

**NO LONGER AT EASE: AMBIGUITIES AND ANXIETIES OF
CHILDREN IN SPECULATIVE
FICTION OF NANCY CRESS, TO CUDDLE AMY**

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To Cuddle Amy is a tiny SF horror story by Nancy Kress. The author is an American and a renowned sci-fi short story writer known for her projections of dystopian society into the far future. The writer ironically titles the story as “To Cuddle Amy” where the central character, Amy is chided for getting poor grades in her school. The author creates a what- if syndrome of rat-race and ambitious parents who have no consideration for their child and extrapolates the same in the future. There were a number of stories published about the anxieties of parents and children in the coming era of genetic engineering that is creeping up on humans, but none is better than this one. In “To Cuddle Amy” Nancy Kress is giving us a world much like our own; by showing us a normal couple engaged in a dispute over their child, she anchors us in that reality and then she deftly slips us information on the few critical differences between her universe and the real world. In Kress’s case, the setting is the key to the story. At this point one may not know what’s going on, but the clue, the indication that something is not-of-this-world, is unmistakable. More importantly, when she does reveal that her beleaguered parents can in fact get their sweet young baby Amy back, Kress doesn’t force to play a guessing game. She tells explicitly that one is in a world where medical science can produce exact clones of a child.

The Campbells had this only daughter, Amy, now fourteen. Her behavior is wild and beyond control. The police had come to warn too. The parents are angry, upset and decide to drive Amy out of the house; she has reached the legal age of fourteen. Alison, the mother, convinces herself:

“It isn’t as if she’d be without resources. The Hitchenses might take her in. Or somebody. And anyway, there are lots more like her out there”(306).

So, this is the culture of the times and many children are discarded like used garbage. Alison carries on about how good her Amy was when she was a baby. “I just want my little girl back again! I want to cuddle my lost little girl!” (306). The Campbells are more concerned for their own desires, not of Amy’s. Paul says finally:

“There are three more embryos left.”

Three of six. Three frozen vials in the fertility clinic, all from the same in-vitro fertilization, stored as standard procedure against a failure to carry to term. (306)

“I’ll throw her out tonight,” he told Allison, “and call the clinic in the morning.”(307)

The parent – child relationship is, in this story, governed by the availability of spare embryos for the asking. The attitude of the parents to the child already with them is colored by this possibility – if this child is bad, let us discard it and go for a new one, after all the babies are more attractive and pose no threat to their peace of mind. Nancy Kress has projected a current medical possibility to one of its potential out comes in the future, with a touch of the negative.

Freud stated that humans instinctually are aggressive and seek egoistic self-satisfaction. Our culture, however, has been designed to put prohibitions and curbs upon our human tendencies toward unchecked aggression and egoistic self-satisfaction. From these prohibitions and curbs come as a sense of guilt--conscious and the unconscious--that has become the hallmark of civilized humanity. Understanding the role guilt plays in helping us check our tendencies towards aggression and violence is paramount. Amy's father is guilty of cloning Amy because he feels that she is useless. This guilt in him turns into apathy which is the psychological projection of Kress through the father of Amy.

Allison didn’t give her daughter a chance to attack first. “So there you are! You just missed the cops, Amy, telling us what you’ve done this time, and it’s the last straw, do you hear me, young lady? We forgave you the awful school grades! We forgave you the rudeness and ingratitude and sullen self-centeredness! We even forgave you the shop-lifting, God help us! But this is over the line! Throwing rocks at cars! Someone could have been killed—how much more do you expect us to take from you? Answer me!
(304)

The relationship between a parent and a child is curtailed psychologically as it grows. As Freud feels, in their early life, children identify with an external authority (the parents or caretaker) and take the authority as their own. As a result of the relationship and interaction between parent/caretaker and child, the child gradually internalizes the parent’s or caretaker’s authority. This helps the child limit and control his or her actions. Freud stated that “a great change occurs only when the authority is internalized.” In other words, there is a replacement of "external authority" with "internal authority." Of vital importance to the development of a child is the child’s relationship with parents and caretakers. Children also experience mixed feelings toward people they love (especially their parents), which results in an ongoing conflict between love and aggression. Every time a child renounces an aggressive wish toward the parent, it intensifies his or her sense of guilt. What also occurs during childhood is that as the child’s relationships widen in the community and he or she develops ties to other people, the internal conflict between love and aggression becomes active. This has made Amy disobey her parents. Amy is deserted because ovary banks have increased and she is no more a child but a choice for her parents.

In Freud's view, the human is driven towards tension reduction, in order to reduce feelings of anxiety. Humans seek to reduce anxiety through defense mechanisms. Defense Mechanisms can be psychologically healthy or maladaptive, but tension reduction is the overall goal in both cases. A nightmare is a dream occurring during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep that results in feelings of strong terror, fear, distress or extreme anxiety. Amy’s world and her fate are nightmares that help in finding solutions to existential anxieties through the awakening projections. Awareness is prevention; Amy is awareness awakened through technology and emotion.

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