

# Vestiges of Humanity: An Examination of the Interrelation between Childhood and Posthumanity in *Shade's Children*

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Current Topics in Literatures in English



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## ABSTRACT

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Western children's literature has traditionally been dominated by liberal humanism, which stresses the centrality and inviolability of the human subject. Recently, though, some speculative novels for young adults have begun to question this notion of humanity following posthumanist thinking. This article examines the post-apocalyptic YA-novel *Shade's Children* and investigates what view of humanity it offers and how it ties this view up with its representation of children, childhood and the concept of innocence. It is argued that although the novel undermines bodily definitions of humanity in favour of a posthuman inclusiveness, it ultimately ends up tying the idea of humanity to liberal humanist notions of cherishing the innocence of children and protecting those weaker than oneself. The novel centres on a nostalgia for the myth of innocence, which, while acknowledging the heroism and agency of its adolescent characters, also stresses the value of freedom from responsibility.

Keywords: children's literature; *Shade's Children*; YA; posthumanism; humanism; childhood; innocence; biotechnology; post-apocalypse; Current Topics in Literatures in English

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‘Whatever the cost, we will regain humanity’s kingdom. Children’s lives... a soul tarnished beyond redemption, washed in blood... this is not too high a cost. Any means must be employed.’ (Nix 91)

These lines spoken by the computer-entity Shade highlight many of the central issues which are explored in the young-adult novel *Shade’s Children*. Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland in which all adults have vanished leaving the children in the power of the Overlords, the novel questions the idea of children as expendable resources. This article will argue that, ultimately, *Shade’s Children* appears to claim that in this posthuman world where the boundaries between human and non-human have blurred, one’s degree of ‘humanity’ is tied up, not with one’s physical shape, but with the degree to which one cherishes and perhaps possesses the qualities traditionally associated with the myth of the ‘innocent child.’ The notion that *the child* is as much an idea as a physical entity was first proposed by Jacqueline Rose, who argued that “[t]here is no child behind the category ‘children’s fiction’, other than the one which the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes” (10). This article, then, will focus both on the child as character in the novel, but also as an idea in the minds of adults, both in and outside the novel. *Humanity* is also a problematic concept which is frequently questioned in the novel. In exploring what it entails in *Shade’s Children*, the article will rely on theories on the posthuman in young-adult literature. Ostry claims that “the traditional view of humanity is that it is based on a sense of empathy, morality, free will, and dignity. It is a fixed view, and this fixedness jars somewhat with the flexibility, or instability, of the human body and mind” (236). Much children’s literature is indebted to this view of humanity, though it has been problematised by recent YA-literature. Following Ostry, I explore whether *Shade’s Children* conforms to the traditional view of humanity, or if it allows for posthuman flexibility of definition. To explore these ideas as well as the central claim of the article, the article asks what image of children is presented in the novel and shared by the characters; in which ways children are used or abused in the novel; how the novel distinguishes between human and non-human; how it plays with this distinction, and, finally, how the novel and its questions of posthumanity relate to children’s fiction and its central ideas.

*Shade’s Children* (1997) is an Australian post-apocalyptic YA-novel written by Garth Nix. The story takes place in a large city, 15 years after a mysterious event, the Change, has made everyone past the age of 14 vanish. Strange people called Overlords gathered the remaining children into dormitories where they are raised. The day a child turns 14 is called ‘Sad Birthday,’ and this day the child gets taken to the Meat Factory where their brain and body is reprocessed to make mutant creatures. These creatures function as soldiers in the retinues of individual Overlords and are used in highly organised battle-games. Occasionally, a child escapes the Dorms, and a group of these have gathered under the protection of Shade, a computer scientist whose mind was transplanted into a

computer during the Change (Nix 65). Shade sends the children out on missions in the city, and the novel centres on one such mission team, consisting of the 15-year-olds Ninde and Gold-Eye, and Ella and Drum, who are in their early twenties and late teens respectively. Though Ella and Drum are not technically children, they grew up under the Change and in a lot of ways represent an end-product, which makes them relevant to the analysis. They are what Gold-Eye and Ninde might become, as well as their most prominent parent-figures.

In *Shade's Children*,<sup>1</sup> the integrity of the child body is disturbed and questioned by the fact that children are seen and treated as raw materials, as biological components, rather than something whole and inviolable. In Western children's literature, children are often presented as separate from the adult state, and this separation is a crucial part of the concept of *innocence* (Rose xi). Children are seen as occupying a sphere of innocence which must not be breached, neither mentally nor physically—any such breach would be a destruction of the inherent untouchedness of innocence (Rose xi). The integrity of the child body is vital to the concept of childhood innocence, and so the violation of bodily boundaries in *Shade's* becomes a violation of the innocence of the child. This is part of what makes the Meat Factory so atrocious, and the creation of the creatures is one place in which traditional notions of humanity and of childhood becomes fragmented. The euphemistic name “Meat Factory” highlights the focus on body as flesh, on children as *meat*. The Overlord name for the place is the “Central Processing Facility” (Nix 294)—both names invoke images of a slaughter house, but slaughter in the impersonal sense; slaughter of animals, not murder of *people*. The children have become mentally severed from their own bodies, uncannily aware that they are *resources*. The Overlords' torment means that they lose touch with their sense of self, as “[t]hey are treated as parts rather than, as a liberal humanist perspective would have it, more than the sum of their parts” (Ostry 231). The children try to maintain their physical autonomy at all costs, as when Ella conjures a hand grenade to help them commit suicide (Nix 116). The children's struggle is not so much a struggle for life as it is a struggle not to be transformed into a creature, where “[their] brains will be doing the rounds inside something else” (243).

Drum is a case in point. At an early age, muscular kids get removed from the dormitories to special facilities where they are exercised and pumped full of steroids to make their muscles grow to create more raw material for the fighter-creatures (Nix 15). Drum escaped from the training facility but not before being deformed into a huge, muscular man, chemically emasculated (17; 173) and with a boyishly high-pitched voice (24). Throughout the novel, his self-estrangement is highlighted as his personality is completely at odds with his hulking, threatening exterior (35). He rarely speaks, or touches other people voluntarily (237), and his self-hatred is accentuated in the way he imagines there will be no place for him in the future world (160). He defines himself in terms of his trauma, the

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter *Shade's*

horror of what has been done to him. His only goal is to stop it from happening to anyone else (160), and to stop himself from getting fully transformed; “he would have his sword... and the Myrmidons’ anger... to keep him from the Meat Factory” (170). Drum’s status as potential sacrificial child has deprived him of all personal hope, and “the void [of unsatiated want] is made manifest: violence, absence, and trauma [is] irrevocably enmeshed in conceptions of self” (Shau Ming Tan 55). The novel highlights the differing views of the boy and his body, ironically describing how the Children<sup>2</sup> have “stolen the precious raw material that humans called Drum” (Nix 232). This otherness of the body is one of the ways in which the novel plays on the dichotomy between body and mind.

The Overlords depend upon their access to children’s bodies to uphold their prestige and possible political power (Nix 327). Their battles function as outlets for their rivalries, and as entertainment (323), while they all follow a strict code that dictates the rules, and their victories are mostly symbolic and short-lived (292). They have institutionalised measures for “Recycling of Combatant Material” (293), and to them, children—and humans in general—are animals. When Gold-Eye asks one of them why they do it, the reply is, “That’s what you’re there for. It’s the way things are meant to be. You animals really are so stupid” (339). Their power thus rests on a dehumanization of the child, a stressing of their own superior intellect at the expense of the weaker group. According to Nodelman, children are often represented as animal-like in their irresponsible focus and reliance on emotion and sensation (191), but they have the potential to become adults, to change and mature (Nodelman 78). In *Shade’s*, this view gets exaggerated to the point where children are not perceived as even remotely intelligent and are viewed entirely in terms of their potential for maturation as objects of usable flesh.

In her examination of *The Hunger Games trilogy*—a YA-series that treats similar themes—Susan Shau Ming Tan argues that in the *Hunger Games* “the child’s form becomes the locus of government supremacy, the destruction of the child’s body integral to political dominance” (61). This, one could argue, is equally applicable in the case of *Shade’s*, where the adultlike Overlords advance their own personal ends via the destruction and commodification of children, who become empty meat shells as the Overlords impose complete, dumb servitude on them. As in the *Hunger Games*, the destruction of the child is highly ritualised. Like sacrificial lambs, the 14-yearolds are dressed in white dresses (Nix 206)—reminiscent both of mythical virgin martyrdom and of clinically sterile hospital gowns. An Overlord inspects their records and their future is decided—what creature will they become? (67). The white gowns highlight the pre-pubescent innocence of the powerless Dorm-children, for whom adolescence means the end, not beginning, of freedom and autonomy. The transformations inherent in adolescence get warped as children are forced to become soldiers, at once frozen in carefree—or non-caring—‘innocence,’ and physically powerful and violent. In *Shade’s* as

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<sup>2</sup> When capitalised, ‘Children’ refers to the children in *Shade’s* team.

in *HG*, growing up is perilous and characterised by violence and a struggle for survival (Shau Ming Tan 57). Those who escape the Dorms face a future no less uncertain. Shade's Children are, for a time, shielded from transformation and allowed to grow, but as Shade says, "I won't have people here who don't participate in the war against the Overlords. We're all soldiers" (Nix 66). As the novel progresses, it gradually becomes clear that Shade's view of the children is little different from the Overlords'. In his opinion, rescuing Drum from the Meat Factory is "a waste of resources" (249). When he tries to convince the children to stay, he argues that their lives will be "thrown away for nothing. Nothing!" (184).

There is a tension between the group and the individual in *Shade's Children* (Gross 113), where life for most of the post-14 children is characterized by their being either agency-less, unindividualized members of a group (as creatures), or wild, desperate and lonely escapees, such as Gold-Eye was in the beginning, "running scared, running alone" (Nix 58). Part of what Shade gives his Children is the sense of community that their future lacked previously, but the price of this community is having the fate of society on their shoulders (Gross 113). They are "given a safe base of operation and under Shade's direction, [...] actively engaged in a war against the overlords. In this war they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good" (Gross 113). One central idea to the veneration of innocence is that children must be protected, and that the parent must construct and maintain a safe space for them, *the home*, in which they can be 'innocent' without threat to themselves (Nodelman 59-60). Shade's submarine is a perversion of this idea as the children are allowed to stay only if they actively put themselves in danger. The Children cling to the idea of the submarine, and when it gets destroyed, "they instinctively moved closer together as they looked out with horror [...] at their former home – the only hope they had ever had" (Nix 253-5). Their moving together shows the need for closeness and safety which is intimately linked to the sub. The emphasis put on the submarine as home, refuge and a possibility for family underlines the way in which *Shade's Children* plays into the traditional genre of the abandonment story. This is a traditional folk motif, which "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" (Gross 105). In a lot of ways, Ella and her team play into the trope of abandoned orphans who find a temporary refuge and eventually learn to stand up for themselves. However, *Shade's* also inverts the motif in a lot of ways, not least by shifting the emphasis from individual child to *all children* (Gross 106). The function of supernatural helper is fulfilled by Shade, who is not, however, the fairy godmother he makes himself out to be (Gross 112), and the crucial, plot-turning moment only comes when the Children disobey his orders and "are no longer Shade's Children" (Nix 256).

Shade frames himself as a kind of pseudo-parent "in loco parentis" (Nix 199), calling the children by possessive endearments ("My boy" (81)), and often referring to himself in a father-role

(for example 199). The name ‘Shade’s Children’ highlights the tension of possession and infantilization evident in his control of them, in which he uses adulthood—age and experience—to justify his unquestioned power (66). The older Children are not actually children anymore, and even less so considering their extensive traumas, but calling them *children* keeps them in subservience. The robotic Shade controls the submarine and can project himself anywhere in it (Nix 67), underlining how their home is intimately tied up with his control and goodwill; an exaggeration of the role of the parent in keeping the home a safe space for the child (Nodelman 78). He physically embodies their home, and psychologically sets himself up as their only hope and salvation (Nix 66). His not acknowledging the children’s agency and ability to better their lives might explain why Shade becomes obsessed with the idea of obtaining a body, as having a body would let him survive the reversal of the Change to continue leading the children (Nix 284). The novel is interspersed with little interludes in which Shade considers the nature of humanity and cost-benefit assessments of his actions; “Who is the protector of the human race? Shade. I. Me. Him. It. How can the protector protect the human race when the protector is not human? By becoming human. How can I become human? By gaining a human body” (Nix 284). To Shade, then, being human is intimately tied up with having a human body, even at the cost of children’s lives. His view of humanity is very exclusionary; ‘humanity’ is a closed category and only humans can help humans. At more than one point, he considers his own actions and the morality of them, as when he admits to himself that “I have sent many children to their death. When I was a man as other men... inhabiting a body... I could not have done so” (Nix 90). Here he shows awareness that his actions are morally questionable, but concludes that his changing attitude is connected to his no longer having a body, thus no longer being truly *human*. This perceived connection between physical shape and humanity is also reflected in the way he keeps stressing the inhumanity of the creatures by referring to their physical shapes and deformities (for example Nix 136). When discussing a poem written by a creature, he exclaims with scientific interest, “Amazing how the odd creature will retain some vestige of humanity. Which reminds me – we haven’t had one to vivisection for a long time” (Nix 71). Even knowing they retain their human personalities he still sees them as flesh-objects, “biotechnical creation[s]” (133). Their changed shape and “psychophysical conditioning” (134) means that they no longer qualify as humans, and thus for compassion—“They’re just the enemy” (Nix 71). However, the fact that the Overlords are human in appearance and intelligence shows how much of a fallacy it turns out to be that to be human is to have a human body.

Early in the novel, the Overlords are impersonalized entities defined by their coloured armour, rather like robots or videogame avatars—Black Banner, Silver Sun etc. But Ninde, who can read minds, reads the thoughts of an Overlord, exclaiming tearfully that, “It was a person! [...] Just like us” (Nix 246). Ella and Drum are not surprised, as Ella comments that “We could never be sure under that armour... but it was always a possibility” (Nix 247). To her, too, humanness is a physical

characteristic. Ninde and Gold-Eye are dumbstruck by the idea that the Overlords are just like them, because their actions are completely incompatible with the kids' view of how humans should treat one another, as their whole lives have been spent thinking in terms of 'us' and 'them.' Gold-Eye questions why they even have the creatures and battles (246), while Ninde "wish[es] they were aliens or... or just something... just something else" (247). To the younger children, human physical features and humane actions had been intimately connected. Their innocence of thinking sets them apart from the other two more world-weary Children. Drum dismisses the apparent humanness, saying that, "It doesn't really matter if they look human under that armour [...] what they've done has made them something else. Not human. Not people" (Nix 247). Having himself a monstrous body, Drum is the first to stress that physical appearance does not necessarily correlate with personality or moral attitude. When the Overlords are personally introduced later, the reader gets to see their uncaring cruelty, the way they seem obsessed with watching their battles on screens and orchestrating them from the comfort of their thrones (324-5). The narrator comments that "they were outwardly indistinguishable from the humans they tormented and used in their awful games" (Nix 324), the loaded adjectives underscoring clearly how the reader is supposed to perceive them. The emphasis in this scene is on distance—how they sit there comfortably and make creatures die for them, battling each other by proxy.

As shown above, *Shade's Children* frequently questions what it means to be human. According to Nodelman, children's literature often relies on depicting binaries, on communicating a worldview made up of sets of differing and mutually exclusive values and categories, one of which is better than the other (228). Binaries frequently found in children's literature include, "reason-emotion[,] order-chaos[,] mind (soul)-body[,] human-non-human[,] master-slave" (Nodelman 229). Some of these binaries are at work in *Shade's* in its endeavour to defeat the evil masters and the unfeeling computer-mind, but I would argue that *Shade's* also inverts or at least questions the binaries between mind and body, and between human and non-human. In this way it plays into ideas about the posthuman.

Posthumanism is an ideology which rejects the binary opposition between human and non-human (Flanagan 15), and which re-examines what it means to be human in a highly technologized society (12). The term 'Posthuman' "refers to the technologically mediated human subject, whose existence has been transformed through technoscience[. It] can therefore also indicate the condition of existing in a world that has been irreversibly altered by technology" (Flanagan 14). As demonstrated above, the existence of the children in *Shade's* is highly posthuman, biotechnology and artificial intelligence having completely saturated and altered all aspects of life. In recent years a growing number of speculative YA-novels have taken posthumanism as an ideological framework (12), and these are "typically concerned with exploring how technologically modified bodies might extend or challenge normative definitions of what it means to be a human being" (14). Adolescence is a time where the individual is greatly occupied with this question as well as what it means to be an

individual, and the question of human identity has never been more complex and difficult than it is in the modern technological world, hence the preoccupation of the genre (Ostry 222-3). Posthumanism is largely taken up with critiquing the humanist ideology, which “privileges the human subject” (Flanagan 12) and focuses on the human as an exclusionary practice based on intellect, agency and self-determination (13). Western Children’s literature has traditionally been dominated by liberalist humanism (13), which emphasises the agency of the individual in shaping their own life and identity (14), and is often underscored by middle-class values (Nodelman 177) such as free will, individuality, empathy, family, integrity, equality and altruism (Nodelman 177; Ostry 236). As the previous analysis suggests, many of these values are implicit in *Shade’s*, especially in the way the protagonists are associated with them, while the antagonists are characterized by their opposites. Despite their extensive traumas, all the children in the book are depicted as compassionate and/or selfless, such as when Drum mercy-kills Brat the Winger (Nix 135), Gold-Eye’s brother Petar sacrifices himself to save Gold-Eye (39), or Ninde cries as she must kill a creature made from a girl whose mind she reads (221). The Children value and reinforce the relative equality of the community in the sub, and protect those weaker than themselves, as exemplified by Drum’s fierce protectiveness, Stelo encouraging a dying team member and carrying a dead one away from the battle, because “[he] just didn’t want to leave him there alone. All by himself in the water” (Nix 266), or Ella throwing the grenade at Gold-Eye and Ninde to save them from the Meat Factory (296). In *Shade’s*, as in the *Hunger Games*, children come to the aid of children in a world where adults have ceased caring (Aitchinson np.). One way in which *Shade’s* especially plays into the liberal humanist ideology of Western children’s literature, is the way the concept of innocence is depicted. Gold-Eye and Ninde, though 15 years old, to some degree possess some characteristics associated with innocence, while Drum and Ella have lost theirs completely. As Drum says, “Ninde is good at heart, but strangely unaware of the time she lives in. And Ella is perhaps too much aware” (Nix 60). One of the characteristics associated with ‘innocence’ is a lack of knowledge and understanding (Nodelman 78). Rousseau likened children to his notion of the ‘noble savage’—a valorisation of indigenous peoples because of their perceived noble, uncorrupted and naturally Christian nature (Rose 50). To him, those who are unspoilt by knowledge of the world—children and indigenous people—are closer to nature and closer to God and “the original goodness of man” (Lesnik-Oberstein 95). Thus started the ‘cult’ of innocence, in which the innocent child is seen as pure and precious (Rose 8); something that must at once be protected from loss of this innocence by too much knowledge of the world, and educated to become a good adult (Rose 44). This conflict of interest in terms of children acquiring knowledge is evident in much children’s literature (Nodelman 78), and in *Shade’s* this is seen in the way it problematises both having too little and too much knowledge. Gold-Eye and Ninde are depicted as knowing and understanding less of the harsh reality of their world—they are naïve, to some degree—while Ella and Drum see the world as it is, with no ‘childish’ illusions. This difference is emphasised



in the way Drum and Ella variously shield the younger children or scold them for being irresponsible. Drum, for example, stops Gold-Eye and Ninde from witnessing the vivisection, to which Ella reproachfully replies “you’re mollycoddling them, Drum. It won’t be anything worse than what they’ve seen outside” (Nix 129). Ella also envies Ninde her carefree enjoyment of sunshine, wishing she could forget their circumstances like the younger girl (98).

Drum points out that to be human is to treat others humanely, in other words, to espouse the abovementioned values, and this seems to be the novel’s stand point. The children to some degree all possess the qualities associated with liberal humanist values, highlighting how they function as the baseline for humanity in this novel. Here we see Nodelman’s system of binaries replicated in the qualitative difference between protagonists and antagonists, and like much other children’s fiction, *Shade’s* ends up favouring one side over the other. However, the novel also acknowledges that the line between human and non-human is not as clear cut as it is often represented in children’s fiction, or at least, the criteria are different. By highlighting the idea of children as consumer items, as shown above, *Shade’s* works to suggest the “porousness of posthuman boundaries” (Haraway, cited in Shau Ming Tan 61), thus working against the fixed and exclusive view of humanity previously highlighted.

The novel makes its most powerful argument for the idea that ‘humanity’ is a mental state, based on possessing *human nature* rather than a physical concept, in the death of Sam the Myrmidon. Sam is one of Shade’s Children who rebelled against Shade and is re-introduced in the last pages as a fighting creature. The Change has been revoked, and the inhibitors which blocked out human consciousness and memory have been broken. Sam tears off his helmet, revealing an uncannily almost-human face, and speaks a poem, “A child is caught... Forsaken at fourteen... Foul prisoned flesh [...] to know no kindness” (Nix 348). Poetry—the amalgam of emotion and imagination—is traditionally considered a human domain (Ostry 236). The fact that Sam, a creature, can create it shows that the creatures have more than a trace of humanity—after all, electronic inhibitors are needed to suppress it. The novel thus allows the changed children their share of human nature—the body is changed and the mind repressed, but not destroyed. However, the brief moments where human nature surfaces are all depicted as tragic, and the creatures all die in the end. Like mutant Drum, there is no place for them in the new world, and their mode of existence is not seen as viable. The line ‘foul prisoned flesh’ underscores how there appears to be a dichotomy between mind and body, a severing brought on by the Overlords, but which ironically allows the creatures to retain their humanity, much the same way as a prison sustains the prisoner, while an execution does not. The poem also accentuates the central tragedy of the story; the children not only die, they are also abandoned and tortured, and they never get to experience the kindness, which, the novel appears to suggest, is a basic children’s right.

Throughout the novel there is a constant focus on and questioning of the idea of the child, which plays into children’s literature theory on the separateness of the child. According to Nodelman, the

concept of childhood in children's literature is often depicted as distinctly different from adulthood (78). Adolescence is a kind of liminal position between them (Ostry 226). Childhood in much children's literature is characterised by a lack of knowledge of the realities of the world; by occupying a position of nostalgic idyll; and by a need for adult protection (Nodelman 78-9). It falls on adults to protect the child, and to "create safe havens for them, places where they can be safely childlike" (78). As indicated in the above, this view of childhood is reflected in *Shade's*, especially in the contrast between Ella and Drum, and Gold-Eye and Ninde. While Ninde is obsessed with 90s TV dramas and dreams—with a childish lack of understanding of the hard work involved—of becoming a doctor or an actress, the soldierly, no-nonsense Ella remembers her tricycle and laughs "a sad sort of laugh for a childhood lost long ago" (Nix 316). The idea of childhood in the novel is saturated with tragic nostalgia for a worldview free from harsh adult cares and responsibilities. Towards the end, Shade transforms into Robert Ingman—an entity supposedly closer to the original man he was (343). This entity is depicted as a much more moral person, and part of what sets him apart is his blanching at the sight of Ella bleeding (346), his wish to protect the children even if it means jeopardizing the mission (346), and his acknowledgement of their superior moral base (349). Here, (*finally*, the novel seems to say), is an adult *acting like an adult*. Via these depictions of Ingman and Drum as good role models, the novel emphasises to the reader the idea that children are basically innocent and should be allowed to stay that way, safe from corrupting influences of violence and responsibility.

However, this notion is highly problematic. Nodelman argues that children's literature and adult depictions of childhood in many ways work as an act of colonisation, as children's literature often "assume[s] the right of adults to wield power and influence over children; thus, they [children's literature texts] might represent a kind of thinking about less powerful beings that can be identified as 'colonial'" (78). In writing for child readers, the adult author impresses them with certain ideas about children and childhood (Rose 141), and so children's literature is occupied with "what adults desire for children—want them to know and not know, want them to be" (Rose 158). Children, as the weaker and inferior group, are infantilised, disempowered and worked on by their adult superiors via the literature they are given, which teaches them how the adults want them to be (Nodelman 167). *Shade's Children* depicts adult figures asserting control over children's minds and bodies for their own purposes, but in the end, itself ends up securing and asserting control over the minds of its young adult readers. People often identify with what they read, and children are sometimes thought to do so even more than adults (Rose 2). Children's literature sometimes aims to be educational, that is, to depict desirable child role models with whom the reader may identify in the hope that the reader will come to share the values and thought patterns espoused in the novel (Nodelman 77-8). *Shade's* thus contributes to a sustained attempt in the children's literature genre to educate child readers on desirable norms and values.

To look for a novel's moral standpoint one might look at how it ends, as the way a story resolves says something about its espoused values. Especially in children's literature, the ending plays a significant role, as this is typically where the story tries to send the child reader off with a final, optimistic message (Nodelman 217). In *Shade's*, Ella and Drum die when reversing the Change, but their death is made less sad by the fact that neither had any hopes of surviving or plans if they did. At the last moment, Gold-Eye, who has precognition, uses Ninde's telepathic powers to transmit a view of the future to them in which Gold-Eye and Ninde are grown up, happy and married, and have their own children named after their friends (Nix 352). Thus, the novel depicts the ultimate utopia as a 'return to normal,' a world in which proud parents watch their children play (352), protecting and cherishing them. Ella and Drum are only allowed into this utopia by proxy—the children they should have been get a chance of becoming in the brave new world, while the militant, overly responsible, burdened young adults they did become, via an unnatural path, get left behind. They are tainted by the violence, tragedy, and despair of the world in which they grew up—violence dominated their adolescence, determined their growth into selfhood, and is now hopelessly enmeshed with their identity. In the end, they die sitting in the sun, which “moved around, bringing the shade to wrap around their bodies like a shroud” (351). The years spent under the Change doing the work of Shade has made them into violent martyrs who must clear the path for others, but not tread it themselves. The new hope is created through self-less self-sacrifice. The ultimate act of humanity—if one accepts the liberal humanist values—restores the world to the way it should be; the idealized utopia found in many children's texts (Nodelman 217).

The martyr death of Ella and Drum to save Gold-Eye, Ninde and the rest of the children of the world, highlights how intimately the question of humanity is tied up with the question of the value of the child. *Shade's Children* uses many posthuman tropes to suggest that the line between human and non-human is porous. It does this through juxtapositions of apparently human or non-human exterior that fails to match the interior. The human-looking Overlords treat children inhumanely, while the rational and intelligent Shade (characteristics classically associated with humanism (Flanagan 12)) is robotically utilitarian, cold and insensitive. Ingman, though he is a disembodied AI-hologram, acts more humanely, while Sam the Myrmidon has enough emotional depth and self-awareness to create poetry; he is human at heart though not in appearance. As physical characteristics are shown to be unreliable indicators of humanity, behaviour is put in their stead. What makes one human, the novel seems to argue, is how one treats those weaker than oneself. Liberal humanism puts value in altruism and egalitarianism, and in this novel, these become the final indicators of humanity. The weakest group is, undeniably, the children, and so one's degree of humanity is tied up with one's treatment of children. But, as has been argued above, valuing children is not enough. The antagonists, the Overlords and Shade, 'value' children as resources—objects that can be used—but one must protect children and cherish their innocence. The humanity of Drum and Ingman is chiefly shown in their

cherishing of innocence, though they themselves have lost it. Children, the novel argues, should be valued for their being children, not potentially useful resources. They are not flesh-objects with as-yet-unfinished bodies, nor are they adultlike warriors. Innocence is useless in a utilitarian, post-apocalyptic world, but the novel's focus on its merits underscores how they should be allowed to have it all the same.

The utopia presented by Gold-Eye's final vision would most likely reflect, at least partially, the reality of some of the novel's readers. Thus, *Shade's* seems to tell its young readers that this is how the world ought to be, that they should appreciate and be happy with the status quo. At the same time, through its depictions of the strong and steadfast young-adult characters it acknowledges their agency, power and ability to change their own situations. The novel both grants the young adults capabilities and agency and argues that it is desirable to stay protected and innocent for as long as they can. In this way, it appears to be saturated with adult nostalgia for an idealised childhood that one must enjoy while it is there. In relation to the potentially disturbing posthuman aspects of the world of *Shade's* none of it, except Gold-Eye's eye colour, makes it into the restored world. Writing about posthumanism in YA, Elaine Ostry argues that "most writers for young adults simplify the argument in favour of making an ideological point about the fixed quality of human nature and values" (242). Posthuman developments may change the body, but most speculative YA-novels focus on sending a reassuring message about the strength and rightness of liberal humanist values (243). As argued above, "[t]hese values are what literature—and the adult world in general—attempt to inculcate in young people" (Ostry 243). Though on the surface *Shade's Children* appears to dismantle human boundaries and exclusiveness, it in effect ends up reaffirming the fixity and unchangeability of human nature.

Like much YA, *Shade's Children* is taken up with themes such as the parent-child-relationship, the changeability of the body, the creation of identity, and the loss of innocence. It utilises many children's literature tropes including the dependence on binary opposition, the happy ending, and the abandonment story. However, it also depicts a gruesome scenario of child abuse, in which children are viewed entirely in terms of their usability, either as flesh-objects or as miniature warriors. The lives of the children in the novel have been altered beyond recognition by technology, which plays into ideas of the posthuman. Posthumanity in *Shade's* is glimpsed mostly in the way it highlights many cases where a character's exterior fails to match its interior in terms of 'humanity,' which becomes a moral concept rather than a species designation. The boundaries between human and non-human gets blurred, and the novel questions what it means to be 'human' now that 'traditional' definitions no longer hold true, or so it appears. Via the creation of a dichotomy between mind and body, *Shade's Children* ends up communicating a reassuring view of humanity in which the body may be technologically altered, but the mind, memories, and personality, remain constant. This is in line with its being written for younger audiences and so belonging to a genre which values reassurance

and protecting its readers from what is seen as the harsh realities of the world. Like much children's literature, the novel plays into the Western liberal humanist ideology where emphasis is placed on altruism and protecting the weakest individuals—in this case children. Posthuman tropes complicate the traditional picture, but the exclusive concept of humanity survives as a non-physical characteristic which is dependent upon how much one cherishes and buys into the idea of the innocent child.

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