Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: And the Stars Were Burning Brightly by Danielle Jawando", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1036. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Danielle Jawando

And the Stars Were Burning Brightly

United Kingdom (2020)

TAGS: Atlantis Orion Pandora





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	And the Stars Were Burning Brightly
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	Danielle Jawando, *And the Stars Were Burning Brightly*. London: Simon and Schuster, 2020, 392 pp.
ISBN	9781471178771
Official Website	Promotional video featuring Cara Thompson available atYouTube (accessed: June 17, 2020)
Genre	Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Sarah F. Layzell, University of Cambridge, sarahlayzellhardstaff@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Danielle Jawando (Author)

Danielle Jawando was born in Manchester, UK and is a writer of short stories, plays and for television. *And the Stars Were Burning Brightly* is Jawando's debut novel and draws on her own experiences of being bullied at school. Jawando's short story, *The Deerstalker*, was selected as one of six finalists in the We Need Diverse Books short story competition in 2018.

Source:

Profile at madeleinemilburn.co.uk (accessed: June 17, 2020)

Bio prepared by Sarah Hardstaff, University of Cambridge, sflh2@cam.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

Set in Wythenshawe in Manchester, *And the Stars Were Burning Brightly* follows fifteen-year-old Nathan as he attempts to understand his older brother Al's death by suicide. Al, a deep thinker and talented artist, seemingly had everything to live for, but Nathan eventually learns that Al was the victim of a sustained bullying campaign on social media and in his everyday life at school and on the estate where they live.

As part of his quest for information both online and offline, Nathan gets to know Megan, one of Al's few friends. Megan is also looking for answers, questioning her friendships and dealing with her own experiences of bereavement. Megan organises an exhibition of Al's artwork in his memory.

Each chapter starts with a brief passage written from Al's point of view, allowing his voice to permeate the novel. The novel's few classical references help to establish core themes such as the desire to disappear and the importance of hope. Although mentioned only briefly, Atlantis, Orion and Pandora all appear in Jawando's debut to powerful effect. Al disappears, like Atlantis, leaving a mystery behind; Nathan, trying to solve the mystery, becomes like a hunter like Orion, whose constellation appears on his ceiling; and finally, the author reflects on the story of Pandora and the importance of hope.

Analysis

Stars are the central motif of the novel, and appear in various forms, for example in Al's art and in his interest in astronomy. Early in the novel, Nathan recalls Al sticking glow-in-the-dark stars on his ceiling the day their father leaves the family home. Characteristically, Al arranges the stars into real constellations:

> "Then he started telling me that there was no point in having stars on the ceiling if they didn't look like the real thing, and he kept going on about all these names. Saying how there was some star named after this guy called Ryan, and how everything was shaped like his belt."
> (Jawando 2020, p. 7)

One of Al's chapter openings reveals that "Ryan" is, of course, Orion (p.331). Orion signifies the hunter, which is what Nathan becomes as he seeks out more information about Al's experiences. Despite his

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initial lack of attention to Al's lecture on the stars, Nathan also finds out more about Al through his own memories of time spent with his brother and the relationship they shared.

The choice of Orion also reflects Al's passion for the stars, seen in his interest in cosmology and his artwork. As well as being a hunter, the role taken on by Nathan, Orion was also violently killed, aligning him with Al's experience of being bullied and premature death. As Orion is placed amongst the stars, so Al is remembered as "burning bright."

Disappearance is a major theme of the novel. In one of his chapter openings, Al reflects on the mythical lost city of Atlantis and considers how he too might be able to disappear:

> "When things got tough, I used to think about vanishing. Disappearing. How it would feel… how maybe it would solve everything. I'd go and sit on this bench in the middle of Civic, between Iceland and Costa, and I'd stay there for hours, watching all these people go by, and think about Atlantis. How a whole city could be swallowed up without a trace. Because, if an entire city can just disappear, then surely someone from Benchill could, too." (p. 37)

However, despite his death Al does not disappear completely but leaves a legacy in the form of his art, shared by Megan on social media and seen and appreciated all over the world. Similarly, the city of Atlantis both disappears and lives on through its legend.

The core message of the novel is one of hope, emphasised by the author's note after the story's conclusion. Jawando discloses that like Al, she was bullied at school and attempted suicide. In the novel, hope is represented by the origami paper cranes on display at the Manchester Museum; for Jawando meanwhile, hope came in the form of a reminder from a teacher of the story of Pandora, a reminder "that no matter how dark times may seem, there is always hope." (p. 391) This message of hope sums up the novel's message to young people and its efforts to validate their lives and feelings.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Atlantis Orion Pandora

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Appearances Art* Bullying* Communication Conflict Death Depression Emotions Family Friendship Gaining understanding Hope* Intellect Isolation/loneliness Loss Memory Parents (and children) Peers Race Relationships Resilience School Self Siblings Silence Social class Social media* Suicide Teachers Teenagers Truth and lies Values Violence Youth
Further Reading	*And the Stars Were Burning Brightly* [book review], *Rums the Reader*, February 19, 2020, available at rumsthereader.blog (accessed: June 17, 2020).

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