

Cancer of Eden: A Novel on Parental Absence in a Child's Development

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ABSTRACT

Up until today, the cases of absent parents are still rising, and many are still unreported. This problem may be caused by the lack of understanding of its effect on children, where parents undermine the importance of caring and nurturing their children. With this case in mind, this creative thesis explores the effects of parental absence in a child's development, the way their parents or caretaker react, and how the children overcome their psychosocial and emotional troubles. By using John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, we can recognize the different patterns on different children after being raised without parental figures. This issue will be explored using the dystopian genre and novel form to show how the absence of parents can cause the child characters to be emotionally detached, feel helpless, and seek attention. The reason for these behaviors come from the fact that the children are abandoned by their supposed-caretakers, the aliens, and now live on their own in the facility. At the end, the children are able to tackle their problems by communicating with each other, regulating their emotions, and becoming self aware of their issues.

Keywords: absent parenting, child development, dystopian, novel

INTRODUCTION

In this creative project, we would like to focus on the emotional development and psychosocial development of the children and how they will work differently when they grow up with absent parents. Child development is a universal process experienced by all human beings, and it is something that all children undergo at this moment. Berk (1999) stated that "child development [is] an area of study devoted to understanding constancy and change from conception through adolescence" (p. 4). Child development is a natural part of human growth, but its theoretical foundation is often unclear to many. For example, if random parents were asked about child development theories, they would likely only know that their child will eventually crawl, walk, speak, and more. As children grow, they learn the skills that allow them to adapt and operate in their surroundings, starting as newborns.

Children experience extraordinary growth and development at a young age, including physical motor, cognitive, language, emotional, and psychosocial development (Sopiah, 2022). In this creative thesis, we will focus on the last two developments: emotional and psychosocial development of the children. Firstly, we have emotional development, which is described as:

Involv[ing] learning about feelings and emotions, and understanding how and why they occur, recognizing their own feelings and those of others, and evolving effective ways of managing them. The process through which children start developing the ability to experience, express, and interpret emotions (Bharti, 2021).

This shows the importance of being present emotionally for children who are still in their development stages. Lastly, psychosocial development is the process by which people grow from socially and psychologically immature to socially and psychologically mature beings through dialectical interactions between themselves and the social contexts in which they grow up (Wang & Viney, 1997). The lack of proper parenting can lead to the children becoming

Wijaya; Setiawan: Cancer of Eden: A Novel on Parental Absence
in a Child's Development

distant, and is at risk of developing emotional and psychosocial problems (Little, 2024; Mahapatra & Batul, 2016).

Absent parenting, according to Langlais et al. (2024), means a parent who is not involved in raising their child either physically or psychologically by choice. Additionally, according to Dinan & Jarron (n.d.), “an absent parent is a parent who is not living with their child. This can happen when parents get divorced or separated, or if one parent is not involved in their child's life” (para. 1). Children who grew up with absent parents often lack the necessary emotional and physical support for the child that is crucial for a healthy development, and this may lead to potential challenges to their emotional state, social interactions, and overall well-being (Mutie, 2009). National Academies of Sciences; Engineering; and Medicine (2016) stated that “[p]arents and other caregivers are essential resources for children in managing emotional arousal, coping, and managing behavior” (p. 46), which means what parents provide is crucial for the child. When parents are absent in their child's lives, whether due to physical absence (such as parents being away or separate) or emotional absence (such as lack of affection and support) frequently face challenges in their development. Winkley (2002) believes that children require a solid emotional foundation to build their early lives around. Without this emotional stability, children can feel a sense of insecurity, anxiety, and depression (Raths, 1972; Chen et al., 2019). Their psychological and emotional development may face long-term difficulties as a result of this emotional fragility.

To provide a deeper understanding of the characters' inner experiences psychologically, we have chosen to present this story in a novel form. By using this novel form, we will be able to showcase the character's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, to fully understand the way of thinking of the characters, using novel form will certainly help in order to explore it. By using inner dialogues and showcase each character in the story, we can get a glimpse of how the absence of parents in a child's life may have different outcomes in different children. This creative work will be using allegory, which Tambling (2010) defined as ““a way of saying one thing and meaning another” (p. 6) and “conceal[ing] a secret significance, in that it may persuade readers to probe for another meaning” (p. 6). Tambling (2010) also stated that allegory could enhance the meaning already provided or highlight a difference between the meaning on the surface and what lies beneath.

For this creative work, we chose dystopian as the genre for my story. According to Claeys (2010), dystopian novels, though they may really be harshly critical of the societies they depict, are sometimes characterized as conservative dystopia, which is a literary depiction of a society where evil or negative social and political developments rule, and is frequently used interchangeably with anti-utopia or negative utopia. We will be able to use dystopia to criticize real life problems, such as absent parenting. Using dystopia as a genre will allow me to challenge the status quo—asking questions about the normalization of being absent parents—and engage readers in critical reflection on the world they live in. According to Panda (2023), “[d]ystopian narratives frequently feature protagonists struggling against oppressive systems, aiming to expose the dangers of unchecked power” (p. 1080). This could represent the story of my creative work, where the children are oppressed as a result of absent parenting, and the power that the parents had over their children is certainly unchecked by child protective services and the child itself.

The theory that will be used in this creative work is the Attachment Theory by John Bowlby (1969). Attachment theory explores and labels children who grow up in different households or families, and how they affect the person's life in adulthood. This theory was later expanded by Mary Ainsworth in 1970. In the 1970s, Mary Ainsworth conducted an experiment called the “Strange Situation Experiment” to observe attachment security in children (McLeod,

2023). As a result of this experiment, Ainsworth et al. (1978) concluded there are three main patterns of attachment and their determinants: anxious-avoidant attachment, anxious-resistant attachment, and secure attachment. One of the patterns is consistent with the child developing healthily, and the other two are predictive of disturbed development. Later, a fourth attachment style is added, called “disorganized”, which is also predictive of disturbed development (Main & Solomon, 1990). This creative work will focus on anxious-avoidant, anxious-resistance, and disorganized attachment styles. Attachment theory, as stated by Bowlby (1969), emphasizes the importance of a caretaker’s role in the child’s development. It suggests that secure attachment between the child and caregiver will be able to form the foundation for a healthy relationship, even to the future when the child grows up. However, Bowlby also argued that the role of caretaker does not have to be the biological parents. According to Bowlby, the role extends to adoptive parents, guardians, other family members, or more. As long as they are able to provide the emotional and physical needs of the child, the child will grow up having a healthy relationship with them and a more secure and confident self. This also means that, even if there is a caretaker when the biological parents are absent, if the substitute caretaker is not available for the child, then the child will also face attachment issues. This will impact them greatly when they grow up.

In this creative work, we raised three questions: a) why Noir and the other children of Plantation 13 struggle emotionally and psychosocially. b) what signs and symptoms of emotional and psychosocial struggle that the children exhibit. And c) How Noir and the other children of Plantation 13 overcome their emotional and psychosocial troubles.

The story is set in the far future where aliens have taken over the world. Aliens, now being the leading government after almost eradicating the human population, take human babies with the purpose of ‘caring for a life’. This is because aliens can only procreate once in a hundred years, and that will take a while. As a result, they take human babies away from their real parents and care for them for themselves. After years, many children grow up mostly on their own at the plantation after being abandoned by their alien parents. In Plantation 13, Noir and the other children had their own set of trials and horrors of the truth of the world. However, having to grow up in this environment their whole life, it was difficult for them to control their emotions in the right path so they can work together. The result of the lack of love and understanding of each other’s feelings from the aliens affects their relationship with each other. But, they have to understand—just so they can reunite with their old friend who has already reunited herself with freedom from the aliens somewhere outside of the facility they call Eden.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The central theme of my creative work is that in the absence of caring parental or caregiver figures, children may suffer emotional and psychosocial harm—but healing and personal growth are possible, even in the most unlikely or adverse environments. In this creative work, Noir and his friends are living in a world where aliens hold the governance over humans. This leads to a world where a lot of human necessities are not met, simply because the aliens do not understand it, and a lot of the humans before the ‘new’ era were eradicated. Noir and his friends, though given a house, food, and other humans to interact with, grew up without a proper figure to look up to in their life. This leads to them barely having any positive emotional development and not knowing what we usually find morally right or wrong. Not knowing the truth of the world as it is all hidden, the children still decided to fight back after getting a glimpse of what the world before the new era is supposed to be. However, they are faced with the conflicts which stem from the absent parenting done by the aliens, such as feeling helpless, needing attention, or detaching emotionally. The story delves into how children, deprived of

Wijaya; Setiawan: Cancer of Eden: A Novel on Parental Absence
in a Child's Development

proper care, struggle to regulate their emotions and form attachments and healthy relationships as they grow up.

Plot

In the beginning, the six children of Plantation 13—Noir, Jay, Karin, Lia, Micha, and Pearl—are running away from their facility called Eden into an unfamiliar forest. However, it is obvious that they are lost amidst the tall trees against their short figures. Not long after, they are guided to a cave by a familiar lullaby of their other friend—Isla. They are relieved to know that their friend is okay, but to their horror, Isla is singing the lullaby to the dead body of their dearest friend, Oliver. He died because he is infected by a virus, though the name of the virus is unspecified. Oliver's face is cracked like that of a broken porcelain doll, and through those holes are thorns and flowers. It will be revealed that the virus is fatal to both humans and aliens; however, aliens die immediately, while in humans, death takes time due to their immune system. In a hurry, Isla tells Noir everything she knows about the world before the alien invasion. After that, the aliens drag the kids back to Eden; they leave Isla behind due to her being infected by the virus. The conversation between the aliens will also reveal that humans are kept by the aliens as children. This will serve as an introduction to the characters and the world Noir and the other children are living in.

The next day, there will be a rise in action in the story as the children return back to their plantation house. The six children avoid children from other plantation houses, refusing their offer to play and not answering their questions. Later, the government officer named Urah, called "Mother", comes to Plantation 13 to pick Noir up. Due to physical contact with Isla, he has to get checked up at the medical room. Thankfully, Noir comes out uninfected. After Noir's turn, Jay, Karin, Lia, Micha, and Pearl get their turn. While being in the main facility, Noir explains to his friends what Isla told him. There will be a flashback of their conversation. Isla told Noir that there is a small red disk to steal from the control room. She also told him that the world Earth belongs to humans, but it has been 1200 since the alien invasion, so they never know of the real human history. Karin meets her previous mama alien who used to take care of her and becomes an emotional mess. Then, Urah takes them to the physical test room as the children suddenly become obedient by wanting to take the test. This is because the children are sure that, by being obedient, they can gain the aliens' favor so they can roam around the facility freely. Another alien named Umnatha also appears to be Urah's brother, and is previously Micha's papa alien, whom he had a strained relationship with. Their meeting after a while almost caused a scene, as Micha continuously rejects Umnatha's approach.

The children return home and have a conversation with each other about their plan to escape and what they are supposed to do. Fast forward to a few months later, Micha comes home tired and exhausted from all the tests and experiments he had to go through. Then a fight breaks out between Lia and Pearl. Pearl thinks that it is okay to find comfort in the aliens they get close to, but Lia finds it dangerous, and that she misses the time the children spend together instead. This fight will serve as the climax of the story. Noir, as someone who is not emotionally well too, has difficulties trying to calm the fight. He just sits there in silence and confusion. Lia walks out of the room to calm herself down as Pearl cries. In hopes they become united again, Noir sings the lullaby they always sing together. After the situation subsides, the group come together again with a clearer mind and open up about their past. They each talk about their alien parents, revealing how all of them were barely there to support them. Some were busy, some were sick, some just completely did not care about them. This serves as the falling action.

Fast forward to the near future, the children finally execute their plan to steal the small red disk from the control room. However, they are here without Jay, who suddenly decides he wants to stay with Mother. They feel betrayed, but they do not have more time to waste. They

know Isla is somewhere out there waiting for them. Thankfully, today is the inspection day, where almost all aliens are out of their workplace to get checked by Urah. With the control room empty, they manage to steal the red disk. Unfortunately, an alien sees them when they are leaving, so Urilah pushes the emergency button and all the alien guards point their guns at the children. They are cornered, so Noir dares to comply and give them back the memory card. Thankfully, a gunshot is heard, which turns out to be Jay and Urah. With Urah on their side, the children finally escape the guards and leave Eden with Jay. They are finally back out in the forest and run straight to find a village. There, an old man spots them, and he tells Isla that there is someone here for her. This is the resolution of the story.

Characters

Major characters

- Noir (FW0602)
Age: 15 years old
Noir is a quiet kid in situations where he is not needed. However, you will not find him missing out on group activities that his friend participates in. When the group is in need of more opinion or participants, he is willing to be part of the plan. Overall, Noir is one of the smartest kids in the group, often offering ideas. He is not usually one to give up easily, however, Noir is very self-aware of his capabilities and limitations. He knows when to give up when the goal is too far out of his reach, which often leaves his friends with the impression that he is pessimistic. This leads him to be someone who prefers to be in the shadows. He does not like to lead, though sometimes the situation forces him to. However, Noir is also known as someone patient, and that can easily help Noir and the other kids to reach their goal during their faults. He thinks that honesty is the most important thing to tell others, so he holds others high in honesty. Noir is 162 cm tall with a bowl cut, raven black hair. His eyes are slightly slanted like that of a fox. His skin is fair and everyone often says he has a baby-like face.
- Jay (AU2004)
Age: 15 years old
Jay is a mature kid for his age. He is 168 cm tall with dark brown skin. His hair is bundled locks on top and short buzzed sides. Jay is often found not taking part in playgroups and prefers to read and be alone. His friends from other plantations also called him a lone wolf, but the friends he is closest with—the friends from Plantation 13—know that Jay is just more comfortable with being around the people who understand him. With that, Jay can actually be very loud and cheerful with the kids in Plantation 13. He was very close with Isla when she was around, which helped him with his mature side.
- Karin (JS2807)
Age: 15 years old
Karin is known to be very cheerful on days where they are doing nothing. She often cracks jokes and is very naive. Due to this, she dislikes conversations that require her to think too much and often leaves the function when it does. However, she does not mind it as long as there is someone from Plantation 13 with her. She found comfort in the people she was closest to. Karin is one of the shortest ones in Plantation 13, at 140 cm. She has shoulder-length brunette hair with freckles on her tanned skin due to playing outside a lot.
- Lia (AW2208)
Age: 15 years old

Wijaya; Setiawan: Cancer of Eden: A Novel on Parental Absence
in a Child's Development

Lia is known to be smart and she makes sure that everybody knows that. With a height of 162 cm, she often towers over the other kids from other plantations. She has proven herself to be knowledgeable a lot of times. Yet, this often leaves others to not have a great impression on her. She is hard headed and her words are always sharp. In Plantation 13, the other kids are already used to those words of hers despite not liking it either. But, they still try to justify her actions when other kids find it rude. Her hooded brown eyes add the impression that she is often bored while playing with other kids, which may or may not be the case at all. Her hair is tied into low pigtails with tiny pink ribbons.

- Micha (JA1704)
Age: 15 years old
Micha is very brass with his words. Unlike Jay who knew his limits and is still considered mature, Micha often makes mean comments without considering one's feelings. He likes to start fights, especially with the children of Plantation 13, but deep down he cares a lot about them. Surprisingly, he was the one who remembers everyone's birthday, everyone's favorite food, and more. Micha's nature comes from his childhood days where other kids would make fun of his green and brown heterochromia eyes. He grew his hair out just to cover it. Until he is assigned to Plantation 13 where nobody thought negatively about his eyes. That was when he began to tie his hair up more often due to the confidence he gained.
- Pearl (RX1412)
Age: 15 years old
Pearl has a caring nature which she learned from Oliver, but she also became a very funny person to be around because of him. Despite this funny side of hers, she is actually very sensitive to the things around her. The jokes that might seem funny might end up hurting her, which makes the other kids have to be so careful of their words around Pearl. Though, even if that happens, Pearl is a very great forgiver. She keeps relationships with her friends as close as possible and hates being apart from them. Pearl is one of the special cases for the aliens—often getting extra examinations due to her albinism. She has long white hair with very pale skin. She also wears glasses to help her nearsighted eyes. She is 157 cm tall.

Minor characters

- Isla (AB2810)
Age: 17 years old
Isla is one of the oldest kids in Plantation 13, making her the most 'reliable' figure for the younger ones. She stands tall at 169 cm with fair skin and black hair. Her hair is often tied up in various ways. Sometimes they are up in a ponytail, low bun, and also a side braid. No matter which one it is, she always has a red ribbon tied around it—a dear gift from Oliver. She is the one who usually takes care of the other kids and is labeled as 'mother' by the aliens. However, in reality, Isla is still a 17-year-old who did not have a great figure to look up to growing up. Despite her making mistakes while helping the other children, she is unaware of these mistakes, as it has never been addressed before, nor did the other children know that it is wrong. Regardless, Isla is still very caring and really tries her best to be a great role model.
- Oliver (MM0712)
Age: 17 years old
Oliver, despite dying earlier in the story, left quite a great hole in the other children's hearts and lives. As one of the older kids in the plantation, he, along with Isla, takes care

of the other kids very well. Emotionally, he is the most available. He provides great support for the other kids. Oliver has fair skin with short, slightly wavy, and blond hair. He is the tallest at 173 cm. He has muscles on his arms from carrying heavy stuff (and playing with the children) often.

- Urah
Age: Unknown
Urah is one of the leading governments of the current society, and Urah is identified as a female. As the leading government of Eden, they refer to her as “Mother”. She appears to the children to be strict and final, but she actually has good intentions towards them that the other aliens are not aware of. Implied to be Noir’s mama alien, she shows favoritism towards Noir and wants him to be free from Eden. Therefore, her decision to help him.
- Schreve
Age: Unknown
Schreve is an alien known to be the parent of Lia, and like Urah, she is also identified as a female. Schreve is one of the kinder aliens, and other children think she is giving special treatments for Lia, while in reality, she has not, and she only adopted Lia to harvest her later, knowing her knowledge can bring her fortune. At least, she is still trying to make connections with her.
- Umnatha
Age: Unknown
Umnatha is one of the working identified male aliens. He is also the former parent of Micha. Due to the nature of his work, he is harsh and rarely shows up for his children anyway.

Conflicts

My creative work will have three types of conflicts that go into the story. The first conflict is Man vs. Self. This conflict refers to the internal struggles of the characters and is often used to make complex characters. This struggle often involves a character having to choose between two opposing obligations confronting their weaknesses and fears, or accepting their own nature (Yang, 2022). The second one is Man vs. Society. This type of conflict showcases the conflict between men against society, where the characters are shown to struggle against the ideas, practices, or customs of others or the rulers (Kenney, 1966). Last, but not least, behind every messed up society is the messed up people who rule the government. My last conflict is Man vs. Man, which means the clashing relationship between two or more characters and it serves as the basis for many of the stories we have enjoyed throughout our lives (Reedsy, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this creative work is to showcase what the parents do that affects the children, what the negative effects of absent parenting on children, and how to overcome it. The first issue is what the parents do that affects their children. In this creative work, the human children are unaware of the existence of their parents, therefore the aliens are the one who took the responsibility of caring for them. The alien parents are showcased to be very distant with their children. In fact, they live in different spaces. The aliens live on their own, while the children live on their own with other children in the plantation houses. Never once in the story do they come visit to care for the children or give them what they need. Even when they do

Wijaya; Setiawan: Cancer of Eden: A Novel on Parental Absence
in a Child's Development

meet each other, the alien parents do not seem to want to take back their children or raise them properly. Instead, their meetings usually turn into small arguments or an awkward encounter. This shows how the alien parents are absent in the child's life, despite having them for a while in their life.

For the second issue, the negative effects of absent parenting on children, we use attachment theory by John Bowlby (1969) and expanded by Mary Ainsworth (1970) to explore the behaviors and reactions of the children towards their life situations after their parents are absent in their life in different ways. The attachment theory is used differently in this creative work. For example, Noir, the main character, showcases the behavior of a child that has anxious avoidant attachment issues, due to not even remembering who his parents are. His friends, Lia and Micha also showcase the same anxious avoidant attachment issue, as they are more against the idea of forgiving the aliens and even hate meeting them. For the anxious avoidant children, they are usually more detached from people because they are having a hard time trusting people to enter their life. They find themselves difficult to love, so they avoid people altogether. However, within the circle of their friends in Plantation 13, they still open up in order to have someone to rely on. In another example, Pearl showcased a behavior of the anxious resistance type, due to her belief that the aliens might still want to take her back, and even has the heart to forgive them, if given the chance. By being the anxious resistance child, Pearl is very open to accepting people, including the aliens. She is more forgiving than the others. This is due to the insecurity of not being accepted into society, therefore accepting everyone. She speaks calmly, but it is due to not trigger her anxious thoughts. Lastly, Jay and Karin have a disorganized issue. This can be seen through their confusing behavior of accepting the aliens in one scene, but rejecting them in another, depending on the situation. Jay is more stable than Karin, showing signs of maturity with his friends by being the decision maker, but it is implied in the story that even though he is on the idea of escaping Eden, he still enjoys the company of Urah. Meanwhile, Karin is more unstable. It is more obvious of her character by showing hatred towards the aliens, but then once she sees her previous alien parent, she begs her to take her back.

The third issue, how to overcome these issues, can be seen through dialogues and actions between the children after their fight about their plan. It is important to people with attachment issues to be aware of which attachment they are experiencing in their life. From then on, they can take the right step to fix the problems that come with it. In this creative work, the children 'become aware' by apologizing to each other and speak up about why they disagree with each other regarding the aliens. They open up about their past with their alien parent, and realize the root of their negative behavior comes from said experience. They communicate their feelings to each other better from then on. When Jay almost betrayed his friends, the children also were able to regulate their emotions by focusing on their goals and tight time instead of lashing out and causing them to have another setback.

Through this novel, we hope the readers will be able to grasp the importance of being present for the child you care for in order to avoid emotional and psychosocial damages of the child's future. And for the people who have experienced it and are struggling with attachment issues today, I hope you will be able to escape the cage once you realize you are the only one responsible for it, not others.

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