

mindstream and be subtle to the point of formlessness. Remember that those who have flava sell it to those who do not, and that those who control the spice control life. When you remember your name, you will remember mine. When I think of you, I will do the same.

The tape's playing ceases . . . see the object fade out.

THE MONOPHOBIC RESPONSE

Octavia E. Butler

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For all but the first 10 years of my life, writing has been my way of journeying from incomprehension, confusion, and emotional upheaval to some sort of order, or at least to an orderly list of questions and considerations. For instance . . .

At the moment there are no true aliens in our lives—no Martians, Tau Cetians to swoop down in advanced spaceships, their attentions firmly fixed on the all-important Us, no gods or devils, no spirits, angels, or gnomes.

Some of us know this. Deep within ourselves we know it. We're on our own, the focus of no interest except our consuming interest in ourselves.

Is this too much reality? It is, yes. No one is watching, caring, extending a hand or taking a little demonic blame. If we are adults and past the age of having our parents come running when we cry, our only help is ourselves and one another.

Yes, this is far too much reality.

No wonder we need aliens.

No wonder we're so good at creating aliens.

No wonder we so often project alienness onto one another.

This last of course has been the worst of our problems—the human alien from another culture, country, gender, race, ethnicity. This is the tangible alien who can be hurt or killed.

There is a vast and terrible sibling rivalry going within the human family as we satisfy our desires for territory, dominance, and exclusivity. How strange: In our ongoing eagerness to create aliens, we express our need for them, and we express our deep fear of being alone in a universe that cares no more for us than it does for stones or suns or

any other fragments of itself. And yet we are unable to get along with those aliens who are closest to us, those aliens who are of course ourselves.

All the more need then to create more cooperative aliens, supernatural beings or intelligences from the stars. Sometimes we just need someone to talk to, someone we can trust to listen and care, someone who knows us as we really are and as we rarely get to know one another, someone whose whole agenda is us. Like children, we do still need great and powerful parent figures and we need invisible friends. What is adult behavior after all but modified, disguised, excused childhood behavior? The more educated, the more sophisticated, the more thoughtful we are, the more able we are to conceal the child within us. No matter. The child persists and it's lonely.

Perhaps someday we will have truly alien company. Perhaps we will eventually communicate with other life elsewhere in the universe or at least become aware of other life, distant but real, existing with or without our belief, with or without our permission.

How will we be able to endure such a slight? The universe has other children. There they are. Distant siblings that we've longed for. What will we feel? Hostility? Terror? Suspicion? Relief?

No doubt.

New siblings to rival. Perhaps for a moment, only a moment, this affront will bring us together, all human, all much more alike than different, all much more alike than is good for our prickly pride. Humanity, *E pluribus unum* at last, a oneness focused on and fertilized by certain knowledge of alien others. What will be born of that brief, strange, and ironic union?

CONTRIBUTORS

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