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The Giver and *Shade's Children*: Future Views of Child Abandonment and Murder

Child abandonment and child murder are common behaviors in many species of animals. Among humans they have been documented around the world and as far back as ancient times. Evidence that these behaviors are still with us today, even in our highly developed postindustrial Western culture, can be found almost weekly in the local newspaper. The continuous documentation of these practices in traditional literature and in literary works meant for children and young adults has been noted by many readers concerned with children's literature. Both Tatar and Zipes have called for new interpretations of traditional stories that depict various forms of child abuse that will take into account the child's point of view and, as Tatar has expressed it, look at "our reluctance to probe the role of the parents in these plots."

John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*

Maria Piers, *Infanticide*

Maria Tatar, *Off with Their Heads! Fairytales and the Culture of Childhood*, p. xxi

Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*, p. 41

Reasons for Child Abandonment and Murder

The first question most people ask is, Why does this happen? Why have children been subject to abandonment and even outright murder throughout human history?

In both human history and story there are several reasons offered for this behavior. The primary one is economic. Children are abandoned or killed because of a condition of poverty, lack of food, or some other kind of scarcity situation. It can also happen for religious reasons, such as the need for a human sacrifice. Another reason is superstition. The presence of disease or deformity in newborns, multiple births (such as twins), and other occurrences thought to be unlucky

Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, vol. 1: A-I

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may result in the murder or abandonment of infants. In the case of disease or deformity, the child might also be rejected due to a belief that the youngster will die anyway or because the parents are unable to care for him or her. Infants can also be put at risk because of their gender. In some cultures there is a preference for boys extreme enough to result in the abandonment or murder of daughters. There have also been cultures, though less common, in which a preference for girls has resulted in the death of boy infants.

Another reason often given for this behavior has to do with the child's parentage. Children may be abandoned or killed if they are illegitimate or the product of an incestuous relationship. In myth, a child may be put at risk because of supernatural parentage. The second most common reason for infanticide in story is as a means to fulfill or avoid some prophesy. In "real life" when infanticide occurs it is usually the mother who does it, and generally women who kill their own offspring are suffering from a combination of mental illness and other psychosocial stressors.

Robert L. Sardoff, "Mothers Who Kill Their Children," pp. 604-605

Abandonment in Traditional Literature

That stories of abandonment persist in children's and young adult literature makes sense, as story tends to reflect our human experience. What is particularly interesting, however, is that even though it is a commonplace event with a long history, its existence is generally ignored by society. Whether the story appears in the newspaper, folklore, or current fiction, the abandonment event is quickly forgotten or repressed in favor of what comes next, either the action of the story or another news event. In discussing abandonment in *Hansel and Gretel*, Zipes has written that, "The history of how readers have received their text demonstrates that we have avoided dealing with the disturbing problems that this fairy tale conveys and at the same time rationalizes" (p. 41). It may be that this statement applies to the many "texts" of children's and young adult literature as well as to our ability to skip over or ignore these events in our reading.

In Greek and Roman mythology child abandonment occurs in many stories. Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers who founded Rome, are cast out as children and fed by a wolf and a woodpecker before being taken in by a shepherd. The famous huntress Atalanta is exposed as a baby for not being born a son (p. 65). She is saved by a bear and later reared by a woodsman. Perhaps one of the best-known abandonment stories is that of Oedipus, made even more famous by Sigmund Freud. Freud felt the story epitomized not only how humans' developing sexuality learns to move from an autoerotic orientation toward an external love object, but also encapsulated, in some way, a

Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, p. 407

Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, pp. 288-295

sense of guilt carried by mankind since its origins. In typical story fashion, Oedipus is abandoned in an effort to thwart the prophesy that he will kill his father and bring ruin to his line (Grimal, p. 323). Instead of dying, Oedipus is found by a peasant and reared in another kingdom. Bloch, a psychoanalyst who writes about the child's fear of infanticide, points out that Freud's avoidance of this tale's genesis and his emphasis on Oedipus's adult actions hides the link between his parent's precipitating action and what followed. Yet Freud's inability to deal with the parent's attempt at infanticide is in line with the deep sense of taboo that keeps both the parental wish to kill and the child's fear of murder repressed (pp. 9-10).

Dorothy Bloch, *"So the Witch Won't Eat Me": Fantasy and the Child's Fear of Infanticide*, pp. 8-9

Many Bible stories also involve infanticide or child abandonment. For instance, it plays a part in the stories of Isaac, Moses, and Joseph. In traditional literature, such as folk and fairy tales, the theme is apparent again. There are many examples from which to choose. *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Three Languages*, and *The Juniper Tree* are only a few.

Grimm's Tales for Young and Old, translated by Ralph Manheim

The abandonment pattern itself is common enough that it is a recognized motif in folklore. The general story line includes one or more cast-out children, who will nonetheless survive, with the assistance of animals, royalty, or supernatural beings. Things generally work out well for these children, justice prevails, and they end up self-sufficient and no longer in fear for their safety.

Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*

Folk and fairy tales that start with children being cast out are generally of two types. The first tells of preadolescent children forced to leave home or abandoned in a place where they cannot find their way back (p. 98). *Hansel and Gretel* is this type of story. Bettelheim wrote that these stories serve the psychological function of helping children deal with their fear of desertion.

Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*

The second type of cast-out story deals with an adolescent who has become so threatening to a parent or step-parent that he or she is put into the custody of a servant with orders to kill. Alone in the woods, the servant relents and instead pretends to murder the child. *Snow White* is an example of this type of story. In psychological terms, Bettelheim writes that these stories help children deal with their anxiety about retaliation from their parents as they grow up and seek independence.

That is the pattern in folklore. Do literary tales work this way? In terms of the structure, very often the answer is yes. Not only are the typical reason(s) given for the abandonment or attempted murder, but, as in the stories mentioned above, the actual abandonment is

mainly used as a literary device, to get the action of the plot moving. The story itself is often not about being abandoned so much as it is about what comes afterward. The emphasis is more on what the character(s) does with the situation, how the character finds assistance and becomes independent. Some modern examples of abandonment stories include *Pinballs*, *Monkey Island*, and *Homecoming*. In each of these stories an adolescent is deserted early in the narrative and has to come to terms with the situation, making do as he or she can. These are but a sampling. Stories that include instances of abandonment are so pervasive in children's literature that it would be very difficult to compile a definitive bibliography.

Betsy Byars, *Pinballs*

Paula Fox, *Monkey Island*

Cynthia Voigt, *Homecoming*

There are, however, two recent works that have added new variations to the child abandonment story, which are of interest both in the ways they have preserved the folkloric pattern as well as in how they have enlarged it. Both *The Giver* and *Shade's Children* update the adolescent abandonment tale by replacing the individual's horror and need to overcome the abandonment experience and the impression that a particular child's abandonment is an isolated event with the modern tone of a childhood lived in the context of adults generally unconcerned about children and unwilling to put them first.

Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

Garth Nix, *Shade's Children*

New Views of Child Abandonment and Murder

The Giver and *Shade's Children* both present the reader with a future dystopia in which children in general are uniformly abandoned by parents in service to goals that are not in the best interest of humanity itself, although the local society perceives these goals to be useful and necessary. This discussion explores how these novels have used and broken free of the traditional pattern outlined by Bettelheim, in which an adolescent protagonist becomes a threat to the parent, escapes destruction, finds help, and finally comes into his or her own.

To begin with, these books are striking in that they have moved beyond using abandonment as a literary device to get the plot moving. These stories do not start with an instance of abandonment, but move toward and through the realization that abandonment and child murder are facts of life in these projected worlds. The protagonists' job is not so much to overcome their own abandonment, which would normally happen with the help of some sympathetic adult; rather they must restructure their entire society, which requires fundamental, if not archetypal, change. Furthermore, it is change that must occur immediately, for even a day lost is at the cost of another child's life, or for Shade's children at the rate of 100 lives per day (Nix, p. 247).

Reasons Why

As previously discussed, the most prevalent reasons for child abandonment in literature have been economic reasons, an attempt to fulfill or

avoid a prophesy, or in the case of an adolescent, because the teen threatens the parent in some way. In *The Giver*, infants are routinely taken from their mothers at birth and raised in nurturing centers for the first year of life. At roughly age one, they are presented to the parents who will rear them, parents who are allowed to have them because their community-arranged marriages have been successful for at least three years, and because their application for a child has passed the scrutiny of the committee in charge. Child rearing, like everything else in this society, is highly controlled. Babies are produced by women who are specifically chosen as best suited for pregnancy and birth, but they are reared at nurturing centers by "staff" for the first year of life and never see their birth mothers again. The daytime child care workers are individuals, again specially chosen, who have the temperament and desire to care for infants. However, this child care standard drops considerably when the shifts change for, "It was a lesser job, night-crew nurturing, assigned to those who lacked the interest or skills or insight for the more vital jobs of the daytime hours. Most of the people on the night crew had not even been given spouses because they lacked, somehow, the essential capacity to connect to others, which was required for the creation of a family unit" (Lowry, p. 8).

In the course of the story it becomes apparent that sameness is valued by these people more than any other quality, and that anyone, including infants, who cannot conform to community standards will be rejected by the community in the strongest sense. There are endless rules and conventions for behavior in this society bent on ensuring order and conformity. One interesting example is the strict requirement for honesty and precision of language. Once, anticipating lunch, four-year-old Jonas, the protagonist, says, "I'm starving," and is instantly pulled aside for lying (p. 70). He is informed that he is not starving and that "I'm hungry" is the accurate statement he should have made. For other children more extreme corrections are sometimes necessary. At age three, when he should have been mastering language, Asher says "smack" when he means "snack."

> The punishment used for small children was a regulated system of smacks with the discipline wand: a thin, flexible weapon that stung painfully when it was wielded. The childcare specialists were trained very carefully in the discipline methods: a quick smack across the hands for a bit of minor misbehavior; three sharper smacks on the bare legs for a second offense. (p. 54)

So, when he asks for a smack he gets one. But after that he just cannot seem to say snack instead of smack. After a while, Asher has lash marks on his legs. Then, for a while, he stops speaking, but "When he began to talk again, it was with greater precision" (p. 55).

This emphasis on "truth" and on using the correct words for things is important to point out as a balance against the consistent use of the euphemisms "being released" and "sent elsewhere" that mask the big lie by which this society lives. The true turning point of this story occurs when Jonas watches a videotape of his father releasing the smaller of twin boys. He is filled with horror as his father injects the newborn in a vein in its head, watches it die, and then throws the baby in the trash (pp. 149-150). This child is murdered because identical twins are not allowed. Gabriel, Jonas's baby foster brother is at risk of release for his inability to sleep through the night.

In *Shade's Children*, all children have been abandoned by all parents for reasons unknown. At a single point in time everyone over the age of 14 literally vanishes into thin air, abandoning the children without warning. The children in turn go willingly into the overlords' custody, "because the guys in the suits [that came for them] looked like grown-ups" (Nix, p. 93). The facility that makes this wholesale abandonment possible "had clearly been built by humans, not creatures. A faded sign nearby gave the details of the architect and builders, describing it as a 'religious temple' constructed for the Church of the Overlords" (p. 296). The reader is informed that these adults "could never have known" what they were doing and yet the "Church of the Overlords" is reminiscent enough of Jones Town and Heaven's Gate to let the reader wonder what not knowing means.

The reason these children are routinely murdered at age 14 is to provide raw materials for the production of biotechnical creatures that compete in elaborate war games staged by the overlords. Why the overlords wish to do this remains a mystery, although the competition between them appears to be their main object of interest. Late in the story, one of the main characters, a girl named Ninde, asks one of the overlords, "Why do you kills us? . . . Why do you do any of it?" (p. 298). The overlord, Silver Sun, answers, "That's what you're there for. It's the way things are meant to be. You animals really are so stupid" (*ibid.*).

Some children, mainly girls who mature early, are allowed to live a few extra years so that they can bear children to refill the dorms that are depleted as the 14-year-olds are taken away. The children all have tracing devices implanted in their wrists to prevent their escape. Yet a few do escape, digging the tracers out of their wrists, living, for a while, on the run. The story's main characters are four such refugee children who are taken in by a computer-housed personality named Shade. Shade's willingness to sacrifice them for knowledge and for his own hope for a body pales next to the revelation that the overlords themselves are not creatures but human adults.

The Threatening Adolescent

In the story pattern outlined by Bettelheim, the adolescent is sent away because she or he has become a threat to the parent. For instance, Snow White's beauty is perceived as a threat to her stepmother, who determines to have her killed as a way of solving the problem. Is the adolescent a threat in *The Giver* and *Shade's Children*? On the surface, the answer is no. Both of these societies appear to have everything under control and the typical adolescent is not a problem for them. For this reason, when the adolescent does arise as a threat, their usual methods of control are ineffective.

In *The Giver*, sameness is stressed throughout the society. The only point at which individual differences are formally acknowledged is at the Ceremony of Twelve, when children receive the assignment that will constitute their occupation as adults (Lowry, p. 51). There is no sense that these young adults present any threat to the order of things. Rather, what the ceremony celebrates is their full assimilation into the society. Throughout, citizens who cannot comply with the rules are simply released. This process is a highly formalized part of this carefully ordered society that sanctifies murder at any point in the human life cycle for individuals who do not fit in or who express a desire to be sent "Elsewhere." Release is performed as a perfunctory part of an assigned duty, without pain, guilt, or remorse.

At the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas's job assignment turns out to be such a rare placement that the difference between him and his peers is extremely pronounced. His assignment as the Receiver of Memories is a high honor, but it also isolates him from friends and family in many ways. Unlike previous receivers, though, the adolescent Jonas becomes a threat because he is able to understand and assimilate the meaning of the memories that he receives. However, his society is unaware that there is trouble brewing for them. In response to what he is learning, Jonas stops taking the pills prescribed for all citizens from puberty on to stop the "stirrings," feelings of sexual desire (p. 129). In contrast to the culture that produced him, Jonas is able to feel and respond to both life and memory. Thus, he recognizes death when he sees it and is capable of setting in motion events that will force this awareness on his community and, hopefully, generate change.

In *Shade's Children*, the potentially threatening adolescent, having reached maturity, is simply harvested. Again, in contrast to the folk pattern, the creatures charged with securing their deaths have no trouble performing the deed. In fact, the destruction of the adolescent is performed with an efficiency reminiscent of the German death

camps of World War II. Systematically, on their Sad Birthday, 14-year-olds are dressed in white gowns and delivered to the Meat factory where their brains and muscle are removed and used for producing biotech creatures to serve in the overlords' war games. Of course, there are always children escaping and running away. Most of them do not last very long before they are hunted down and killed or harvested anyway. Such an outcome should be expected in this highly authoritarian atmosphere. As Freud puts it, "From the time of puberty onward the human individual must devote himself to the great task of freeing himself from the parents" (Freud, 1943, p. 295). As horrific as the overlords are, they are the pseudo-parents providing for the care and education of the children until they reach adolescence. Traditionally, adolescence is threatening because at this developmental stage children begin to have, for the first time, some of the prowess of adulthood. They are less dependent on others and can better compete with and challenge the adults around them, should they decide to do so. However, the overlords take great pains to catch the renegades more for the value of their "parts" than with any sense that they could threaten the status quo.

Finding Assistance

Typically, though, the outcast adolescent will find someone who can help. At first Jonas has his adoptive parents on whom he thinks he can rely. They do their job of rearing him and he trusts them. It is not until he reaches puberty that he comes to understand that they have lied to him in the same way that the culture at large lies to all its children. The Giver does not lie to Jonas. In fact, he is there to divest himself of all the truths and memories of humanity: memories that weigh him down, make him old and tired. But he is not very good at it. He tried to give the memories away once before to a Twelve named Rosemary. At first he gave her only good memories, things that would make her laugh. But they both knew she would eventually have to receive the full range of human experience. He started, somewhat gently, with loneliness and loss. The first memory was "of a child taken from its parents" (Lowry, p. 142). It stunned her. Then he gave her "anguish of many kinds. Poverty, hunger, and terror" (*ibid.*). The Giver does not get a chance to give her memories of war or physical pain. Before he can get to these, in response to the memories she already has, Rosemary not only requests release, but also chooses to inject herself with the fatal dose meant to take her Elsewhere.

The society in which Jonas lives has persisted for many generations. The Giver, whose place he is meant to take, as well as the receivers before him, could have taken steps to change the society at any

point. As it turns out, Rosemary was the Giver's own daughter, but even her death did not alter his desire to preserve the status quo. Only Jonas is able to make him see how wrong the society is. In response, the Giver helps him devise a plan. The Giver will stay and help the people assimilate the memories. Jonas will leave the community, provided with food and memories of strength to help him handle the ordeal. As he escapes, the memories he has of pain, death, love, and color will return to the collective mind of the people. As it turns out, Jonas is forced to flee sooner than anticipated and must achieve both escape and survival by relying on his own strength and perseverance.

In *Shade's Children*, Shade is the only adult mind available to the children running from the overlords. He is an intelligent personality housed in a computer who cares for runaway children and who, with their help, is waging a war of sorts to return the world to the way it was before the overlords came. At first, Shade seems reliable. He has a great hiding place and a lot of technical expertise. He has organized things such that the children who live with him are fed and have clean clothes and a safe haven from the creatures. In return, these children run patrols for him, gathering information about the creatures, finding supplies, and bringing in other runaways. These patrols are risky, but the children are happy to do as Shade bids for the relative safety and community with which he provides them. Gradually it becomes clear that the gathering of information is more important to Shade than the children are. He sends them into intense danger at times without really needing to. Later, as Shade's computer personality becomes obsessed with the idea of getting a biotech-body for himself from the overlords, he turns traitor, leaving the children to fend for themselves and to save humanity on their own.

The problem that Jonas's and Shade's children face is nothing less than how to clean up the mess the adults have made of things. In contrast to traditional tales where the protagonist's concern is to save the self, these children must save society (if not the entire world). Instead of finding the assistance of competent adults, the helpers they have are flawed, and at the critical moment, ineffectual. The adolescents must act alone, and now, to achieve their aims. It is interesting that in support of these teens both authors invoke the folk motif of endowing them with magic powers that appear for them around the onset of puberty. Jonas is chosen to be the new Receiver because of his "Capacity to See-Beyond" (p. 63). Likewise, each of the four main characters in *Shade's Children* has a special supernatural talent that helps him or her, and the group, to survive and elude the overlords. Ella can conjure objects out of nothing, Drum can manipulate objects

from a distance, Ninde can read the creature's thoughts, and Gold-Eye can see glimpses of the future (Nix, pp. 1, 4, 9, 17).

When Jonas hears his father say it will be "Bye-bye to you Gabe in the morning," he knows what it means and that he has to do something (Lowry, p. 165). If he is to save little Gabriel's life, he cannot wait to enact the Giver's plan or to take advantage of any other preparations. By night, he and little Gabriel sneak out of town by bicycle and head for the Elsewhere that Jonas hopes exists. They sleep, hidden by day, and pedal all night, taking care to stay out of sight of the search parties and planes. Worn out and hungry, they continue to flee, looking for a safe haven. In the end, it is only Jonas's determination and perseverance that keeps them on their way.

In *Shade's Children*, Shade is finally able to determine how to get rid of the overlords. He tells Ella, Drum, Ninde, and Gold-Eye that they must destroy the Grand Projector that sits on top of Silverstone Mountain (Nix, pp. 234-235). The party sets out to do the deed unaware of Shade's traitorous relationship with the overlords. He has arranged for the children to be captured on their way to the mountain. Ella and Drum manage to escape and continue the journey. Ninde and Gold-Eye are taken into custody, where they learn that the overlords are "old people" before they are marched to the ocean to be drowned (p. 294).

At the last minute, a chagrined and more human Shade hologram meets up with Ella and Drum to apologize, help them get into the tower where the Grand Projector is housed, and point them toward what they must do. As it turns out, though, Shade does not know how to turn the projector off. Ella and Drum are on their own again, and furthermore, are advised that destruction of the projector will release lethal radiation that will kill them within minutes.

The Value of the Individual Versus the Welfare of the Group

In both *Shade's Children* and *The Giver* the theme of the value of the individual versus the welfare of the group is another way in which these two novels enlarge the typical abandonment story line. The frame is set in both novels by expanding the peril beyond the fate of one individual and playing the drama out in society-wide terms. In *The Giver*, going to sameness involved giving up more than a variable climate, the ability to feel strong emotion, and the wisdom earned through the history of human experience. In this process the people also relinquish choice. Jonas struggles to understand this as his experience expands, but is somewhat convinced by the Giver's logic that, "We really have to protect people from wrong choices" (Lowry, p.

98). The price for this protection is paid by the Receiver of Memories in a life lived alone, apart from the rest. Receivers are allowed to marry, but the rules governing their behavior do not allow them to share what they do or know with anyone, not even family. The knowledge they bear is a huge weight. Holding the memories has aged the Giver earlier than normal. Very often, Jonas's training sessions are postponed because the Giver is in physical pain with the memories, pain that is incapacitating and goes on for hours.

Although to be the Receiver of Memories is an important position in the community, there are many days when Jonas does not want the job, nor to bear this burden for everyone else. At one point he suggests to the Giver that the two of them really do not need to care about what will happen to the community when there is no Receiver of Memories. But, "The Giver looked at him with a questioning smile. Jonas hung his head. Of course they needed to care. It was the meaning of everything" (p. 157).

The regular life of the community also reflects the emphasis on the welfare of the group. The community's acceptance of release for the elderly and for those who cannot, or will not, conform is total. When, at the Ceremony of Twelve, the children move into their adulthood, they are told, "Thank you for your childhood" (p. 56). In their ability to conform to the endless rules, it is not so much a statement of childhood's end, as a recognition that whatever true childhood each might have experienced was sacrificed to the order and sameness the community demanded.

There is, however, a difference between release and loss, but even in cases of loss the attachment felt by these people for each other is ephemeral. When four-year-old Caleb wanders away and drowns in the river, the whole community is able to release their memory of him by performing a "Ceremony of Loss." Everyone speaks his name throughout the day, at longer and longer intervals and in softer and softer tones, until it seems that the child has just faded away (p. 44).

In *Shade's Children*, the tension between the individual and the group plays out in several ways. The situation is so horrific and those who escape are generally so involved with their own survival that it is impossible for them to concern themselves with the fate of the children still inside the dorms. For the children who find their way to Shade, the situation is somewhat different. These children, given a safe base of operation and under Shade's direction, are actively engaged in a war against the overlords. In this war they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. There are many casualties, and in contrast to the Ceremony of Loss observed in *The Giver*,

where the memory of the child is released, in *Shade's Children*, the name of the person is spoken "as though to fix them in memory" (Nix, p. 46). This is followed by the chant, "We will remember them. . . . At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them. . . . We will remember them" (*ibid.*).

Shade proves even more willing than the children to sacrifice them to this battle against the overlords. Increasingly he sends them out on expeditions where the risk does not seem worth the return. At one point, after Drum mercifully kills a creature Shade is in the process of vivisecting, Drum accuses Shade, saying, "You'd even cut one of us up if you thought you'd learn something," and Shade answers, "I simply seek the best for the greatest number of you" (pp. 114-115).

Shade's children not only get attached to each other, but they are also forced to face many sacrifices of people they care about. Somehow they do not lose their sense of compassion for the individual. Drum kills the creature because he recognizes not only something human in it, but also the personality of someone he once knew. Risking his own life is one thing. The torture of another life for the greater good, even his own, is unacceptable.

Later in the story, Ella, Ninde, and Gold-Eye decide, against Shade's wishes, to rescue Drum, who was caught by the creatures and sent to the Meat factory. They do this at incredible risk to themselves. Once in the Meat Factory, however, Ella's response to the shelves of unconscious children is to feel "a stab of guilt so painful it made her wince" (p. 177). She wants to save them all, but knows she cannot. Next, in the process of searching for Drum, they find an unconscious boy who used to live with them. Being a well-trained soldier, Ella will not listen to Ninde's pleas to save him too. They are there to find Drum and it is risk enough to do this and get him out.

Ultimately, the individual is sacrificed to the greater good in this story. In contrast to acting under Shade's past orders, this time Ella and Drum fully understand the risks, choices, and options open to them when they destroy the projector. Still they do not falter and within minutes Ella and Drum die of radiation poisoning.

Let Justice Prevail

Like the cast-out adolescents in the traditional story outline, the young people in these stories are given a sense that justice will prevail. Jonas, in *The Giver*, knows that he has returned responsibility for human memory to the community. He believes that he has found asylum for Gabe and himself. Likewise, though Ella and Drum die, they

are aware that they have prevailed against the overlords and that the other children will be freed. There is also evidence in both stories that the survivors will prosper in the sense that they will ultimately achieve their vision of utopia, being freed from the dystopia into which they were bred.

So, what is tomorrow's wish for tomorrow as presented in these works? Do these children want material possessions, power, recognition, or fame? Amazingly, realistically, and simply enough, what these adolescents want is family love. For Jonas it begins when the Giver gives him a memory of sledding down a snow-covered hill. The memory pervades his dreams at night with the sense that there is "a destination: a something—he could not grasp what—that lay beyond the place where the thickness of the snow brought the sled to a stop" (Lowry, p. 88). Jonas sometimes has trouble receiving a memory, but there is one memory he slides into easily. "Jonas felt the joy of it as soon as the memory began" (p. 122). He sees three generations of a family together sharing a Christmas holiday. His wonderment at the idea of grandparents is total. Later, stripped of all the memories of his people, and approaching his final destination, he is filled again with joy. Somehow his recognition of this place his dreams called him toward, and which mimicked an experience induced by the Giver, comes from "a memory of his own" (p. 178). The place he is racing toward is really, most strongly, about belonging. He is going to a place "where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love" (p. 179). But further, the people there "were waiting for him; and that they were waiting, too, for the baby" (p. 180).

The desired future in *Shade's Children* is very similar. When Ella and Drum destroy the projector, all the creatures drop dead, saving Ninde and Gold-Eye from being drowned in the ocean. In the few minutes left to Ella and Drum, all four of the friends feel a surge in their ability to use their special talents. Gold-Eye is seized with a vision of the soon-to-be-now that Ninde shares telepathically with the dying Ella and Drum. It is a picture of grateful parents watching their happy children play in the park. It is a vision of Ninde and Gold-Eye as adults, parents themselves. Ninde is calling to their children, "Ella! Drum! Daddy's here!" "It's time to go home" (Nix, p. 310).

Summary

These novels, in the ways they both conform to and vary from the traditional story lines of abandonment, reflect on how the phenomenon of child abandonment and murder occurs in the backdrop of the modern developed world and is given little or no attention by society. They present many of the elements we expect to find. These are cast-

off children who face potential murder, find help, and achieve their own ends in the course of the narrative. They have the advantage, from the folk motif, of special powers, and the reader is left with the sense that justice will prevail.

These novels also enlarge that story pattern in ways that are both interesting and profound. For instance, traditional motives for child abandonment are absent. The children in these books are not abandoned or murdered in response to a lack of resources, tribal superstition, or even as the result of being born to an unstable mother. Rather, they are killed to preserve sameness in the group or to harvest body parts for use in adult games. Further, instead of presenting abandonment as an isolated or idiosyncratic event, both Lowry and Nix weave it into the full context within which childhood takes place. In these novels abandonment is more than a literary device used to set the story in motion; the fact and extent of the abandonment is discovered only as these narratives unfold. Where in traditional stories the assigned executioner relents and allows the adolescent to live, in these novels the child murderers are efficient and kill without conscience. Yet another contrast is apparent in the adult help these adolescents find. Far from being reliable, these adult helpers have personality flaws and agendas of their own that keep them from providing true assistance. Finally, the theme of the value of the individual versus the welfare of the group that runs through these novels provides an interesting mirror for the context within which the protagonists must operate. The abandonment of children is a selfish and shortsighted choice on the part of these societies. It is left to these adolescents to think and act beyond their personal needs to try to effect a future that will belong to everyone.

Chad Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare*

Oscar Wilde once said, "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which humanity is always arriving." The dream of a utopia speaks deeply of human yearning for a perfect world. Both Lowry and Nix have used the abandonment story pattern in a dystopian future to reach toward a true vision of a basic human need. The vision of Utopia that they express will ring true to many readers who will identify with the experience of abandonment (literal or figurative) by parents and/or society at large. They will also identify with the dream of doing better than their parents were able to do in their quest for belonging and family love.

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