to the antebellum South to mutant shapeshifters exploring the Africa of the slave trade, from first contact with tentacle aliens after a nuclear war to a climate-ravaged America of the 2020s bedeviled by a despotic fascist vowing to "make America great again," these are the novels that establish Butler as one of the great artists and thinkers of our time, and open the door on a relentlessly and unapologetically creative genius who transformed so many lives.

4 monthly sessions on Zoom: Sep 13, Oct 11, Nov 1, Dec 6 | 6:30–8:30 p.m. EDT

Syllabus

9/13: *Kindred*

10/11: *Wild Seed*

11/1: *Dawn*

12/6: *Parable of the Sower*

All discussions will be conducted during Zoom.

Bio

Gerry Canavan is an associate professor of twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature in the Department of English at Marquette University, and the author of *Octavia E. Butler* (University of Illinois Press, 2016) and the editor of the Library of America edition of *Kindred* and *Fledgling*. He is the co-editor of *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction*, and *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction*, and also serves as an editor at two academic journals focused on science fiction studies: *Extrapolation* and *Science Fiction Film and Television*.