CONSTRUCTING MOTHERING PERFORMANCES:

THE MOTHERHOOD IDEAL IN CALDECOTT

AND NEWBERY WINNERS, 1980-2014

by

DANA MCCULLOUGH BREWER

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Dedication

In recognition of her guidance and the determination that she consistently modeled, I dedicate this dissertation to my Oma. *Je was bij mij elke dag dat ik schreef, Oma. Ik hou van je.*

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Abstract

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Dana McCullough Brewer, Ph. D.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2015

Supervising Professor: Timothy Morris

This project examines representations of motherhood in Caldecott and Newbery winners from 1980-2014 and is informed by feminist literary theory, juvenile literary theory, and motherhood studies. While motherhood studies are evolving to consider egalitarian ideas of motherhood and multiple definitions of motherhood, many Caldecott and Newbery Medal winners present a traditional (and antiquated) motherhood ideal in which maternal figures tend to domestic duties and provide selfless nurturing of children. This objectification depersonalizes, essentializes, and stereotypes motherhood. Diverse mothering characters and practices do materialize in some texts but are often regulated by the motherhood ideal.

In Chapter 2, I define the Caldecott motherhood ideal by analyzing a pre-1980 Caldecott text (*Sylvester & the Magic Pebble*), and then I use award winners from 1980-2014 to demonstrate the continued presence of the motherhood ideal. I contend that the texts in Chapter 2 essentialize motherhood by associating it with femaleness, and they prescribe homogenized mothering experiences. In Chapter 3, I define the motherhood ideal exemplar in Newbery texts (specifically *Jacob Have I Loved* and *Shiloh*). In this chapter, I clarify the case for acculturation in juvenile literature. In Chapter 4, I define "diverse" mothering experiences depicted in the Newbery texts from 1980-2014 as found in *The Tale of Despereaux*; *Flora & Ulysses*; *Kira-Kira*; *Out of the Dust*; *Dear Mr. Henshaw*; *Dead End in Norvelt*; and *When You Reach Me*. The texts in Chapter 4 demonstrate that emphasizing the action of mothering rather than promoting a naturalness allows for progressive and/or non-traditional mothering. Still, the texts in this chapter demonstrate that the motherhood ideal becomes a reactionary force against diverse mothering practices and limits the possibility for fictional explorations of egalitarian parenting. In Chapter 5, I argue that the motherhood ideal prescribes resolutions for mother/daughter conflicts in *Jacob Have I Loved*, *When You Reach Me*, *Kira-Kira*, and *Flora & Ulysses*. I contend that *Walk Two Moons* rejects the motherhood ideal myth as it explores maternal anxieties. In Chapter 6, I analyze replacement mothers and temporary mothers in *A Gathering of Days*; *Sarah, Plain and Tall*; *Bud, Not Buddy*; and *The Higher Power of Lucky*.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about

the nature and meaning of motherhood" (Rich/*Of Woman Born* 11)

In a 1978 special issue of *Feminist Studies*, Rachel DuPlessis calls for a

"feminist theory of motherhood" while discussing the essentially non-existent

critical attention given to motherhood by feminists and literary scholars (1). Since

DuPlessis's article appeared, critical attention to motherhood has increased, and

modern feminist scholars are concerned with the continued consideration of

motherhood in critical assessments. Although critical examinations of

motherhood from 1980-present have allowed for further understanding of both the

cultural constructions and the practice of motherhood, ambiguities and anxieties

persist in the definitions and images of motherhood. As Rozsika Parker writes,

"Among the many cultural contradictions about mothering that we collectively

harbor, none is more harmful than this: that we believe on the one hand that for

every parenting problem there exists some technical or technological solution; and

on the other that mothering is a fundamentally instinctive, intuitive process"

(140). The continued insistence that mothering is instinctive can be found in

media representations of motherhood in which women are depicted primarily in

domestic settings; these mothers remain calm, nurturing, and sacrificial,

regardless of whatever challenge they face regarding their children. Even though maternal ambivalence is recognized by theorists, therapists, and experienced in the everyday lives of mothers, most often ambivalence is not portrayed in normative cultural representations of motherhood found in media such as movies and books. Ignoring ambivalence promotes the continued concealment of lived mothering experiences in favor of what Susan Maushart labels a "mask of motherhood" that "confers an idealized and hence unattainable image of motherhood that causes women to feel guilt and anxiety about their own (often messy and muddled) experiences of mothering" (3). I contend that studying the idealized images in juvenile literature is a crucial component in motherhood studies and that it has been mostly overlooked.

In the critical conversations regarding motherhood, the genre of juvenile literature is usually absent. Juvenile literature constitutes an ideal space for acculturation, and normative cultural expectations may be "internalized by children as young as three years of age" (Dumberman). The material these young children are reading, especially picture books, depicts images of gender performance through the motherhood ideal. Even before they are able to read, children are presented with images of motherhood. Once literate and able to choose their own books, children often select reading material from school libraries where certain texts, like Caldecott and Newbery winners, are placed in easily-accessible areas. These texts, with their shiny award stickers, attract

children's attention, and librarians tend to recommend them to children as "safe" options.

This project examines representations of motherhood in Caldecott and Newbery winners from 1980-2014. I focused on the American Library Association's Caldecott and Newbery Medals because of their significant influence in children's literature and their long history (the Caldecott was first awarded in 1922 and the Newbery Medal in 1938). In 1971, Alleen Pace Nilsen noted the stereotyping of mothers through mother characters in picture books who most often were depicted wearing aprons. She also explained that few female characters appeared in Caldecott Award winners, something she labels a "prejudice against girls" in these award-winning texts (Nilsen 918-920). Not surprisingly, when she does appear, the mother in books for children is most often idealized, so much so that Adrienne Rich once labeled the images "reductive" (246). These earlier texts include representations of mothers engaged in domestic chores (cooking, cleaning, folding laundry, and so on) and in nurturing roles (cradling children, reading to children, comforting children, and so on). Mothers do not appear disheveled, nor are they depicted returning home from work. The suggestion is that these fictional mothers maintain a spotless home while keeping themselves spotless—all while providing the perfect response to their fictional children's needs. The goal of my research was to search for either the continued presence or the absence of these stereotypical mother characters and to define a

motherhood ideal in award-winning texts from 1980-2014. If the ideal persists, then I intended to argue for its evaluation in literary and socio-cultural studies.

1.1 Defining Motherhood

One of the challenges of this project has been that the main categories studied (motherhood, juvenile literature, and childhood) are difficult to define because they are cultural constructs and, as such, dependent upon socioeconomic factors. Motherhood in America, where the majority of women work and place their children in some type of childcare setting, looks very different than motherhood in less developed countries where emphasis is placed on communal mothering. Furthermore, even when a specific, broad culture is isolated (like American), subcultures exist in that very large category that restrict definitions. In fact, a number of critical studies examine the importance of "other mothers" in African-American culture. These other mothers may be grandmothers, aunts, or other influential women who have significant influence on a child and, in a sense, share mothering duties. Of course, socio-economic factors determine how much access young children have to their mothers since, in America, poorer mothers often work multiple jobs and spend less time with their children while middle-class mothers spend more time reading to and playing with their children. Through their examination of British families based on class status in *Democracy in the Kitchen*, Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey demonstrate that similar trends are found in Britain in regards to the amount of time that lower class

mothers are able to spend engaged in quality time with their children (anything not related to correcting or disciplining them), and these patterns are similar to those experienced by American families.

In short, any attempt to claim an exact definition of "motherhood" results in essentialism. This exact problem is what most often surfaces in the award-winning books' characterizations of mothers. As Ann C. Hall and Mardia Bishop write in *Mommy Angst*, American culture desires a "simple, reliable definition and representation of motherhood" that "answers all questions, addresses all situations" (ix). Simply stated – that is impossible.

Generally, motherhood studies has been informed and conducted by feminist scholars. While second-wave feminists tended to ignore, and even condemn motherhood because they believed it restricted women's options and perpetuated an oppressive patriarchal state, third-wave feminists tend to focus on expanding definitions of motherhood. In fact, while ideas of "the patriarchy" may still appear in some current writings, many scholars focus on the potential of empowered mothering, maternal thinking, outlaw mothering, and even maternal ambivalence. While the images and messages about motherhood that surround women tend to diverge from their own lived experiences, I believe that the continued study of those images and ultimately their rejection will prove more empowering to women than prolonged discussion about the effects of patriarchy. As Maushart explains, "Although it is true to say that the mask of motherhood has

been forged on the anvil of patriarchy, it is no man-made delusion. Women have

made the mask of motherhood, and women have worn it. And so, too, must we

wear the responsibility, along with the conviction that what we have made, we

can unmake" (23). Still, for the purposes of this study, while newer theories will

be considered, it is also necessary to consider a patriarchal motherhood because

contemporary theorists often situate themselves within or against it. The source

for understanding patriarchal motherhood is Rich's famous definition of an

institution of motherhood:

> Throughout this book, I try to distinguish between two meanings
> of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential
> relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and the
> children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that
> potential—and all women—shall remain under male control. This
> institution has been a keystone of the most diverse social and
> political systems. It has withheld over one-half the human species
> from the decisions affecting their lives; it exonerates men from
> fatherhood in any authentic sense; it creates the dangerous schism
> between "private" and "public" life; it calcifies human choices and
> potentialities. In the most fundamental and bewildering of
> contradictions, it has alienated women from our bodies by
> incarcerating us in them. (13)

She further explains that "motherhood as institution has ghettoized and

degraded female potentialities" (Rich 13). Rich is not alone in her opinion, and

her contemporaries make similar arguments. Rich's idea of motherhood as an

"institution" persists today; although it is most often used to discuss inauthentic

representations that limit the power of motherhood, regardless of gender. In

addition, what Rich labels the institution of motherhood has resulted in what other

critics identify as a professionalization of motherhood—doctors' opinions and parenting experts' books have replaced midwives and the practice of passing down information from generation to generation (thus interrupting the discourse between mother and daughter, or the "motherline"). In fact, in her *Stories from the Motherline*, Naomi Ruth Lowinsky identifies the Baby Boomer women as the first generation to have separated so far from motherline that they "lost the authenticity and authority in their motherhood" (83). So, the same women primarily responsible for second-wave feminism are the first generation to be essentially removed from a generational or shared community of motherhood. The daughters of these women were the first to enjoy the changes brought by second-wave feminism but are also the ones working full-time jobs out of the home while retaining their domestic responsibilities and being bombarded by the media with images of maternal idealization.

The types of limitations faced by women at the onset of motherhood studies (in around 1980) have changed in dramatic ways. Most notably, the numbers of working mothers have increased; in a 1997 study, Hochschild noted that 56 percent of mothers with infants under one year old worked outside of the home, "which a mere generation ago would have been seen as tragic or aberrant (27). Unfortunately, as Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels explain through the identification of a "new momism," some of the contemporary idealized images of motherhood are creeping into the practice of motherhood in a way that creates a

new repression for mothers—the irrational goal of perfection that results in a constant state of intense anxiety. In *The Mommy Myth*, Douglas and Michaels define the new momism as "a set of ideals, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond your reach" (4). So, what exactly is happening? As the daily lives of women in America push them further from a traditional, patriarchal institution of motherhood, a continued cultural discourse surrounding a mythical motherhood ideal persists. This always sacrificial and nurturing type is denied agency and presented as first a vessel for life and then as an extension of her children's demands. She cannot choose a path, which means that she will continue to adhere to an out-dated patriarchy by ensuring the care of future generations.

Perhaps the purchasing power of women drives some of this continued idealization of women. Douglas and Michaels explain that educational toys were advertised to mothers; according to the marketing, "good mothers" would spend the time to both research the toys and then play with their children. Play is an activity cited by many psychologists as important in a child's development but one that the working mother (not surprisingly) has little time in which to participate (Douglas and Michaels 296). In addition to playing with her children, the good mother is always sacrificial. E. Ann Kaplan argues that the "ideology of the masochistic, angelic, all-sacrificing mother, produced through psychoanalytic

theories as representing the healthy 'feminine' women, has functioned and is *still* functioning" (45). The ideology produces images of good and bad mothers "whose purpose is to manipulate women in, or out of, the work-force, in accordance with capitalism's needs" (45)

Similarly, Andrea O'Reilly defines a "contemporary Western patriarchal motherhood" that she claims to adhere to the following rules:

> 1) children can be properly cared for only by the biological mother; 2) this mothering must be provided 24/7; 3) the mother must always put children's needs before her own; 4) mothers must turn to the experts for instruction; 5) the mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood; 6) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children; 7) the mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother; 8) motherhood, child rearing specifically, is regarded as a personal, private undertaking with no political import (369).

O'Reilly's definition is even more unsettling when one considers that feminist writers in the 1970s were discounting the practice of exclusive mothering. Nancy Chodorow derided the practice in 1978 writing:

> There does not seem to be evidence to demonstrate that exclusive mothering is necessarily better for infants. However such mothering is 'good for society.' Exclusive and intensive mothering, as it has been practiced in Western society, does seem to have produced more achievement-oriented men and people with psychologically monogamic tendencies (75).

So, while the practice does not benefit the mother, Chodorow argues that the practice continues because of its eventual result of making the family insular and isolated, eventually relieving society of any burden of responsibility towards

children. Interestingly, her conclusion connects the practice to the neo-liberalism that would later be identified by O'Reilly and Douglas.

An immediate shift from exclusive mothering means that the meaning of "mother" can be expanded. Rather than biologically defined or gender-restrictive, the definition of mothering has evolved not only in ways that reflect women's tendency to work out of the home but also technological advancements. No longer is a "mother" limited to the person who births a child. The commonality of surrogate mothers and even the medical care given to premature infants has expanded the rhetoric about who is a mother. Of course, adoption has always meant that a non-biological parent figure would become a mother and experience motherhood. Generally, emphasis has shifted to the act of mothering, the verb, so that Rich and Chodorow's interest in an egalitarian motherhood in which woman and man share mothering duties should be more of a reality. Yet, studies in the practice of motherhood tell us that this is not really the case. In fact, women are doing more work than they did in the past as they work outside of home and then perform almost the same number of hours of domestic work as their foresisters through the so-called "second shift" (Hochschild).[1]

The lived reality of motherhood brings additional contradictions. Sara Ruddick explains that women are always under the "gaze of others" (74) so that mothering is never really done in private—just ask any mother who is on the

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[1] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (Viking).

receiving end of judgmental glares from spectators when her toddler has a

meltdown at the mall. In the images presented in the media, sentimentalism has

definitely beaten the egalitarianism hoped for by feminist scholars. Nowhere is

this idea more obvious than in the glorification of celebrity moms. Wearing

bikinis mere months after birthing a child, celebrity moms grace the cover of

magazines complete with articles about the newest mobile phone application that

can make the impossible-to-manage schedule of a working mom manageable.

Mom will no longer struggle to get one child to violin lessons, the other to

tutoring, and still have time to make a dinner with all-organic foods. Further from

robust, even tendentious representations of mothers and motherhood, cultural

images continue to lean towards essentialism and idealization.

The definition of "motherhood" for this project attempts to consider all of

the possible suggestions of the aforementioned theories. So, while mothering is

most often considered a verb (to be involved in the act of nurturing and caring for

a child or minor), the project considers gender when examining *representations* of

motherhood.

<div align="center">1.2 Defining Childhood</div>

In much the same way that defining "motherhood" proves challenging,

creating an exact definition of "childhood" is problematic. While American

culture has certainly moved past the pre-20th century view that children are

simply miniature adults, an exact definition that encompasses childhood still

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remains debated. In some ways, the accepted view of childhood hasn't moved

much past the idyllic stories of the past with innocence being the most defining

characteristic of childhood.[2]

While motherhood is fraught with an anxiety and anxiousness, childhood

is generally still viewed as a time of innocence. Yet, as Jack Zipes and others

explain, there is little innocence in childhood, a state fraught with its own

anxieties, frustrations, violence, and selfishness. It does not take much reading to

learn that the critical conversation about "childhood" centers on an inability to

define it. Perry Nodelman writes about the violence and fear experienced in

childhood, something that Maurice Sendak addresses in *Where the Wild Things*

Are. Nodelman also writes of an inability to provide a definition, and, like Jack

Zipes, laments about an homogenization of childhood meant primarily to serve

marketing needs. Zipes writes of a "systematic homogenization of American

children" that "prep[s] them to respond to the demands of the markets" (2). Zipes

finds the practice paradoxical because it "is occurring at the same time when we

appear to have learned how to appreciate and honor multiculturalism and to

provide children with more free choice in their lives" (2). In a sense, the

homogenization of childhood is similar to the idealization of motherhood—both

are desperately seeking a simple definition of complex and individualized

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[2] In literature for children, that innocence is often connected to the idea of nostalgia—an interest in recreating the past.

experiences and are market-driven. They are ultimately a form of acculturation that becomes a commodification.

Much like motherhood, a definition of childhood depends on cultural experiences—from nationality to neighborhood. This social construct is generally employed to separate children from adults and to provide a frame in which to acculturate children. For the purposes of this project, John Stephens's statement that "Childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, and how to think—in general, the intention is to render the world intelligible. These ideas are constructed within social practices" provides a workable definition of childhood (8). Certainly, some of these social practices are teaching literacy and gender identification. As such, the texts signified as valuable through earning the Caldecott or Newbery Medal are definitely worthy of study in the search for patterns related to the inscription of cultural norms and gender roles. This project argues that the presentation of motherhood is these texts is important to study because, not only does it serve as one of the aforementioned cultural norms, but also it affects the development of gender roles and may affect the choices young girls make as they develop into women.

If it is true that, as Alison Lurie and others argue, childhood is its own culture that contains its "own rituals, beliefs, games, and customs," then the

acculturation process of children into normative society is aggressive as one

culture dominates another (194). Already threatened by the power of youth, adults

must contain childhood for a number of reasons—from not wanting to explore

aspects of their sexuality to a desire for a type of immortality as their thoughts and

customs are passed to the next generation, adults need childhood to exist more

than children do.

1.3 Psychoanalytic Theory and the Construction of Childhood and Motherhood

As psychoanalysis focuses on the child, it is not surprising that theories

about juvenile literature and motherhood studies are influenced by psychoanalytic

theory. Most interesting to this project are Nancy Chodorow's motherhood

theories based on object-relations and D. W. Winnicott's "Good Enough" Mother.

Contending that "Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get

gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced,"

Chodorow explains that psychoanalysis "suggests that major features of social

organization of gender are transmitted in and through those personalities produced

by the structure of the institution—the family—in which children become

gendered members of society" (39). More than simply imitating behavior, she

connects mothering to object relations theory, emphasizing internalizations so

that:

> The reproduction of mothering begins from the earliest mother-
> infant relationship in the earliest period of infantile development.
> This early relationship is basic in three ways. Most important, the

basic psychological stance for parenting is founded during this
period. Second, people come out of it with the memory of a unique
intimacy which they want to recreate. Finally, people's experience
of their early relationship to their mother provides a foundation for
expectations of women as mothers (57).

In the post-Oedipal stage, a girl remains attached to her mother and keeps
her as an internalized object. Chodorow theorizes that the child, in response to an
ambivalence felt when the mother is not able to meet its needs or is absent, "may
split its perception of her and internalize only the negative aspects of their
relationship" or "may internalize the whole relationship and split and repress only
its negative aspect" (69). The internalization and attachment to the mother affects
the child's ego development and its future relationships while serving as "a
prototype for later attachment to other objects experienced as separate" (72). If
the child develops a negative attachment or experiences difficulty in establishing
relationships because of its relationship with its mother in infancy, this certainly
speaks to the power of motherhood. Later, Chodorow contends, this is how
children reproduce motherhood. Of course, Chodorow's theory is not represented
directly in the Caldecott and Newbery texts; but, the idea that the mother serves as
the child's gatekeeper to the world and trusted friend certainly emerges and is
reminiscent of what Chodorow and others label "exclusive mothering" (74).

Exclusive mothering is the practice of ensuring that the mother is
responsible for the majority of infant and early childhood care. In bearing almost
sole responsibility for childcare, a mother's options outside of the domestic space

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are limited. As such, this practice reinforces the concept of private and public

spaces by keeping women primarily out of the public. When they are in public,

they are defined by the ways in which their childcare and domestic

responsibilities enter the public space (through shopping and household

management chores); so, they remain essentially silent in the public sphere.

Chodorow and others examine the practice of exclusive mothering,

eventually concluding that there is no real benefit to it in terms of infant

development (75). "New Momism" and trends towards a new domesticity have

caused the practice of exclusive mothering, which had faded in the 1980s-early

1990s to resurface.[3] Douglas and Michaels point to multiple news stories about

the dangers of childcare institutions and the narrative that children forced into

childcare become aggressive and do not reach their intellectual capacity as

motivating the regression towards exclusive mothering in middle-class families.

This exclusive mothering is apparent in new momism and the practice of

masking motherhood experiences. In fact, these practices extend exclusive

mothering beyond early childhood so that mom retains almost sole responsibility

for a child's activity and social calendars. In both instances, a mother's focus

needs to be her children so that motherhood becomes synonymous with sacrifice.

Women sacrifice their careers, sleep, health, leisure, and quiet time in favor of

conducting tutoring sessions, planning elaborate birthday parties, sewing dresses,

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[3] *The Mommy Myth* (Free Press)

carpooling children to extracurricular practices, and volunteering at their child's school.

Far from dismissing responsive mothers, D.W. Winnicott's Good Enough mother theory recognizes women for responding to their infants' and children's needs in an appropriate manner. He does not advocate for perfectionism, stating that the responsiveness will cause children to feel loved and protected, which will aid them in the process of individuation. He also acknowledges that the mother will have intense feelings of ambivalence towards her child and will discover ways to address both feelings equally – something that is not supported in either the new momism or exclusive mothering, which is the reason for the masking that Maushart identifies. While she is satisfying her child's desires, the Good Enough Mother remains aware that the child will eventually mature and leave her protection. So, Winnicott theorizes, the mother will become gradually less responsive, teaching the child that she is separate from him or her and that its needs cannot always be met immediately, or even to the child's satisfaction. So, in the end, the mother forces the child towards greater independence while keeping him or her safe.

As Lucy Rollin explains, Winnicott further contends that children use a transitional object; most often a "beloved" but "ill-treated object" represents the mother and aids the child "to give up its dependence on the mother-figure" (8). Of course, the ultimate result of childhood is its end. Children will grow up, and both

mother and child are always cognizant of this truth. This idea perpetuates much

of juvenile literature theory, especially the supposition that literature for children

enacts a nostalgia for adults of a past that may or may not have existed.[4]

1.4 Defining Children's Literature

Like other areas of the project, defining juvenile literature and finding

some delineation between literature geared towards younger children versus older

children proves challenging. Definitions are not exact and depend upon a

consideration of characteristics or trends found within the literature. As Perry

Nodelman suggests, a true children's literature can never exist since children are

not writing for children. He continues, explaining that adults are far more

involved with the process than children, who are simply the recipients of the text

written, edited, published, marketed, purchased, and, often, read by adults. Layers

of arbiters lie between the child listener/reader and the author. Nodelman also

theorizes about a shadow text that "say[s] less than it hints at," but, he suggests,

child readers may understand some of these insinuations (9 *Hidden*). Indeed,

accepting the theory of a shadow text is instrumental in this project since many of

the cultural codes examined are merely suggested. In the end, the separation

between author and audience makes juvenile literature unique, and much of the

debate in children's literature theory is about audience—are the stories truly

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[4] See Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*; Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*;
and Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones*, for instance

written for children to enjoy or ostensibly for adults to find security in the future by producing books that serve as cultural guidelines for children?

In his *Minders of Make-Believe*, Leonard S. Marcus credits 19th century Unitarian minister Samuel Osgood with advocating for the creation of an American children's literature. While children primarily read Bible stories, some stories written for children emerged in England in the seventeenth century; although, these stories were mostly didactic and moral in nature. In fact, it was not until the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 that widespread acceptance of children's stories as being geared towards entertainment began to occur.

Osgood's interest was in creating "morally responsible" but "adamantly nonprescriptive" literature that "showed respect for young readers' intelligence and trust in their already having acquired a basic understanding of right and wrong, and that on occasion might serve up tales of rebellion to satisfy vicariously the urge for the real thing" (33-34). Marcus identifies this point as the first time that an interest in elevating stories for younger readers to the status of literature developed in America. Of course, it was in the 19th century that magazines like *St. Nicholas* and *Robert Merry's Museum* were being produced. Targeted at children, these magazines showcased the works of respected writers like Louisa May Alcott alongside the writings of children. Many of the stories created in the 19th century, and especially those during the Golden Age of Children's Literature

(from about 1850-1910) shift away from didacticism and contain many of the elements still associated with children's stories.

Throughout the study, the term "juvenile literature" is used to signify literature written for minors. Even though the awards give a suggested reading age, many factors, from reading ability to socio-economic status, determine whether a book is appropriate for a specific child. Likewise, trying to select characteristics and use them to differentiate between children for literature and young adults proves difficult—after all, a fantasy book or one with talking animals may not necessarily be written for children, as is the case with *A Game of Thrones* or *Animal Farm*, respectively. Therefore, the guidelines provided by Perry Nodelman and Jerry Griswold have been instrumental in analyzing the literature reviewed for this project. In his *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman writes that literature for children is: simple and straightforward, focused on action, about childhood, concerned with expressing a child's point of view, optimistic, interested in fantasy, a form of the pastoral idyll, didactic but able to balance the idyllic and didactic, filled with repetition, and able to view an un-idyllic world from the viewpoint of innocence. Focusing a bit more on themes, Griswold explains that literature for children contains five elements that "can be seen as feelings or sensations prevalent in childhood" (3); they are: "snugness, smallness, scariness, lightness, and aliveness" (2-3). Both Nodelman and

Griswold's definitions contain some elements of ambiguity; however, they do provide a basis for examining the texts and will be used in subsequent chapters.

Generally, young adult books focus on issues related to maturity and adolescence. Where the goal of literature for children is often to make the child reader feel secure while encouraging him or her to develop an imaginative sense of wonder, young adult literature seems to focus on curbing rebellion. In addition, it almost always deals with sex – something that does not appear in literature for children. Roberta Trites argues in her *Disturbing the Universe* that books for adolescents are "superficially" subversive since the growth that young characters experience is limited by relationships of power. In short, "institutions both empower and repress adolescents in the ways that they create new opportunities for teenagers while they simultaneously establish rules" (Trites xii). As such, she considers parents primarily in terms of their relationship to the adolescent characters, arguing that parents, whether physically present or absent from the text, force characters into a repressive state in which they must rebel (Trites 55). Trites focuses on Foucault and Lacan to frame her argument that the formation of the subject in the young adult novel depends upon understanding subjectivity as a construct of language. In essence, parents exist not as individuals, but as the obstacle to the creation of an authentic self since the family is one of Louis Althusser's Institutional State Apparatuses. Unlike literature written for children with its emphasis on security and imagination, young adult literature emphasizes

the alienation often felt in adolescence, and, where children's literature almost always ends optimistically, young adult literature often includes ambiguous endings that depict growth in a main character but also hint towards obstacles he or she will face in the future.

1.5 Scope of Project

Award-winning books serve as cultural arbiters to both parents and children. Certainly, a number of awards are given to children's literature every year. Still the Newbery and Caldecott awards remain the most prestigious in American Literature, and they were chosen in this study because the publishing industry, through its marketing of these texts, ensures their continued prominence.[5] Furthermore, since this project always runs the risk of essentialism, choosing American literature instead of world literature seems sensible since, at minimum, the project is placed in the context of American culture.

In *Why Literature?*, Christina Vischer Bruns argues that literature is a transitional object in which readers may experience "a tangible form for an inner state that may be otherwise inaccessible to conscious experience" (28). Through the experience of reading the text, the reader uses events and meanings from his or her own experiences to construct meaning so that, when the reader returns to a state of separateness from the text, he or she may develop a fuller "self-

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[5] The generally "safe," normative depictions within these texts belie diversity as they enact nostalgia. Yet, the motherhood ideal that will be defined in subsequent chapters is far from "safe;" rather, she serves an out-dated patriarchy through her selflessness and retained object status.

awareness," leading to a "reworking of our conception of self and other" and "our relation with the world" (30). In accepting Bruns's argument, what follows is an even stronger recognition of the importance of literature as cultural work. Not only are cultural codes imbedded in literature, but also the way readers learn to view others and, eventually, interact with them is influenced by the process of reading literature. For the youngest readers, it would seem that the texts they read are significantly important since they serve to develop concepts of "other" and affect self-awareness.

As Leonard S. Marcus explains in his *Minders of Make-Believe*, Caldecott and Newbery Medal winners are often chosen by busy and overwhelmed parents (297). The stickers are literally seals of approval. Certainly, these texts perform cultural work by acculturating children to various social expectations and practices—from learning to go to bed in one's own room to introducing gender roles. However, how do they affect conceptions of self and other? I argue that this is a question that needs to be addressed, especially by feminists and theorists interested in a functioning egalitarian society.

Arguably, the most respected awards for juvenile literature in America are the American Library Association's Newbery Medal and Caldecott Medal. These awards serve as cultural arbiters and are presented annually to recognize contributions to literature for children. Indeed, the namesakes of each award are of significant importance to juvenile literature, with John Newbery often

recognized as the first person to market to children with his *A Pretty Little Pocket Book*. Newbery's book was packaged with either a doll meant for girls or a ball meant for boys. Randolph Caldecott was a nineteenth-century artist recognized for his contribution to illustrations in books meant primarily for children.

Yet, the process that these committees follow when selecting winners is not easily defined, and their rationale is not always accessible to researchers. Each year, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), which is part of the ALA, establishes two committees, one for the Caldecott Medal and one for the Newbery Medal. Both committees include fifteen members with eight elected members, six appointed members, and one chairperson. Generally, members include librarians, teachers, and book reviewers (Newbery and Caldecott Awards). Both committees value the secrecy of the process; and, while some information about the selection process is available, each committee may interpret criteria differently since no distinct definitions exist.

The selection criteria for the Caldecott Medal states that a picture book "is one that essentially provides the child with a visual experience" and "has a collective unity of story-line, theme, or concept, developed through the series of pictures of which the book is comprised" ("Caldecott Medal"). The book must have children as the intended audience and must consider "children's understandings, abilities, and appreciations" ("Caldecott Medal"). The guidelines state that texts are to be appropriate for children up to age fourteen.

Texts must be "distinguished," which is: "Marked by eminence and distinction; noted for significant achievement; Marked by excellence in quality; Marked by conspicuous excellence or eminence; Individually distinct" ("Caldecott Medal"). Likewise, the committee must deliberate on: "Excellence of execution in the artistic technique employed; Excellence of pictorial interpretation of story, theme, or concept; Appropriateness of style of illustration to the story, theme or concept; Delineation of plot, theme, characters, setting, mood or information through the pictures; Excellence of presentation in recognition of a child audience" ("Caldecott Medal").

The most defined characteristics are that the text must be a "self-contained entity" and that the committee must focus on illustration but may consider other characteristics, such as the text. Finally, the book should not be chosen for its didacticism or popularity ("Caldecott Medal"). In essence, much of the criteria depends upon the collective interpretation of the committee – what is "excellence in quality," and what is "excellence of execution" in art? Likewise, what determines "appropriateness?" Another concern, and a popular criticism of the awards, is that the selected text may not appeal to children. The criteria states that the content should be easily understood by children but likability is not mentioned. Whether these award-winning texts will be liked by children seems to not be as meaningful of a concern for the committee as whether the text demonstrates what the group believes that children *should* consume. In fact, in the

2004 guide to the Caldecott and Newbery winners, Gratia J. Banta outlines in an essay entitled "Reading Pictures Searching for Excellence in Picture Books" a process for reviewers, librarians, teachers, parents, and any other interested adults to develop their "visual literacy" (12). She contends that visual literacy enables adults to select appropriate texts for children. The primary focus in the process she describes is understanding artistic form and composition. Banta emphasizes studying art history and uses well-known works of art as examples. She concludes, stating: "When we take the time to really look at the pictures in books, know the elements of design, understand cultural context, and develop our visual literacy, we become well prepared to undertake our search for excellence. We can then celebrate picture book illustration with our hearts and our heads" (Banta 18).

Curiously, while Nodelman acknowledges that composition affects the appeal of children's picture books, he emphasizes the relationship between the images and words in a picture book. Stressing the importance of a prior knowledge of the content in the illustration, Nodelman states that objects become "meaningful" because of the contexts they evoke in the reader (*Words* 101). He echoes William Ivins's belief that artwork does not develop meaning or significance until it is placed in relation to the effect it has on viewers or readers. Determining the effect these images have on children is not the focus of the committee. Rather, they are selecting texts they believe to be appropriate and significant. As such, my concern with the cultural codes presented in these texts

becomes even more pertinent to literary and cultural studies since these are sanctioned messages presented to children.

The selection criteria for the Newbery Medal are similarly open to interpretation and direct committee members to find a "distinguished contribution to American literature" for children ("Newbery Medal"). The following criteria are to be considered: "Interpretation of the theme or concept; Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization; Development of a plot; Delineation of characters; Delineation of a setting; and Appropriateness of style" ("Newbery Medal"). The guidelines indicate that "the committee need not expect to find excellence in each of the named elements," but the text should "have distinguished qualities in all of the elements pertinent to it" ("Newbery Medal"). The text needs to be written with children as the intended audience.

Like the Caldecott guidelines, the criteria listed and the final comment that the selection should not be for "didactic content" are the most definitive statements in the guidelines. Curiously, one of the areas in which the text must be distinguished is in character development. Presumably, the focus is on the main character, and, as I will demonstrate, supporting characters (such as mothers) often receive little character development. In short, Marcus's observation that there exists a "much vaunted veil of secrecy surrounding the award committees' deliberations" exists seems to be an accurate description (196).

Marcus identifies a[n] "historical phenomenon of children's books as messages passed down between generations" so that "to understand the thoughts and actions of the people responsible for the creation and dissemination of children's books is to glimpse the inner machinery of one of literature society's primary means of self-renewal" (xi). I contend that even though we may not be able to identify all of the criteria used to select books, the effect is the same – the status these books attain as award winners increases their likelihood of being consumed and read to or by children.

Gail S. Murray provides information about the development of the Caldecott and Newbery awards as well as the marketing of juvenile literature in *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood*. Awards for children's books and the professionalization of the genre (editors, children's librarians, and so on) began in the 1920's. Murray identifies these developments as a means of shielding children; professionals serve as "gatekeepers" (147). In her *Kiddie Lit*, Beverly Lyon Clark also identifies a "guardianship" in children's literature that is partially driven by the confirmation of awards (48). Seth Lerer expands the relationship, claiming that there is "a unique relationship between the worlds of children's reading and the structures of the library" in a chapter entitled "Good Feeling" from his *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (275). In short, the connection between award-winning books and material that is readily accessible to children is beyond debate. As Clark explains,

the impression of an award on the cover of a book can lead to sales in the scores of thousands (48).

Lerer's discussion about librarians' practice in the early 20th century of making children wear gloves so as not to dirty the books provides a metaphor for Murray's argument that the award-winning books are clean and "emphasiz[e] nostalgia and dominant-culture, middle-class themes" (147). While she demonstrates changes in the texts produced throughout the twentieth century (for instance, a proliferation of multicultural texts after the Civil Rights Era), at issue is whether those "dominant-culture, middle-class themes" and their representations of motherhood remain prevalent in contemporary award-winning texts. While Murray, Lerer's, and Clark's research on award culture is thorough and critically important, the authors tend to focus on the early 20th century; so, examining their ideas from a contemporary perspective is necessary.

In almost half of the Newbery books from 1980-2014, mothers are either absent or represented in the form of surrogates. Do these texts continue to advance those middle-class themes? Or, have the cultural representations in juvenile literature expanded to include a more robust sampling of family traditions and mothering practices within America? For reasons related to reading and purchasing habits, much of the conversation about motherhood is limited in some sense to a consideration of upper-middle-class and middle-class mothers— those who would be purchasing these texts. However, public schools ensure that

all students are exposed to the texts to some degree. Part of what the project examines is if those middle-class essentialist expectations of motherhood (new momism, for instance) are sanctioned in the award-winning texts, and, I believe that they are most often present.

Caldecott books, because they contain little or no text, provide a unique opportunity to study schema formation. Perry Nodelman considers how words and pictures limit each other in *Words About Pictures*. Nodelman's work focuses on the ways in which the visual elements found in picture books differ from those in visual art. Nodelman uses semiotics to claim that picture books depend upon a schemata while simultaneously teaching children cultural assumptions. In fact, Nodelman argues that the pictures may determine preferences; so, for example, it is questionable whether children inherently relate to animals or whether they "learn an interest in such humanized animals from their frequent appearances in books" (*Words* 35). In his *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Nodelman explains that pictures operate as a "visual equivalent of the shadow text" in that they rely on the understanding of certain schemata since "what is most meaningful" is "what the text doesn't say" (*Hidden* 11). Nodelman's statements about schemata and cultural assumptions are situated well within the history of didacticism and acculturation found in juvenile literature. Elaborating on Nodelman's application of semiotics to gender and motherhood in picture books will demonstrate the ways in which these texts both suggest traditional

values associated with motherhood while subverting the authority of parents. In addition, some of the texts represent cultural codes that allow for the changing concepts of motherhood from the identified period of 1980-2014.

After evaluating the Caldecott winners, the focus shifts to maternal character development as well as its absence in Newbery texts. The intricacy of these texts, whose prospective audience is eight to twelve-year old readers, allows for a more complex analysis of the mother characters than is possible in the Caldecott texts. As protagonists tend to be older than those in Caldecott texts, they are sometimes engaged in preadolescent behavior and more focused on forming identities independent of their parents. They may rebel against Institutional State Apparatuses during the process of individuation, and, as Trites demonstrates, their rebellion is superficially subversive since the status quo is maintained once the rebellion is settled, but, Trites's study does not consider that silencing or eliminating the mother character objectifies the maternal and contributes to gender perfomativity. Trites establishes the power dynamic between parents and adolescents; but, like much of the criticism in juvenile literature, she examines the mother as a type, not as a subject. Maternal characters in Caldecott texts are categorized as present or not present, but Newbery texts are considered as follows:

- Biological mother present and influential
- Biological mother present but mostly absent from the text and marginally influential

- Biological mother absent; raised by father
- Biological mother and father absent; raised by family member
- Raised by grandmother
- Biological mother and father absent; raised by adoptive parents or guardians
- Influential grandmother important to protagonist's development
- Biological mother (either present or absent) presented as a traditional mother
- Biological mother abandoned family

Some categories overlap; so, a text like *Jacob Have I Loved* includes both a biological mother who is present and influential as well as a prominent grandmother. The one text that was difficult to categorize was *The Giver* since Jonas's biological mother is presumably still living but he is raised by adoptive parents. His mother does not provide the emotional support common to the traditional mother but ensures his safety, until he rebels. Unlike the Caldecott books, the Newbery texts offer a range of maternal characters or influence, which allow for the consideration of whether the mothers are given a voice and/or have motivations other than mothering. Texts that contain developed characters would allow for the mother to be viewed not as an object of the child's development but as a unique subject. Also, since maternal ambivalence is such an important topic in critical examinations of motherhood, some attention is given to whether mother characters exhibit any signs of ambivalence in either the Newbery or Caldecott texts.

The connection between motherhood, childhood, and children's literature is significant. As Andrea O'Reilly and others have focused on the importance of maternal narratives in the cultural construction of motherhood, this project argues that understanding and examining those first images of motherhood absorbed by children is essential in developing motherhood theories as well as being a significant component of juvenile literature. While second-wave feminism ushered in the working mother and contributed to the expansion of opportunities for women, the literary status quo in juvenile literature has remained relatively unchanged in a way that limits the practice of motherhood by reinforcing its institutionalization through the inclusion of traditional mothering images, and it encourages a culturally accepted performance of motherhood worthy of study by feminists and motherhood theorists.

1.6 Chapter Outlines

This project examines representations of motherhood in Caldecott and Newbery winners from the 1980-2014 and is informed by feminist literary theory, juvenile literary theory, and motherhood studies. Ultimately, I argue that, while motherhood studies are evolving to consider egalitarian ideas of motherhood and multiple definitions of motherhood, many award winners present a traditional (and antiquated) motherhood ideal in which the maternal figure engages selflessly in care-giving and is motivated only by her domestic duties. The texts present fictionalized, idealized images about motherhood but still resonate with readers;

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in the end, they present coded messages to children about motherhood. Juvenile

literature offers a space to explore the mother as subject and object while

ultimately emphasizing the mother as an object for the protagonist who is engaged

in identity formation. This objectification depersonalizes, essentializes, and often

stereotypes motherhood. However, diverse mothering characters and practices do

materialize in some texts. They are often regulated by the motherhood ideal when

the mother character enacts elements of the ideal to resolve conflict. Dualism in

the development of mother characters further limits fictional mothering.

Moreover, the depictions of motherhood in these texts for young readers affect

girls' identity formation. Finally, and most importantly, I contend that critical

attention by feminists and motherhood scholars needs to be given to these texts

because they contain meaningful cultural codes and expectations.

In the second chapter, I define the Caldecott motherhood ideal by

analyzing a pre-1980 Caldecott text (*Sylvester & the Magic Pebble*). I chose this

text because it depicts the stereotype to which Nilsen opposed.[6] Then, I use award

winners from the 1980-2014 to demonstrate the continued presence of the

motherhood ideal in Caldecott winners; I argue that the motherhood ideal

exemplar character from the past three decades appears in *Snowflake Bentley*. In

this chapter, I also consider diverse representations of motherhood in Caldecott

texts, such as the absent and unaware mother. The final text examined in Chapter

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[6] See "Women in Children's Literature." *College English* 32.8 (1971).

2 depicts a working mother and suggests at egalitarian parenting, but I argue that ambiguousness blurs the message. Overall, I contend that the texts in chapter two essentialize motherhood by associating it with femaleness and prescribing homogenized mothering experiences, distinguishable only by whether the mother is aware or unaware of the conflict and by whether the mother is present or absent in the text. The pattern of identifying a motherhood ideal and then considering her in relation to diverse mothering experiences appears in Chapters 3-4 in relation to the Newbery texts.

In Chapter 3, I contend that a more defined motherhood ideal appears in the Newbery texts and use two characters as examples. Through the outmoded, passive femininity, the motherhood ideal enacts restrictive gender role expectations. I distinguish between the motherhood ideal exemplar found in *Jacob Have I Loved* and the more developed but still ideal character found in *Shiloh*. This chapter establishes the use of "normative" in regards to the motherhood ideal, especially in relation to the work of Valerie Walkderine and Helen Lucey. I also define the use of the term "emotional stability" in relation to the motherhood ideal. In this chapter, I clarify the case for acculturation in juvenile literature. Overall, the purpose of Chapter 3 is to provide a clear definition for the motherhood ideal that will be used in subsequent chapters.

"Diverse" mothering experiences depicted in the Newbery texts from 1980-2014 are defined in Chapter 4 as: selfish mother characters (*The Tale of*

Despereaux and *Flora & Ulysses*); developed, but marginal mother characters (*Kira-Kira* and *Out of the Dust*); and developed, but present mother characters (*Dear Mr. Henshaw*, *Dead End in Norvelt*, and *When You Reach Me*). These mother characters emphasize the action of mothering over the state of being a mother, but their more progressive or non-traditional behavior is often countered by their choice to enact elements of the motherhood ideal. The motherhood ideal becomes a reactionary force against diverse mothering practices. In this chapter, I also argue that dualism in the characterization of mothers further limits egalitarian parenting by situating the mother against the father.

Chapter 5 analyzes the motherhood ideal in relation to mother/daughter conflict and introduces two arguments. In *Jacob Have I Loved*, *When You Reach Me*, *Kira-Kira*, and *Flora & Ulysses*, the motherhood ideal becomes a tool to solve mother/daughter conflicts. Rather than use the creative space to explore potential resolutions, the selflessness found in the motherhood ideal provides *the* pathway the repair the mother/daughter relationship. In this chapter, I discuss *Walk Two Moons* because of its representation of maternal anxieties. Considering Rozsika Parker's theories on maternal ambivalence, I argue that *Walk Two Moons* rejects the motherhood ideal myth while offering some creative space to explore the damage caused when mother strives for perfection because she associates her identity with the ideal.

Replacement and temporary mothers are defined and analyzed in Chapter 6. I argue that, even within these characters that possess no genetic ties to the child protagonist, expectations of the motherhood ideal emerge. Mothering is valued because the replacement and/or temporary mothers resolve conflict; but also it is devalued because of the connotative replaceability and naturalness of mothering. This chapter analyzes: *A Gathering of Days*; *Sarah, Plain and Tall*; *Bud, Not Buddy*; and *The Higher Power of Lucky*.

Chapter 2

What They See: Caldecott Medal Winners and Images of Motherhood

Although texts with nuanced mothering experiences exist in juvenile

literature, I argue that an image of a motherhood ideal persists in the Caldecott

Medal winners from 1980-2014. Furthermore, little diversity appears in

mothering experiences dramatized in these texts. Despite the inclusion of some

cultural and ethnic diversity and some subtle changes in the clothing of mothers in

award winners after 1980, the primary role and expectation of a mother character

in these texts is to nurture, and that has remained unchanged. In my reading of

these texts, I find no significant space to explore multiple voices of motherhood.

Rather, the reductive images present an idealistic motherhood—one focused

primarily on nurturing and self-sacrifice. The motherhood ideal communicates a

comforting image to children in these texts, but its continued presence

demonstrates that a lingering influence associated with expectations set through a

patriarchal institution of motherhood restricts and essentializes motherhood.

Further, the images may shape the child readers' interpretations of motherhood

experiences, especially in terms of gender-limiting beliefs and the naturalness

ascribed to female nurturing. Despite egalitarian messaging in some texts,

Caldecott Medal winners trend towards stereotypical representations of mothers

with the aforementioned emphasis on a fantastical ideal. As such, they limit the

representation of motherhood and mothering, promoting *a* prescriptive

motherhood rather than *motherhoods*. This exclusion of diverse mothering voices also "masks" motherhood by limiting its expression and focusing on its positive attributes.[7] The motherhood ideal demonstrates the power and powerlessness of mothers as it limits a mother's influence to the home. Finally, the continued honoring of motherhood ensures future mothers by preventing an examination of the anxieties experienced in mothering; in this sense, the motherhood ideal fulfills some of the same patriarchal goals that second-wave feminists identified.

bell hooks writes: "Children's literature is one of the most crucial sites for feminist education for critical consciousness precisely because beliefs and identities are still being formed" (23). Through the Caldecott texts, children learn far more than how to hold and open books; they learn about more than literary devices such as plot, conflict, climax, and resolution. Children learn to associate objects depicted in the picture books with certain "contexts" and "relate them to [their] general knowledge and experience of life, of literature, and of visual art" (*Words About Pictures* 101). So, the images and contexts are dependent upon each other and interpreted through both the child's experiences and some mediated version of the adult reader's experience. After all, until the child learns to read, these texts are always a translation, presented through the voice and experiences of the adult reader. (Arguably, these texts always exist in translation since they are produced through a publishing industry managed by adults). If

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[7] Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood* (Penguin Books).

adult readers accept that images in picture books represent a symbol or type, then the possible meanings found in the symbolic pictures may evolve into stereotypes. Through these stereotypes, a form of acculturation occurs. For instance, ideas of youth and beauty are valued over age and deformity because the former appear in characters that are associated with goodness (such as princesses) while the latter are characteristics usually seen in evil characters (such as witches). While these stereotypes allow emerging child readers to anticipate plot and conflict through identifiable character markers, I read them as presenting certain cultural concepts.[8] For the child listener, each component of the story-reading event builds schemata. As an example, a child's world centers on his or her relationship to others, especially family members. Most children who view or read picture books remain wholly dependent upon the parental figures in their lives. As such, the ways in which parental figures in juvenile literature are presented likely resonate with a child, and he or she may begin to associate categorical representations found in picture books with an individual parent.[9] So, if mother characters continually perform care-giving roles while fathers engage in manual labor, it is reasonable to argue that children absorb the depictions of gender roles through these texts; indeed, this argument appears throughout juvenile literature

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[8] Indeed, I am not alone in this belief. Nodelman writes that understanding picture books "require[s] a knowledge of learned competencies and cultural assumptions" *Words About Pictures* (University of Georgia), 17.
[9] Perry Nodelman, *Words About Pictures* (University of Georgia), 31.

scholarship.[10] With that scholarship in mind, I assert that children (and adults) absorb the images of the idealized mother in these texts.

`   Idealizing motherhood is not a new practice, and at the onset of second-wave feminism, Julia Kristeva advocated a disruption of the patriarchal discourse around mothering, which she aligned with the idealized, selfless, nurturing image of the Virgin Mary.[11] In her *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan challenges the belief that a woman's ultimate goal should be to enact her femininity because that femininity had been interpreted to align with domestic management, and it limits the potential women (and men) may reach. Imbedded in this discourse and in the motherhood ideal that I am attempting to define is space to consider Adrienne Rich's criticisms against an institutionalization of motherhood, which she connects with patriarchal rules established to control mothers and women; specifically, she writes that: "Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self" (42). In the ensuing decades since the publication of *Of Woman Born*, much has changed in the lived experiences of mothers—from more mothers entering the workforce to the cultural acceptance of divorce and alternative motherhoods, such as those brought

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[10] See Perry Nodelman, *Words About Pictures* and Gail S. Murray, *American Children's Literature and the Construction of the Child*, for instance.
[11] "Stabet Mater," *The Kristeva Reader* (Columbia University Press).

about through reproductive therapy. Yet, the idealization of motherhood continues.

Contemporary feminist scholars such as Beverly Birns, E. Ann Kaplan, Andrea O'Reilly, Rozsika Parker, and others apply various characteristics to a so-called idealized mother. The idealized mother engages in self-sacrifice and the cultural ideal insists that mother's gratification springs from gratifying the child" (Parker 21). Kaplan identifies an "angel" mother prevalent in the nineteenth through the early-twentieth century as the "prevailing cultural discourse," and, in my reading, this sacrificial angel mother informs the motherhood ideal presented within the Caldecott texts (7). The motherhood ideal suggests a fantasy, a myth, based on some motherhood experiences rooted in the past, and especially before the onset of second-wave feminism. The myth depicts mothers as feminine, calm, self-sacrificing, domestic, and nurturing.[12] The ideal motherhood found within the Caldecott texts ignores varying motherhood voices, such as the non-domestic mother, the disabled mother, the impoverished mother, the lesbian mother, and many other possible mothering experiences. Further, I realize that the experiences of lived mothers in similar categories (two impoverished mothers, for instance) vary. Certainly, *a* culture or *a* sub-culture is as difficult to define as *a* motherhood.[13] However, there is little to no consideration given to even various

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[12] Here, I am thinking of physical representations; so, femininity is most often depicted through the mother character wearing long dresses and with her hair pulled back.
[13] See Chapter 1, Section 1.1 for a longer discussion.

"types" of mothers.[14] Rather, the most commonly appearing mother character in the Caldecott texts corresponds to an idealization of motherhood. Missing from these texts is any consideration of the anxieties and conflicts brought by motherhood as well as the boundaries between motherhood experiences because the suggestion in these texts is that "mother" is a type with static, predictable behavior, regardless of the conflict and/or the mother's ethnic or socio-cultural status. The inclusion of single mothers and one distinctly non-white mother in these award-winning texts does provide a cursory inclusion of motherhood experiences separate from the pre-defined ideal; however, I see these motherhoods regulated by the ideal or through the adoption of her characteristics. Thus homogeneity rather than diversity is emphasized.

2.1 Methodology

This dissertation was initially informed by Allen Pace Nilsen's article "Women in Children's Literature" which identifies a "cult of the apron" in picture books.[15] Since four decades have passed since Nilsen's article, and Caldecott Medal Winners have become more multicultural, I sought to find differences between the pre-1980 texts mentioned by Nilsen and more contemporary award-

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[14] Two single mothers appear in the award-winning texts, but their experiences are easily categorized as inside or outside of the motherhood ideal.
[15] *College English* 32.8 (1971).

winners.[16] In my assessment, the traditional and reductive images to which Nilsen objects most often present mothers as follows:

- situated within domestic settings.

- engaged in care-giving activities.

- clothed in long dresses and wearing their hair pulled back

- motivated only by care-giving responsibilities.

The first step was to record which books contain mother characters; half of the texts include mothers. Texts **with mother characters** include: *Black & White*; *Fables*; *Grandfather's Journey*; *The Hello, Goodbye Window*; *The House in the Night*; *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*; *Joseph had a Little Overcoat*; *Jumanji*; *Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Hood Story from China*; *Mirette on the High Wire*; *Ox-Cart Man*; *The Polar Express*; *Rapunzel*; *Snowflake Bentley*; *Smoky Night*; *St. George and the Dragon*; and *Tuesday*. Texts **with no mother characters** include: *A Ball for Daisy*; *Flostsam*; *Golem*; *The Glorious Flight Across the Channel*; *Hey, Al*; *Kittens' First Full Moon*; *Officer Buckle and Gloria*; *Owl Moon*; *Shadow*; *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*; *So You Want to be President?*; *Song and Dance Man*; *The Lion and the Mouse*; *The Man Who Walked Between the Cables*; *My Friend Rabbit*; *This is Not My Hat*; and *The Three Pigs*.

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[16] An increase in multi-cultural protagonists in Caldecott Medal Winners has occurred since Nilsen's article.

In examining the Caldecott winners from 1980-2014, I discovered that many texts retain the pre-1980 imagery.[17] Indeed, mothers from the 1980-2014 texts are most often depicted wearing dresses and with their hair pulled back. Aprons are not as prevalent as in pre-1980 texts; however, mothers almost always appear in the domestic space, and are still commonly shown in the kitchen (only one text depicts mother leaving for work outside of the home). I expand the observations of Nilsen to create a motherhood ideal and notice that: none of the mothers in the examined texts is given a first name; these mothers do not engage in the type of physical play and outdoor activities that fathers do; and if mother characters are granted agency, it is with the intent to protect their children.

Mother characters in these texts read as limited to dualities. Mothers either engage in nurturing activities indicative of the motherhood ideal or are woefully ignorant of what is happening to their children. In regards to nurturing, mothers are more often shown hugging, comforting, and caring for children than a father character. The persistent dramatization of motherhood in these texts suggests that nurture is *natural* for mothers because of their femaleness.[18] Indeed, it is moderately difficult for lived mothers to escape this expectation so that it is still not uncommon for mothers who do not feel an instant connection to their infant to

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[17] Specifically, *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, *The House in the Night*, *Joseph had a Little Overcoat*, *Jumanji*, *Ox-Cart Man*, *Rapunzel*, *Snowflake Bentley*, *Smoky Night*, and *St. George and the Dragon*.
[18] Naturalness in mothering is not an uncommon argument, appearing in the work of feminist scholars such as Andrea O'Reilly, Rozsika Parker, and Adrienne Rich.

be treated for a disorder.[19] In the lived mothering experience, this debatable

supposition that nurture is connected to femaleness and mothering is so strong

that assigning blame to mothers for epigenetic effects occurs, especially in some

mediums of popular culture. A recent study by Sarah S. Richardson and others

points to articles in popular culture such as "Mother's Diet During Pregnancy

Alters Baby's DNA" and "Pregnant 9/11 Survivors Transmitted Trauma to their

Children" to illustrate the point (131). In the award-winning texts, I find this

emphasis on femaleness and mothering through the motherhood ideal. The ideal

insists that the mother character is *expected* to nurture; therefore, the child reader

may associate this role with the idea of mothering, and, by extension the role of

"mother" in general—as well as his or her own mother. My conclusion here aligns

with Parker's argument that "children" will "absorb the imperative that there is

only one way to be a good mother" (2). My conclusion also connects to juvenile

literature scholarship since it aligns with Nodelman's argument that pictures

determine children's preferences; so, for example, it is questionable whether

children inherently relate to animals or whether they "learn an interest in such

humanized animals from their frequent appearances in books" (*Words* 35). I argue

that the child reader learns to prefer (and expect) the comfort provided by the

mother character. In the award-winning texts, this character is not played by a

male; so, the nurturing trait becomes associated with femaleness. In fact, the

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[19] "Reactive Attachment Disorder," *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR* (American Psychological Association, 2000).

expectation to nurture transcends birth-mother status so that any *female* acting as a mother is expected to naturally produce nurturing behavior[20].

Within the award-winning texts, the mother who does not nurture is the extreme opposite because she is depicted as woefully ignorant of the obstacles her child faces. Certainly, this ignorance may be related to the fantastical elements of the texts and the sense of independence that children may discover (or be encouraged to find) in these precursors to the *bildungsroman*, but I was surprised to discover seemingly out-of-touch mothers in the award-winning texts. I consider the dichotomous presentation of mothers in the award-winning books discouraging because this extreme (either absent or present mother characters) limits the representation of fictional mothers. These mother characters exist only in the domestic space and engage in activities focused on their children. This lack of diversity in motherhood representations limits the opportunity for non-stereotyped representations of mothers. Instead, the nurturing, domestic role of mother is emphasized so that a mother is reduced to being either present and nurturing or absent; when absent, she becomes, in a sense, not-mother.

Beverly Birns and Dale Hay argue that "images of motherhood can influence how women provide for their children and how they feel about themselves" and further that the goal of "adequate mothering" is to "raise a child

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[20] As explored in Chapter 1, the concept of "mother" includes more than biological mothers or women. A mother may be anyone who engages in the emotional and physical care-giving of a child. For instance, *A Ball for Daisy* demonstrates a child "mothering" a dog.

that adheres to cultural norms" (47). If this is the case, then these reductive images harm both mothers and child readers if we accept that juvenile literature provides a space to acculturate children.[21] In *Enchanted Hunters*, Maria Tatar associates bedtime reading with Mary Louise Pratt's contact zones where separate cultures meet and often experience conflict and/or coercion. So, bedtime reading becomes a space of acculturation where cultural expectations are communicated to children. Furthermore, Nodelman associates one of the colonizing effects of literature for children as teaching gender definitions so that the stories "act to address – or produce – the presumably different tastes and interests of male and female children" (*Hidden* 173). Arguably, this girl/boy distinction has a long history in juvenile literature. In marketing his *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, John Newbery, included a toy with each book—a ball for boys and a pin-cushion for girls. This 1744 text marks an attempt to differentiate girls from boys, even though the text was the same for boys and girls.

This chapter identifies trends in the representation of mothers and mother characters in the Caldecott Award winning texts.[22] It begins with an examination of *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, a Caldecott text published prior to the scope of this study in order to establish the existence of the types of texts to which Nilsen

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[21] The argument that juvenile literature acculturates children appears frequently in juvenile literature scholarship; see Peter Hunt, Perry Nodelman, Jacqueline Rose, and so on.

[22] The study considers only Caldecott Medal winners. Honor books were not analyzed for this project. Any reference to "award winners" pertains only to those texts earning the Caldecott Medal.

objected and to create the motherhood ideal.[23] The second section then considers *Snowflake Bentley* as a representative of the motherhood ideal exemplar from the 1980-2014 Caldecott texts and *Smoky Night*, which presents a mother character with elements of the motherhood ideal. The second section examines texts in which the child solves the conflict because of an unaware mother; in both *Mirette on the High Wire* and *Jumanji*, the mother characters display some elements of the motherhood ideal. The third section considers *A Ball for Daisy* and *Owl Moon* in which the mother is absent. Finally, I argue that *Black & White* depicts a mother who falls outside of the motherhood ideal. The text hints towards a sense of equality in the mother/father relationship, but ambiguities in the text obfuscate the mother's role. Through the analysis in this chapter, I establish a continued existence of the motherhood ideal as well as a duality in mother characters. In the Caldecott Medal winners examined, mother characters are limited to being aware or unaware of the child protagonist's conflict. Ultimately, the continued presence of the motherhood ideal limits mothering representations in the texts and promotes prescriptive mothering practices associated with naturalness and sacrifice.

2.1 Mrs. Duncan: An Image of the Motherhood Ideal

Although this study focuses on award winners from 1980-2014, one text from a pre-1980 Caldecott winner needs to be discussed because not only does it

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[23] Alleen Pace Nilsen, "Women in Children's Literature." *College English* 32.8 (1971).

provide an example of the reductive mothering identified by Nilsen, but also it influenced this dissertation.[24] Awarded the Caldecott at the beginning of the women's movement in academia, William Steig's *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (1969 winner) presents a stereotyped, traditional mother. The plot of *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* is that Sylvester, who likes to collect pebbles, finds a magic pebble in the forest one day. As he is about to be attacked by a lion, he wishes to be turned into a rock. Once his wish is granted, Sylvester cannot speak to call for help, nor can he touch the magic pebble to make another wish. So, although his parents search for Sylvester, they cannot find him. One year later, Sylvester's parents decide to picnic in the forest in an attempt to ignore their sorrow. They stop in a clearing and set up their picnic on a rock that, unbeknownst to them, is Sylvester. Unable to touch the pebble, Sylvester concentrates his thoughts on wishing to be himself at the same time that his parents wish for his presence. Finally, Sylvester becomes a donkey again and is reunited with his parents.

Like most mother characters in Caldecott texts, Sylvester's mother, Mrs. Duncan, is not given a first name. In her first appearance, Mrs. Duncan is in the domestic space; she wears a long dress and apron. She sweeps while Mr. Duncan reads his newspaper and Sylvester sorts his pebble collection; so, while both Mr. Duncan and Sylvester are connected to the outside world (Mr. Duncan through his

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[24] Alleen Pace Nilsen, "Women in Children's Literature." *College English* 32.8 (1971).

newspaper and Sylvester through his rocks), Mrs. Duncan remains firmly placed in the home.

2.1 *Sylvester* 1

Mr. and Mrs. Duncan are shown engaging in gender-defined activities while attempting to cope with their distress over Sylvester's appearance. In one frame, Mr. Duncan sits at a table with a closed book pushed aside. The companion frame places Mrs. Duncan in a rocking chair. Her attempt at knitting abandoned, Mrs. Duncan cries, and dying flowers in a nearby vase symbolize her disinterest in household chores. This neglect of domestic duties emphasizes her depression since she cannot complete the tasks with which she has been previously identified.

After a month of searching the same places over and over again, and inquiring of the same animals over and over again, Mr. and Mrs. Duncan no longer knew what to do. They concluded that something dreadful must have happened, and that they would probably never see their son again. (Though all the time he was less than a mile away.)
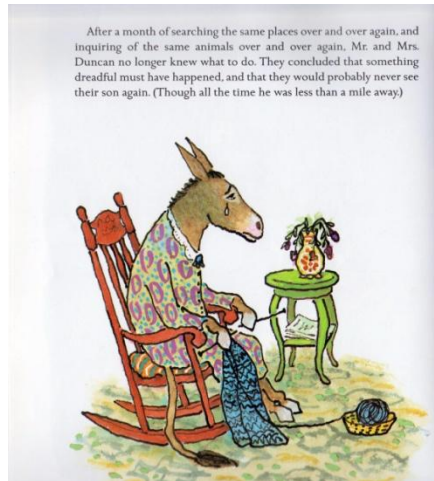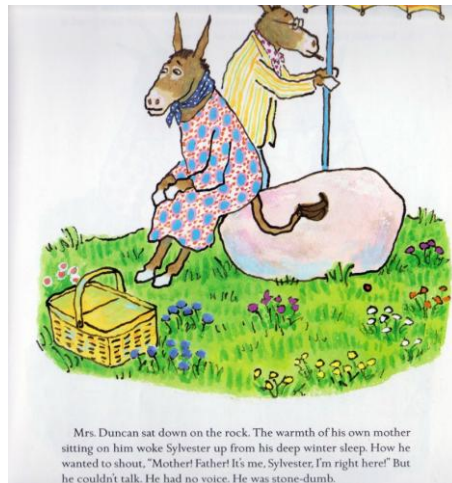
2.2 *Sylvester* 2

Furthermore, this juxtaposition of Mrs. Duncan and Mr. Duncan sends gender-defined messages; the father spends leisure time reading while mother chooses to knit.

2.3 *Sylvester* 3

The characterization of Mrs. Duncan as the nurturing care-giver appears throughout the text, and it relates directly to her relationship with Sylvester. For

instance, when the Duncans choose a spot for their picnic, the connection between mother and child is stronger than Sylvester's imprisonment. The regeneration that the despondent Sylvester feels due to his mother's presence will result in his eventual reunion with his family; thus, the motherhood ideal aids in conflict resolution.

Mrs. Duncan sat down on the rock. The warmth of his own mother sitting on him woke Sylvester up from his deep winter sleep. How he wanted to shout, "Mother! Father! It's me, Sylvester, I'm right here!" But he couldn't talk. He had no voice. He was stone-dumb.

2.4 *Sylvester* 4

Here, the natural bond between child and mother is emphasized as her "warmth" wakes Sylvester from his sleep (Steig). Curiously, Sylvester's rock possesses some womb-like qualities; first, in its shape and then in the sense that he is awoken from a "deep winter sleep" when his mother sits on the rock (Steig). Furthermore, in the next illustration, as Mrs. Duncan *feels* her entombed son's distress, she dramatizes naturalness. The rock, like a uterus, serves as both a

barrier and connective force between mother and son.[25] In this scene, comments

by Jessica Benjamin that suggestions of an omniscient mother persist because of a

"fail[ure] to conceptualize the mother as a separate subject outside the child"

apply (133). In my reading, the rock, the surrounding dialogue, and the fact that

Sylvester's father fails to sense Sylvester's presence symbolizes the idea that an

inseverable biological connection between mother and child exists. Mrs.

Duncan's sense of purpose is to mother, to be a mother. Her identity is limited to

enacting motherhood as illustrated through the physical connection between Mrs.

Duncan and Sylvester; she reads as indivisible from her son.

They sat down to eat. Sylvester was now as wide awake as a donkey that was a rock could possibly be. Mrs. Duncan felt some mysterious excitement. "You know, Father," she said suddenly, "I have the strangest feeling that our dear Sylvester is still alive and not far away."

2.5 *Sylvester* 5

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[25] Sylvester's rock could be interpreted as an egg as well with his mother nesting on him until he hatches. I think that, despite the differences between an egg and a uterus, the connectivity between mother and child is stressed in the images and text. Either womb or egg seems appropriate. I chose womb because Mr. Duncan also touches the rock but cannot feel or sense Sylvester. Only his mother is aware of a presence, which, in my view, makes the connection between mother and child unique and personal—more like an external womb than an egg.

With his mother sitting on the rock, Duncan wishes to become a donkey again. Upon his reunion with his parents, Sylvester is shown hugging his mother with his father nearby. Although a following illustration includes the three of them together, in the moment of reunion, Sylvester is comforted by his mother in a nurturing role while the father jumps about happily. Once again, her purpose is to comfort; she is not given any hint of characterization outside of the ideological "mother:"

2.6 *Sylvester* 6

I contend that *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* reduces both motherhood and gender through its text and illustrations. These images show children that mothers complete household chores, avoid physical tasks (Mr. Duncan sets up the umbrella at the picnic), and wear dresses. Furthermore, mothers maintain a biological connection to their children that affects their behavior and perspective, as shown when Mrs. Duncan *feels* Sylvester's presence; something that Mr.

Duncan cannot do. This connectedness between mother and son also suggests a selflessness as the mother character's motivation is limited to nurturing activities. Ultimately, these moments of contact relate to a perceived naturalness of nurturing in the mothering character, which results in a reductive message that presents selfless nurturing as an ideal and fails to welcome alternative representations of motherhood.

2.3 The Lasting Tradition: The Motherhood Ideal from 1980-2014

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble appeared in 1969 at a time during which women were more likely to not work outside of the home than they would be just one decade later. Presumably, then, the mother character and the images of her change as the years advance. As previously stated, that is not necessarily true of the 1980-2014 Caldecott Medal winners. Although most mothers no longer wear aprons, they continue to appear in dresses, and, more importantly, their motivations are limited to caring for children and managing the domestic space. The texts in this section include highly-involved mothers who conform to the types of traditional, idealized imagery seen in *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. The first text examined, *Snowflake Bentley*, depicts the motherhood ideal exemplar character that appears throughout the 1980-2014 time period.[26] The second text (*Smoky Night*) dramatizes a mother character that includes elements of the motherhood ideal; her ambiguous marital status prevents her from being

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[26] *Joseph had a Little Overcoat*, *Rapunzel*, *Fables*, *Ox-Cart Man*, and *St. George and the Dragon*.

labeled as a motherhood ideal exemplar. However, she does demonstrate most of the characteristics of the motherhood ideal.[27] In both texts, the motherhood ideal is aware of the child protagonist's conflict and contributes to the restoration of order.

Traditional mother imagery appears in *Snowflake Bentley* and follows the pattern identified in the preceding sections. The 1999 Caldecott winner was illustrated by Mary Azarian and written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin. Based on the life of Wilson Bentley, who perfected a method for photographing snowflakes that is still used today, the text is set in the latter half of the 19th century (Bentley was born in 1865)[28]. *Snowflake Bentley* begins with Wilson as a child who expresses an interest in photography. He shares this interest with his mother, and his parents eventually purchase a camera that he uses to begin his experiments. In addition to dramatizing Bentley's life, the text includes factual information about Bentley on the side of each page.

Since the text is set in approximately 1875, the mother is stylized in a fashion that fits the time period; but, not only does this imagery suggest a specific time period, it also fits the motherhood ideal identified by this study.

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[27] Throughout this study, I will make the case that characters display significant elements of the motherhood ideal without being represented as a true motherhood ideal exemplar.
[28] Douglas Prior, *Wilson A. Bentley, 1865-1931* (Arizona State University).

2.7 *Snowflake* 1

Bentley's mother appears clothed in a long dress covered by an apron, and her

hair is tucked up in a bun. Indeed, she looks almost grandmotherly, which adds to

the nostalgia dramatized through the historical setting. Situated in the domestic

space, she stands in front of the home and holds a duster. In a later image, she

knits while sitting in a rocking chair in an image reminiscent of Mrs. Duncan:
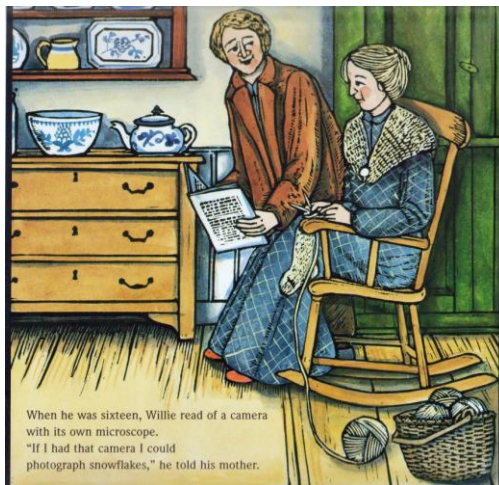
2.8 *Snowflake* 2

In both of the preceding scenes, Bentley's mother plays the role of nurturer as she supports Bentley in his interest of photographing snowflakes. Like Sylvester and Mrs. Duncan, the bond between Bentley and his mother is strong, and when Bentley has an interest in purchasing a camera, he shares it with his mother. She is his confidant. Unlike his father, Bentley's mother is aware of his passion and attempts to foster it. In fact, she gives him an old microscope to help with his studies.

Serving as an advocate for her child because she knew "he would not be happy" unless he could pursue his interest in photographing snowflakes, Bentley's mother discusses purchasing an expensive camera that Bentley has requested with his father (Martin). While his father at first disagrees, stating "Fussing with snow is just foolishness," he eventually agrees since "he loved his son" (Martin). Here, the motherhood ideal resolves a potential conflict, and Bentley's parents purchase the camera for him. While she expresses agency in supporting her son, this act is limited to a role of nurturing since she uses her voice to advocate for her son.

Willie's mother knew he would not be happy until
he could share what he had seen.
"Fussing with snow is just foolishness," his father said.
Still, he loved his son.
When Willie was seventeen
his parents spent their savings and bought the camera.

2.9 *Snowflake* 3

Bentley's mother appears outside of the domestic setting once, as shown below:

2.10 *Snowflake* 4

Here, she seems moderately out of place, as if she were plucked out of the private,

domestic space and placed in the public space. While Bentley's father's clothes

are appropriate for working outside, Bentley's mother could easily be placed back

inside the home. Still wearing a long dress and apron, she stands straight, almost

stilted compared to Bentley's father whose clothes appear disheveled as he leans forward, leading the cows.[29] Her physical appearance connects her to the home, and, as previously mentioned, her motivations are limited to supporting her child and maintaining the domestic space (much like *Mrs. Duncan in Sylvester & the Magic Pebble*). Through her nurturing guidance, Bentley may expand his interest in photography, ultimately becoming a skilled photographer.

While the setting is more contemporary than that of *Snowflake Bentley*, the mother in *Smoky Night* enacts characteristics of the motherhood ideal, especially the traditional nurturing role. Illustrated by David Diaz with text by Eve Bunting, *Smoky Night* (1995 award winner) was inspired by the Los Angeles riots of 1992. The text relates Daniel and Mama's experiences as they are forced to leave their apartment building because of looting and fires caused by a riot. They spend the night at a shelter where their cat befriends the cat of Mrs. Kim, an Asian-American woman who operates a grocery store in their neighborhood. The text addresses racial prejudices as Mama and Mrs. Kim set aside their differences after watching their cats play together. The book begins with these short sentences:

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[29] The dualism between mother and father characters displayed here also appears in Newbery texts. It receives a thorough examination in Chapter 4.
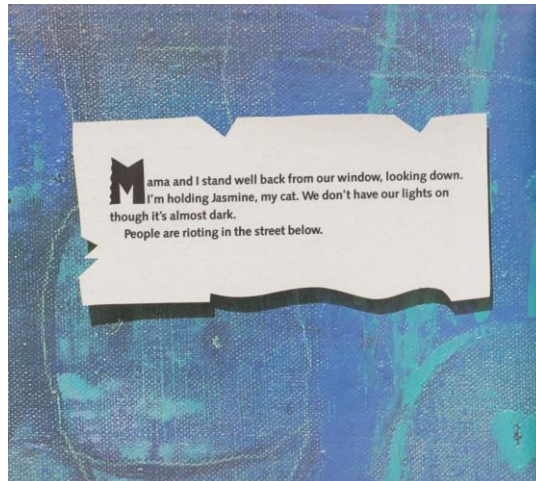
2.11 *Night* 1

Next, Daniel and Mama are shown standing at the window:

2.12 *Night* 2

She wears a dress, and, interestingly, is the only mother in the reviewed texts who wears her long hair down. Significantly, this text is the only award-winner that

addresses race *and* depicts non-white characters.[30] Still, the space for a diverse

(or at least, non-white) motherhood voice disappears because Daniel's mother

becomes a type as she enacts behavior emblematized in the motherhood ideal.

Despite the destruction and unpredictability of the riot outside their home, the

mother in *Smoky Night* maintains a calm, nurturing demeanor as she guides her

child through the frightening evening. This is best demonstrated in the scene at

bedtime. Daniel explains that Mama has told him they will sleep in the same bed

that night. Then, "[s]he makes me wash my face and brush my teeth. I'm to take

off my shoes but leave on my clothes. She puts me next to the wall" (Bunting).

Even in this time of distress, the mother attempts to maintain order through

routine by instructing the child to brush his teeth. In what is the strongest scene of

nurturing in the text, Mama lays next to Daniel in bed with a finger up to her

mouth, instructing him to shush. The cat lies in bed with them, and they all appear

emotionless, despite the ensuing riot outside.

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[30] In *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, the characters may be in a mixed-race family; race is unclear in the illustrations.
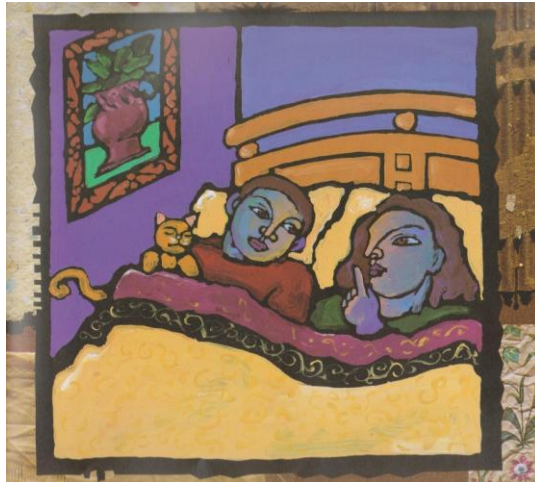
2.13 *Night* 3

The text contains disturbing, but realistic elements. Mama and Daniel relocate to a local shelter because a fire threatens their home. Daniel drinks hot chocolate at the shelter, but this childlike behavior contrasts the seriousness of the shelter in which crying people and one woman who "screams and screams," cause Daniel to hide under his blanket (Bunting). In another scene, Daniel expresses: "I grab hold of Mama because I think I see a dead man with no arms lying there, too. But it's just one of those plastic people that show off clothes in department stores" (Bunting). Later, at the shelter, Mama instructs Daniel to lie down, and Daniel explains: "She's always making me lie down" (Bunting). This insistence that Daniel lie down, and the word "always" denotes Mama's role as nurturer. She remains motivated to keep Daniel safe and comfortable as she strives to resolve the conflicts they confront throughout the dangerous night.

Even as a presumably single mother, Mama is never shown at work or discussing her job. Here, a space to explore a motherhood experience exists, but it is ignored. Of course, the pressing, dangerous external conflict may preclude the exploration of other themes since Daniel and Mama's immediate concern is survival. Yet, the text considers a theme other than survival through the conflict between Mama, Daniel, and Ms. Kim—racism. Mama mentions that they do not go to Ms. Kim's market because "it's better if we buy from our own people," and Daniel explains that his cat, Jasmine, and Mrs. Kim's cat fight while Mrs. Kim yells at Jasmine in a language he does not understand (Bunting). The text ends with a scene of racial unity as the Asian Ms. Kim's cat drinks milk next to Mama and Daniel's cat. Mama then invites Ms. Kim over to dinner, and the last image is of Daniel, Mama (standing behind Daniel), Ms. Kim, and the two cats' faces – all of which fill the frame.

2.14 *Night* 4

Despite being published in different decades, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, *Snowflake Bentley*, and *Smoky Night* share trends in their representations of traditional, selfless mothers (although Mama in *Smoky Night* contains elements of the motherhood ideal and is not an exemplar). These texts continually imply gender roles by placing women in traditional roles as nurturers and depict them as such through clothing and proximity to domestic spaces. If we accept Nodelman's suggestion that the images "imply attitudes only through systems of signification that work to create specific expectations in viewers," then the connection between text, image, symbol, and the implied messaging found within the motherhood ideal becomes undeniable (*Words* 42). In addition to stereotyping the appearance of mothers, these texts reinforce the domesticity of mothers and their ultimate responsibility for the care-giving of children. In the final assessment, nurturing is always the responsibility of the mother character in the aforementioned texts, and in addition to stereotyping mothers; this continuing trend prevents a representation of motherhood that considers lived experiences of motherhood in favor of an ideal.[31]

2.4 The Unaware Mother: Providing Space for Child-led Conflict Resolution

As underdeveloped as her traditional, domesticated counterpart, the clueless mother may be present but unaware of some meaningful conflict her

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[31] In fact, Susan Maushart discusses multiple studies documenting the common issue of a lack of time – not enough time to work, maintain the home, nurture the child, and pursue activities that interest the mother. Yet, mothers' guilt is almost always highest in the area of not "being there" or caring enough for their children (189).

child experiences; or, she may be generally removed from the action of the story. The most striking of the first type of clueless mother is the mother in *Mirette on the High Wire*. In this 1993 award winner by Emily Arnold McCully, the main character (a young girl named Mirette) befriends a grown man named Bellini who teaches her how to walk on the high wire. In the process, Bellini, who was once a high-wire performer overcomes his "fear on the wire" and finishes his own high-wire walk after Mirette performs in front of a small group near her house (McCully).

In this first scene, Mirette's mother is depicted wearing a long dress and with her hair pulled back. She works in the kitchen, as does Mirette, who is described as a "good listener" (McCully). Although this is rather flat characterization, she becomes more than just a little girl with that simple phrase while her mother remains a stereotype.
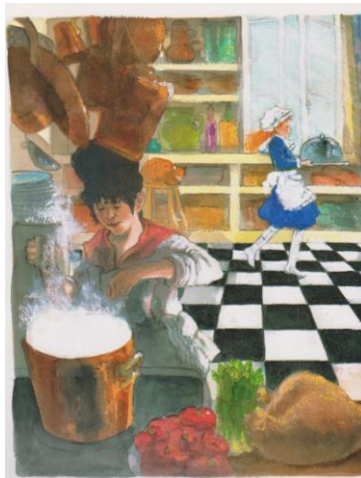
2.15 *Mirette* 1

Only shown one other time in the text as a silhouette, Mirette's mother is completely unaware of her friendship with Bellini. Yet, Mirette spends quite a bit of time with Bellini. In fact, even prior to developing a friendship with him, Mirette is shown in three scenes similar to this one watching Bellini.

Mirette watched him every day. He would slide his feet onto the wire, cast his eyes ahead, and cross without ever looking down, as if in a trance.

2.16 *Mirette* 2

Since Mirette watches him "every day," it would be reasonable to expect that her mother would be knowledgeable of Mirette's interest in Bellini, and, ultimately their friendship (McCully). Even more curious is that the training continues for some time, and Bellini is described as a "strict master" who ends up serving as a sort of parental figure to Mirette; yet, her mother remains unaware of their relationship (McCully).

2.17 *Mirette* 3

The relationship becomes strained at one point because Bellini (due to his fear of the wire) no longer wishes to teach Mirette, which saddens her. Rather than discuss the conflict with her mother, Mirette is depicted alone, scrubbing floors as she copes with the rift between herself and Bellini:[32]
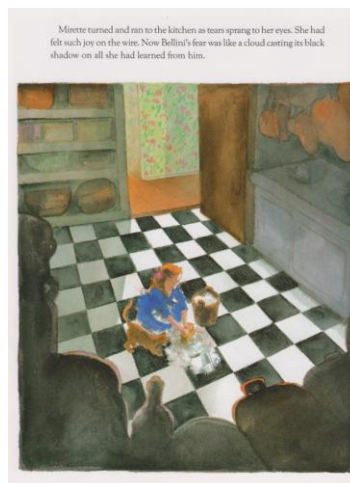
2.18 *Mirette* 4

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[32] Mirette's choice to not discuss the conflict with her mother previews adolescents in Newbery texts solving conflict without the assistance of their parents.

The mother is so removed that, when a commotion is heard at night, she says to Mirette: "Go and see what it is" and "Maybe it will cheer you up" (McCully). Of course, the noise is the result of one of Bellini's attempts at walking. Eventually, Bellini and Mirette walk together, as shown in the final, triumphant illustration of the text. In the final analysis, Mirette resolves her own conflicts due to her mother's absence. Her mother shares *physical* traits found in the motherhood ideal. The lack of ambiguity and tensions in her character contribute to her idealized representation. However, her ignorance to her daughter's conflicts distinguishes her from those mothers who display omniscience regarding their children; she contains physical characteristics of the motherhood ideal but does not enact the ideal. Still, as she is devoid of any characterization and aligned physically with the motherhood ideal, Mirette's mother contributes to the stereotyping of mother characters.

Another example of an unaware mother is found in Chris Van Allsburg's popular text *Jumanji* (1982 award winner). Here, the mother (and father) are oblivious to their children bringing animals into the house through a game that they play while the parents attend the opera. Similar to *The Cat in the Hat*, only the body of the mother character is shown, almost as it would appear to a child who is not looking up. Still, in her appearance, she follows the trend of other Caldecott winners since she wears a dress, and, although her hair appears to be cut short instead of in a bun, it does not hang loosely.

2.19 *Jumanji*

We do hear the mother's voice, but her directions are either about keeping the house clean or relate to the children's well-being. True to the expected role as nurturer, she greets the children with a soft, "Wake up, dears," and then, after inquiring about their well-being, directs them to put on their pajamas (Van Allsburg). Since the children have recaptured the animals, she is unaware of the chaos that ensued in her absence. Like Seuss's iconic book, the children in *Jumanji* must resolve the conflict as they return the house to normal so as not to upset mother with a destroyed domestic space.

In a sense, picture books like *Mirette on the High Wire*, and *Jumanji* are the precursor to the *bildungsroman* found in many children's novels. They remove the child from the world of the parent in a way that is not too uncomfortable for either child or parent and then return the child home. These mothers do not reestablish order or solve conflict. Some juvenile literature

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theorists would argue that the theme of children learning to overcome a challenge in a safe space, such as the home, is certainly a valuable component of juvenile literature.[33] Indeed, in many ways, the texts examined demonstrate that picture books have not changed much since Margaret Wise Brown's iconic *Goodnight, Moon* (1947), which serves primarily to comfort children before bedtime and assure them that the images they see prior to falling asleep will still be there in the morning. Yet, adults interpret the needs of children through the creation and distribution of literature for children—whether *children* seek "comfort" or "nostalgia" in the reading experience is debatable. Alison Lurie's arguments that children prefer subversive literature that challenges rules proves useful here since the Caldecott committees overwhelmingly choose texts that provide a soothing resolution that emphasize stability.[34] Even in 2014, a text such as Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1964 winner), with its inclusion of a conflict between mother and son remains somewhat of an anomaly.[35] In fact, of the thirty-four award winners reviewed for this study, not one leaves the conflict unresolved, fewer than one-third occur outside of a domestic setting, and none focus on the negative emotional experiences of the child. The post-1980 Caldecott Medal winners demonstrate that picture books chosen for an award require a satisfactory, comforting conclusion for the child reader. In the examined texts, the

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[33] Jerry Griswold, *Feeling Like a Kid* (Johns Hopkins University Press), 29.
[34] Alison Lurie, "A Child's Garden of Subversion," *New York Times*
[35] Of course, Max and his mother presumably reconcile as Max returns home from his adventure to find that his mother cooked dinner for him.

power of mother is noted, but only as it pertains to her role as nurturer and

guardian of the domestic space. The insistence that mother provide the comfort

belies lived realities and presumes that children and adult purchasers prefer this

fantasy over the potential to empower mothers. The controlled femininity found

through the motherhood ideal guarantees mother's presence; but, as the texts with

absent or unaware mothers demonstrate, conflict may be resolved without a

mother.

2.5 The Absent Mother

Certainly, a frightening thought for a child is the loss of his or her mother.

While none of the texts specifically address the absence of a mother, some texts

include no images of mothers or maternal figures.[36] So what happens when

mother is missing? In my review of the texts, the mother's absence is simply not

addressed. On occasion, another character may play the role of nurturer; that

character is always another female.[37] A more recent winner that removes mothers

does places a young girl in the role of nurturer. In Chris Raschka's *A Ball for*

Daisy (2012 winner) the dog, Daisy, is comforted by a girl following the loss of

her toy ball. Wearing a long dress (similar to the traditional depictions of mothers)

and engaged in a moment of care-giving, the girl appears as a mother-in-training.

In the image that follows the moment of reassurance, Daisy is depicted alone but

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[36] See page 45 for a complete list.
[37] The exception is *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* (2011 winner) in which Amos, a zookeeper, is cared for by his animal friends when he is ill.

seemingly more relaxed. Once again, an award-winning text presents

stereotypical gender performances, and, in this case, suggests its practice into

future generations.

2.20 *Daisy*

Only one reviewed text focuses on the relationship between a father and

child. The text establishes a contrasting presentation of the parent/child

relationship while signifying traits with fatherhood. In the 1988 award-winner

Owl Moon (illustrated by John Schoenherr and written by Jane Yolen), the father

and child character undergo an adventure as they search for owls in the winter

night. A sense of peacefulness emanates through the illustrations of a snowy

landscape; a reader can almost hear the quiet crunching of snow beneath the

father and child's feet as they walk through the forest.

While the images are tranquil, a sense of nurture and comfort are absent

from the text. In fact, the child remarks: "When you go owling/you don't need

words/or warm/or anything but hope" (Yolen). Interestingly, this type of "hope" seems to occur away from the home (and, presumably, mom). Through adventure and maintaining hope, the father and child are rewarded with views of owls at the end of the text. Unlike scenes with mothers, the child appears active and engaged in behavior inappropriate for the quiet, calm domestic space as she calls for owls with dad:

2.21 *Owl*

None of the reviewed award-winners include a scene quite like this one with a mother character. Almost always, mom remains in the domestic space and certainly does not take the child on an adventure past bedtime in a potentially hazardous environment, like a snowy night in which both parent and child are

clothed in protective, warm clothing.[38] Through her unrelenting presence in the domestic space, mother symbolizes comfort, warmth, safety, and consistency.

2.6 Not-so Black and White: (Shades of) Egalitarian Parenting

A unique mothering experience appears in *Black & White* (1991 winner) by David Macaulay in which mother and father are labeled "problem parents." The text follows three story lines and presents them in a somewhat disjointed manner. A disclaimer at the front of the book states: "This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended" (Macauly). In short, *Black & White* presents a series of events that may prove challenging for younger readers to decipher; still, the coded messages are worthy of examination.

The "Problem Parents" in the story only become a "problem" once they change their normal patterns of leaving for work in the city at 7:00 a.m. and returning at 7:00 p.m. simply to sort the mail, "ask about homework, and send us to bed" (Macaulay). These are the stereotypical middle-class parents who work so many hours that they become disengaged from family life—an image of the children watching the distracted parents pour milk on the dog at the breakfast table while they read the paper serves to symbolize that idea.

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[38] Daniel's mother in *Smoky Night* is forced to lead her son to safety after a riot; she does not choose to subject her son to a potentially dangerous situation.
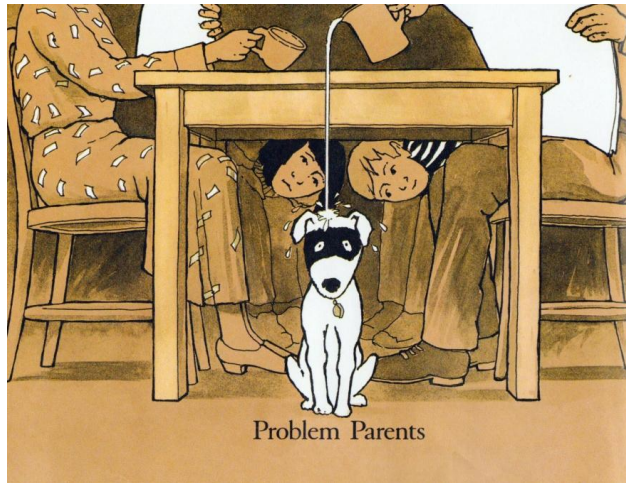
2.22 *Black & White* 1

Here, mom wears a dress and shoes with heels. In a following scene, she is shown

leaving for work and holding a bag that seems to contain a newspaper and work

files. This is the only Caldecott winner of those examined for this project that

depicts the mother character leaving the home for a professional job (*The Hello,*

Goodbye Window mentions mom work, but she is not shown doing so).
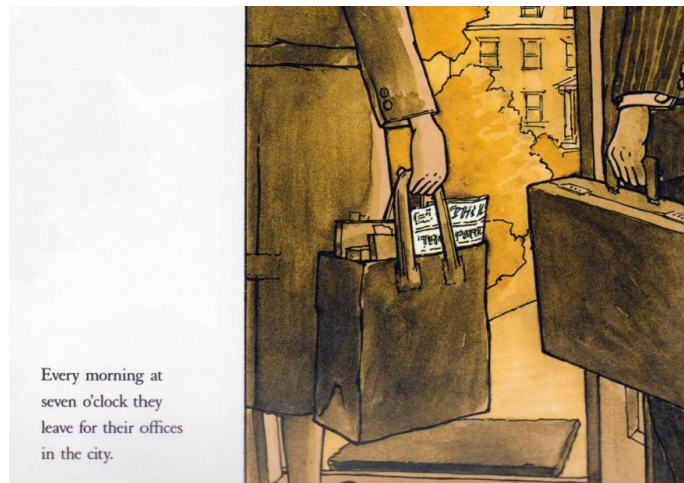
2.23 *Black & White* 2

When the problem parents arrive home at their usual time, the children immediately sense that something is different. The children and the dog are shown looking concerned as the parents walk in wearing newspapers and marching around the living room singing, "laughing, ignor[ing] the mail" (Macaulay).
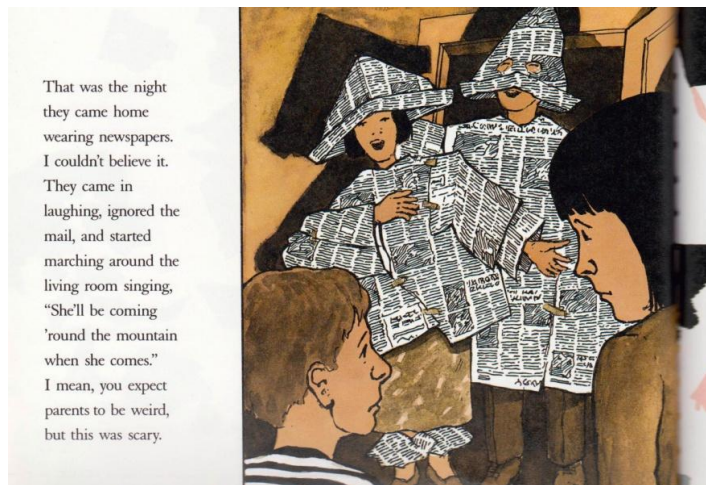
That was the night they came home wearing newspapers. I couldn't believe it. They came in laughing, ignored the mail, and started marching around the living room singing, "She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes." I mean, you expect parents to be weird, but this was scary.

2.24 *Black & White* 3

The narrator asks Mom if she wants to check on their homework, but instead of assuming her predictable role, she "ask[s] if I want to be a turkey" (Macaulay). The narrator explains: "I mean, you expect parents to be weird, but this was scary" (Macaulay). The children decide to try to play along with the parents, but they feel silly and then decide to "save" Dad by giving him the mail. Instead of responding as they expect, Dad simply pauses and then rips the mail into pieces. The reason for the parents' unusual behavior is never explained; but, child readers are assured that all will be well when clean up ensues after an unexpected and

unusual dinner at a restaurant on a school night. Mom and Dad do ask about homework right before the children go to bed, and the narrator concludes their family's story by stating: "You've got to watch those parents. It's exhausting" (Macaulay).

I've got to admit, it was kind of fun in the end—even cleaning up all the papers around the house. But just as I was heading for bed I heard, "Hey, kiddo. What about that homework?" You've got to watch those parents. It's exhausting.
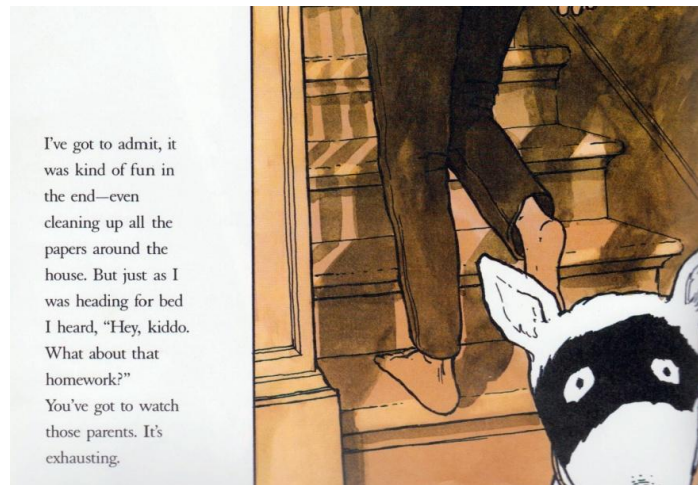
2.25 *Black & White* 4

The children of the "Problem Parents" do not resolve the conflict; rather, they are relegated to watching the illogical behavior of their parents in a type of role-reversal that parent readers, who often watch their own children behave in illogical ways, will understand. In the end, the parents return to their normal roles, and any lingering sense of anxiousness on the part of the child reader ameliorates as the demarcation between "child" and "adult" is once again established.

Black and White presents the most developed mother character and certainly one whose dramatized experiences separate her from the idealized mother. Although her departure from home is limited to the doorframe, she does

hold a career outside of the home. In her call for egalitarianism, Adrienne Rich

advocates shared domestic responsibilities, and some of that is evident in *Black &*

White.[39] Mother shares duties with father as they both review homework. In short,

Black and White presents images of a somewhat developed mother character,

capable of making choices, who seems a bit more like mothers in this postmodern

era through her ambiguous motivations. Her illogical behavior also results in a

character development not seen in other award-winning texts. As mother and

father engage in the same illogical behavior, I read no indictment of her status as a

working mother who falls outside of the motherhood ideal. Any criticism is levied

against choosing to ignore the imperative to play. The motherhood ideal is not

required in order for a sense of comfort and stability to emerge in the resolution,

as shown because the child narrator initially labels her parents' behavior "scary,"

and then later states that "it was kind of fun" (Macaulay). Through the example of

Black & White, I argue that literature for children may create a fictional space that

does not advocate stereotypes and still resolves the conflict through imaginative

scenes.

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[39] *Of Woman Born* (W.W. Norton & Company).

2.7 Concluding Thoughts: The Continued Search for Diverse

Motherhoods

As texts like *Black and White* demonstrate, complex characters, conflicts,

and ambiguities may be present in juvenile literature, even in picture books.[40] Yet,

in my reading, most Caldecott Medal winners promote, even celebrate the status

quo to offer safety through fantasy to child readers. As *Smoky Night* indicates,

even when the domestic setting is not obviously a nuclear family, the role of

nurturer remains with the mother. *A Ball for Daisy* advocates this through the

mother-in-training scene in which the child nurtures Daisy.[41] Through its fantasy,

the motherhood ideal creates a sense of nostalgia for traditionalism in both family

and motherhood. Perhaps, then, the images in these generally safe texts reinforce

cultural assumptions that lie below the surface of our chatter about equality and

gender-neutral family roles and the slow-moving march towards the practice of

egalitarianism both inside and outside of the domestic space. Andrea O'Reilly

writes that:

> Despite forty years of feminism . . . modern motherhood continues
> to function as a patriarchal institution that is largely impervious to
> change because it is grounded in gender essentialism, a gender
> ideology that established a naturalized opposition between public
> and private space (367).

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[40] I read ambiguities in a number of the texts from the 1980-2014 time period, including: *Black &
White*, *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, *The Invention of Hugo Cabaret*, *Jumanji*, *Rapunzel*, and
Tuesday.
[41] *The Hello, Goodbye Window* prescribes this for future generations in the final scene as the
female child character states her commitment to becoming a mother.

In evaluating her statement, we must consider research that concludes how even the most well-meaning and highly educated couples almost always slip into standard, traditional, gender-informed parental and domestic roles once a child becomes part of the family—even if the couple engaged in an egalitarian distribution of chores and domestic duties in the past (Maushart 189). Is it possible, then, that the overworked mother-reader who is trying to connect with her child in a rare moment of quiet during bedtime reading is actually left feeling mommy guilt or angst? A response in the affirmative is conceivable, and, it is akin to theories that liken false body images in popular magazines as contributing to eating disorders in young women and feelings of inadequacy in women in general. I identify an intertextuality between messages in popular culture, such as mothering magazines, and those found within these award-winning picture books that may be read to communicate the only mother is the idealized nurturer. Despite the evolving responsibilities and images of real mothers, these fictional mothers remain idealized. Once again, there is no space to explore diverse motherhoods through the very real ambiguities experienced by mothers and those who mother.

Another point of consideration is that these images may limit children's imaginations. Nodelman mentions criticism that, in presenting illustrations, picture books prevent children from inventing images in their minds (*Words* 280). For the immediate purposes of this project, the concern is that the images present

limited options. In other words, I am not concerned with whether picture books

prevent children from using their imaginations *at all* but rather, by presenting

limited representations of mothers in limited roles, they *constrain* the child

reader's ability to invent other possible images or roles for mothers. In a similar

vein, readers engaged in the act of mothering may feel a sense of disconnect from

the texts that present fantastical, idealistic mothers. As Nodelman writes, "our

understanding of pictures starts with wholes and breaks down into details" (*Words*

202). Is that "whole" limiting, though? In my research, as the question pertains to

images of mothers in award-winning texts, and presumably the normative

expectations implied in those images, it is definitely limiting. In addition, I find it

limiting to children's ability to imagine an individualized role for themselves as a

mother or father. Sanctioned by the award-winning texts, the ideal image of

mother becomes a non-negotiable.

Finally, I am not objecting to the concept of nurturing as a component of

motherhood; my concern is with the seeming *naturalness* ascribed to it in relation

to motherhood.[42] Mothers definitely engage in nurturing behavior, as do fathers.[43]

Still, mothers perform many other roles than that of nurturer, and nurturing may

not be their primary role. My concern is that, even though she is no longer

stereotyped as adorned in an apron and standing in the kitchen, stereotyping

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[42] In addition to prescribing gender roles, this naturalness is dangerous because it places children raised by other family members, adopted children and those in non-biological family units as non-normative.

[43] Fathers appear infrequently in these texts and are not shown engaging in nurturing behavior.

remains since the modern mother of picture books is depicted as useful only when she provides comfort. These limiting views and images send a definite message about any desire to explore and celebrate individual experiences of mothering. Certainly those in the motherhood role care for their children, but what is the cultural value of placing a primacy on the act of nurturing over all other potential acts of motherhood? I see an attempt to define *a* motherhood – to essentialize and define something that is fundamentally indefinable with an expectation that then suggests a value hierarchy for lived experiences of motherhood. If motherhood can be labeled and packaged neatly, then it becomes simple to place those outside of the package, those on the lower end of the hierarchy, into the category of "unstable," "unsuitable;" or, at least, in need of assistance. Defining motherhood, especially with positive connotations, ensures the continuation of an interest in women to become mothers.

As decades of children's literature theory has demonstrated, these texts are far more than "kiddie lit" and deserve critical attention.[44] Embedded in these award-winning texts is not only the motherhood ideal, but also a concern with safety and conflict resolution, which relates somewhat to the continued appearance of the motherhood ideal. Still, "culture" and "media" continue to "lon[g] for a representative, ideal mother" (Hall and Bishop x). Idealization rejects nuance or complications, and a conflicted motherhood invites scrutiny of

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[44] Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

lived practices—something which change the practice of "glorify[ying] the ideal

of motherhood" and "tak[ing] for granted the work of motherhood" (Maushart 3).

Rather, an idealized motherhood, especially one that is presented to children is far

less messy; but, I view the potential for detrimental long-lasting effects that

encourage gender perfomativity over egalitarianism. Despite the inclusion of a

few single mothers in the award winners and one working mother, I view the

overall homogenized representation of motherhood with its emphasis on nurturing

as disconcerting. Far too many similarities between the fictional mothers are

illustrated and suggested so that the depiction of a limiting motherhood

experience persists within these texts. The motherhood ideal provides little space

to empower mothers as it limits a mother character's influence to her domestic

and/or care-giving duties. In this way, her presence avoids discussion of the

messiness of mothering and ensures future mothers by glamorizing motherhood.

Chapter 3

Mrs. Duncan Revisited: The Motherhood Ideal in Newbery Texts

In this chapter, I analyze the fictional representation of child protagonists'

mothers in Newbery Medal winners, ultimately establishing the existence of a

motherhood ideal and arguing that the motherhood ideal codifies fictional

mothering representations.[45] Throughout the research for this chapter, I was

inspired by Ann Dally's comment that: "By idealizing it is possible to control"

because I identify the potentiality for an ideal in literature to influence a reader's

impression of that subject in the lived experience (97). Since this project situates

juvenile literature as a place for cultural reproduction and contends that fictional

texts reproduce socio-cultural practices, the presence of a limiting, ideal in the

fictional space suggests an acceptance of that ideal in the cultural space. In

postulating a connection between fictional representations and socio-cultural

practices, this projects follows in the tradition of juvenile literature scholarship;

for example, Jack Zipes writes that literature for children serves as a

"methodological manner in which we cultivate familial and institutional practices

to make kids think and act in the same predictable ways" (2).[46] Although I

recognize the playfulness and subversiveness in some juvenile literature and reject

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[45] The motherhood ideal may create a reference for appropriate or acceptable mothering practices in child or adult readers.

[46] As discussed in Chapter 1, juvenile literature is often interpreted as a space for acculturation and the transmission of socio-cultural values (Beverly Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*; Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*; John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature*, and so on).

that it is a wholly didactic literature, I do agree that literature for children *most often* performs the cultural work of acculturation as it dramatizes appropriate social interactions and problem-solving. "Juvenile literature" encompasses a broad collection of texts and serves different purposes to academic and non-academic readers. I agree with Zipes's assessment that it is a "vast historical complex" for academics but provides moments of "pleasurable or compulsive reading" for most non-academic readers (70). I am most concerned with award-winning texts because they serve as cultural arbiters. As mentioned several times in this project, one of the main considerations of my research is the messages being transmitted to readers through these sanctioned, award-winning texts about mothering and gender.[47] Therefore, I argue that the motherhood ideal depicts a passive femininity, and it rejects egalitarian parenting. I further contend that a motherhood ideal similar to the one identified by feminist scholars in regards to media and cultural studies appears in contemporary Newbery texts, and I advocate for its evaluation in feminist scholarship. As these texts provide some of the first instances of gender performance for children (through the mother and child protagonist roles), they must be considered with feminist theories about issues such as a lasting patriarchy, economic conditions that limit women, and gender essentialism. Finally, the definition of the motherhood ideal as it pertains to Newbery texts established in this chapter will be used in subsequent chapters.

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[47] I use "readers" here because I believe that the potentiality exists for adults and children to interpret socio-cultural messaging in literature for children.

Since this project evaluates the awards given by the American Library Association, I considered whether a connection between the motherhood ideal in Caldecott and Newbery texts exists. In Chapter 2 characters representing the motherhood ideal in Caldecott texts are identified as follows: **situated within domestic settings**, **engaged in care-giving activities**, **clothed in long dresses, wearing their her hair pulled back**, and **motivated only by care-giving responsibilities**. In summary, the motherhood ideal in Caldecott texts appears as characters who practice traditional femininity and expresses the sole motivation to nurture. She cares for her child(ren) without hesitation, always making the correct choice and offering sound advice. Mostly silent and presented as an object to her child(ren), the motherhood ideal never becomes the literary subject. Her presence comforts the child, and her characterization shows no signs of the complexities found in the lived mothering experience.

As discussed in Chapter 2, my reading of the motherhood ideal aligns the concept with Adrienne Rich's institution of motherhood and Betty Friedan's feminine mystique – both theories cite patriarchal control of mothering by privileging traditionally feminine characteristics (such as passivity). Similarly, E. Ann Kaplan comments that the 19th-early 20th century motherhood myths present an ideal "angel" mother who practices the type of "purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness" defined in Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood" (24). Rich and Kaplan's arguments are revisited and expanded by other feminist

writers, such as Susan Douglas and Susan Maushart who note the continued

expectation of exclusive mothering, which requires mothers to provide almost all

of the care for their children. Indeed, Douglas identifies a "new momism" visible

in popular culture that depicts traditional feminism and an unobtainable perfect

mothering. Similarly, Andrea O'Reilly characterizes the "Good Mother" as a

"select group of women who are white, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied,

married, thirty something, in a nuclear family with usually one to two children,

and, ideally full-time mothers" (7). The Caldecott motherhood ideal falls outside

of O'Reilly's specific definition, instead seeming to range in age, but O'Reilly's

"Good Mother" offers an updated version of Kaplan's "angel" mother myth,

which does appear in the motherhood ideal.[48] Despite the progress evident in

cultural practices and the seeming acceptance of heterogeneous motherhoods

(largely due to the work of academic and cultural feminists), a prevailing

motherhood ideal remains in these award-winning texts.

     Understanding the Caldecott motherhood ideal is necessary because my

research focuses on the most prominent awards conferred by the American

Library Association and attempts to look at them in relation to each other.

Newbery texts, as novels, tend to present more complicated plots and

characterization than Caldecott texts; so, I speculated that the mother characters in

Newbery texts may reject and/or complicate the motherhood ideal through a

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[48] Kaplan writes about the end of the 19th century-first half of the 20th century, but I argue that the "angel" mother imagery extends past that time period.

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mother character's voice and/or agency. As such, I considered the following questions while evaluating mother characters:

- How often are the mothers given a voice?
- Are they allowed to tell their own story?
- Are they seen without the children?
- Do they have motivation and/or interests other than mothering?

Certainly, second and third-wave feminists have challenged the patriarchy, and, as Andrea O'Reilly writes, "good" mothers may now include "noncustodial, single, queer, transgendered, old, young, and working" mothers in addition to other mothers, such as grandmothers; however, not all of these heterogeneous mothers appear in Newbery texts, and none of them are seen in the Newbery motherhood ideal (8). In addition, of the twenty-four texts included in this study, only three include non-white child protagonists and their mothers.[49] The mother characters in the award-winning texts *most often* demonstrate Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey's conclusion that "the maternal behavior of the middle class becomes culturally constructed and codified as the real, normal, and natural way to mother" (30).[50] As such, any reference to "normative" denotes the generalized experience of primarily white, middle-class, married, heterosexual mothers.[51]

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[49] *Kira-Kira*; *Bud, Not Buddy*; and *Walk Two Moons*.
[50] Walkerdine and Lucey write about the lived mothering experience, but the characteristics appear in literature, especially literature for children as well.
[51] Even "middle class" is difficult to define since these texts are set in a variety of time periods, and socio-economic status fluctuates. Furthermore, the Newbery texts tend to describe class status only if it affects the plot. Since none of the families in the Newbery texts are described as wealthy, I read those families not otherwise defined as battling poverty to be situated in the middle class.

While many cultures and subcultures exist even in this definition of "normative," they are rarely seen in the Newbery texts examined in this study. The term "normative" in this study does reflect the Walkerdine and Lucey quote. However, "normative" also appears in motherhood and gender studies and is usually interpreted to mean traditional, heterosexual gender performance and relationships; so, that connotation influenced this project as well.[52] Therefore, in addition to identifying the award-winning texts' limited inclusion of non-white mothers, this project considers whether (and how) the idealized mother characters promote normative gender roles.

The motherhood ideal presents one, prescriptive motherhood ideology as proper. Motherhood discourse is limited and myth-making prioritized through the impossibility of this mother type. Although a lengthy discussion of the motherhood ideal appears throughout this chapter, a brief definition is useful here. Generally, the motherhood ideal depicted in Newbery texts contains the following characteristics:

- displays traditionally feminine characteristics in appearance
- practices passivity
- appears almost exclusively in the domestic space
- remains emotionally calm and stable
- rarely, if ever, becomes the literary subject
- remains an object to the child protagonist

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[52] In gender studies, the use of "normative" most often aligns with Judith Butler's theories on gender performance. I am thinking primarily about the following scholars: Rozsika Parker, Andrea O'Reilly, Susan Maushart, Valerie Walkerdine, and Sara Ruddick. In juvenile literature, "normative" features in the works of Roberta Trites and Marah Gubar who write about feminism and juvenile literature. Perry Nodelman uses this term as well.

- practices nurturing activities
- displays few, if any, character flaws
- practices confident mothering and is not disturbed by the chaos of mothering
- displays few, if any, contradictions in her characterization
- practices selflessness
- maintains a positive, heterosexual marriage.

The motherhood ideal emphasizes the mother character's selflessness, nurturing traits, and her emotional stability. These mother characters provide appropriate advice to child protagonists as they practice gender-defined behavior; finally, the motherhood ideal character displays few, if any flaws.

"Emotional stability" requires further explanation; the term represents the mother character's retention of a calm, rational emotional state. She refrains from crying, arguing, raising her voice, or overreacting. The passive, controlled femininity reads as a reaction to the idea that femininity "has always been linked with emotion, passion, desire, irrationality, and madness" (Blackman and Walkerdine 137). Far from the fictional representations of hysteria evidenced especially in early 20th-century fiction, these mother characters "behave," practicing a controlled, civilized femininity. In addition, these characters often ascribe a naturalness to mothering that connects it to the female body so that mother characters read as physically destined to perform certain activities. This limiting representation of both mothering and femaleness dramatizes mother characters as possessing (through naturalness) a type of omniscience that allows

them to remain intuitively aware of their children's thoughts and feelings of distress.

After establishing the existence of a motherhood ideal, the reasons for its existence need to be considered. The emphasis placed on these normative traits by the Newbery selection committees (as demonstrated through their continued appearance in the award-winners) suggests that these traits are considered uncontroversial and that they would appeal to those responsible for purchasing the texts. Roderick McGillis posits that juvenile literature "perpetuates the values and cultural conceptions of the ruling group so to not alienate buyers" (38). Again, the oft-cited argument by juvenile literature scholars that literature for children acculturates its readers into the adult world appears. I connect McGillis's statement here to another characteristic of both Newbery and Caldecott texts— nostalgia. Arguments that literature for children creates "nostalgia" appear throughout the writings of juvenile literature scholars, and the term most often refers to an attempt by adults to recreate a past that may or may not have existed.[53] Specifically, Nodelman writes that nostalgia signifies a "desire for an imaginary reveling in a golden, simpler time now past" (*Hidden* 46). Nostalgia assists in constructing childhood, primarily by insisting upon the innocence of childhood. In so doing, "child" becomes a concept separate from "adult." As discussed in Chapter 1, "innocence" in childhood introduces a problematic

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[53] See Perry Nodelman, Jack Zipes, John Stephens, Roberta Trites, Andrea MacLeod, and Leonard Marcus, for instance.

concept that requires one to overlook the cruelness of childhood as evidenced through children's behavior (bullying, fighting, etc.) and the traumatic lived experiences of many children (coping with death, poverty, illness, discrimination, and any other difficult issues). Within the award-winning texts examined in this project, this nostalgia creates a myth of "family" and "tradition," and even "mother" that is simply untrue of many lived experiences. Since "mother" relies on one's relationship with a child as well as social constructs, "mother," in the lived experience results in varied and personal definitions. Again, I am reminded of Hall and Bishop's argument that American culture desires a "simple, reliable definition and representation of motherhood" (ix). Through this quest for a consistent definition, the motherhood ideal, the myth, becomes the marketed representation, thus suggesting a certain norm or expectation and limiting the fictional representation of diverse mothering experiences. I argue that promoting a false idea of innocence and nostalgia over the potential strength of the fictional mother prevents the child reader from being exposed to representations of egalitarianism in parenting.

I read the motherhood ideal's appearance in juvenile literature as having some connection to generic history. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the distinction between so-called "boys" and "girls" books became more pronounced. Elizabeth Segel argues that "the women who dominated the ranks of the juvenile authors viewed writing for children as the exercise of

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feminine moral 'influence" (Segel 515). Within that doctrine was a

"restrictiveness of the woman's role as prescribed by the girls' books" (Segel

519). I mention this because a historical precedence in literature associates the

female character (girls) as capable of disrupting order. Unlike the boy characters,

who are often disorderly as well, the girls are trained into proper behavior. Even

though female protagonists may resist femininity, "nearly all of them capitulate in

the end" (Segel 517).[54] The main characters in *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little*

Women provide examples that literature (especially that which appeals to

children) has a history of training girls to "capitulate" by becoming mothers.

At the same time that girls are associated with challenging order, or the

status quo, as children; they hold the power to restore order as mothers-in-

training. In contemporary juvenile literature, I do read similarities to the texts

identified by Segel through the mother characters. So, when Birns and Hay write

that: "A culture's views about mothers often depends on its beliefs about the

nature and needs of children," I read a connection to the motherhood ideal (47).

Her presence restores order to the children who require regulation (this will be

shown through *Jacob Have I Loved*, for instance). In subsequent chapters, her

presence (or the adoption of her characteristics) will be shown to regulate

mother/daughter conflict. She will rectify harmful mothering practices and

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[54] Segel writes about Jo March from *Little Wom*en and Anne Shirely from *Anne of Green Gables*. I agree with her assessment here.

neutralize some diverse expressions of character to ensure that mothers retain order.

While the previous chapter required the use of an award winner outside of the decades being examined to establish the motherhood ideal, I analyze a text from the first decade of this study to argue for the existence of a motherhood ideal. In Katherine Paterson's 1981 winner, *Jacob Have I Loved*, the motherhood ideal appears in the characterization of the mother, Susan. I argue that Susan embodies the traits of the motherhood ideal, and the following explication focuses on her selflessness, emotional stability, flat character development, passivity, and limited positioning as literary subject. I argue that, in addition to providing a representation of the motherhood ideal, Susan's characterization enacts nostalgia. While Susan serves as the motherhood ideal exemplar, Lowis Preston in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh* also embodies the motherhood ideal. In the second section, I argue that Lowis's selflessness and child-centered parenting situates her within the ideal. In addition, while some of her minor character traits could be read as flaws, they do not interfere with the plot, nor do they affect the child protagonist. Rather, they provide some character depth and create nuances in Lowis's characterization.

3.1 Present and Traditional: Mrs. Duncan Revisited in *Jacob Have I Loved*

Jacob Have I Loved introduces the reader to the Bradshaw family who live on the fictional, remote island of Rass. Thirteen-year old Sara Louise narrates her coming-of-age story that includes part of her adulthood. In the first chapter, Sara Louise explains that she feels her mother abandoned her at times during her infancy to care for her sister, Caroline. Sara Louise's narration of the first few weeks of her life dramatize Susan's selflessness and emotional stability as she responds to the demands of mothering in a way that enacts the motherhood ideal.

When Sara Louise recalls the story of the first weeks of her life during which much attention was bestowed upon Caroline because she was born sickly, she explains that her mother (Susan) visited the hospital "eight or ten times each day . . . believing that the milk of a loving mother would supply a healing power that even doctors could not" (18). This story of Sara Louise and Caroline's first few weeks of life offers the first characterization of Susan as the motherhood ideal. Here, Susan's status as birth-mother supersedes the expertise of doctors through the suggestion that she possesses *natural* healing powers unavailable to doctors. The naturalness aligns with an essentialist view of mothering that emphasizes femaleness and rejects the inclusion of other care-givers as satisfactory nurturers. Likewise, naturalness supports the previously considered

concept of exclusive mothering.[55] No acceptance of egalitarian parenting exists here since Sara Louise remains bitter, even calling herself "motherless;" within this melodramatic statement is the idea that only mother's care is adequate, even in rhetorical mothering.

Labeling herself "clean and cold and motherless" because she lay in the basket in the care of other relatives, Sara Louise remains bitter about the choice her mother made, unsatisfied with the knowledge that her father and grandmother cared for her in her mother's absence (Paterson 16). Sara Louise's resentment of her mother's absence reinforces that mother's presence cannot be substituted by another family member. Already, Susan is an object, a possession, to Sara Louise and Caroline; this object status situates Susan within the motherhood ideal. As an object, she does not receive a pardon for her absence from one daughter, even though she was performing her duties as a mother (to pardon her would require analyzing her motivations as an individual and not as an object to Sara Louise).

Susan appears as the selfless, ideal mother motivated to provide for her daughters, despite any potential sacrifices she must make (indeed, the effects of these daily trips on Susan receives no attention). Although Susan's natural, physical connection to mothering (as represented through her ability to nurse Caroline) emerges, the scene introduces tension between *acting* as mother and

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[55] "Exclusive mothering" pertains to the practice of a mother providing almost all of the care for a child, rather than another family member or a hired child-care worker. (See Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (*The Mommy Myth*), for instance).

physically *being* a mother. For Susan, the act of mothering means not providing

emotional support for one child while responding to the physical needs of another.

This type of dilemma places Susan within lived experiences of mothering, where

mothers make difficult child-rearing decisions. In my reading, rather than cast

aspersions on Susan's choices as a mother, Sara Louise's reactions depict her as

emotionally reactive while Susan appears calm and stable (true to the motherhood

ideal)—this distinction between reactiveness and stability typifies the motherhood

ideal and will appear throughout this analysis.

 Similar to the motherhood ideal in Caldecott books, Susan almost always

appears in the domestic space. In fact, when World War II begins, Susan reacts to

the crisis by making "plates of cold meat and leftover potato salad," which not

only places her in the domestic space, but also signifies her distraction since she

prepares a cold meal (Paterson 24). Also, she serves the girls their first cup of

coffee, an act that causes Sara Louise to understand "that our secure, ordinary

world was forever in the past" more than any comments made by Momma about

the onset of the war (Paterson 24). The description of this critical moment in

history and the girls' childhood experience emphasizes the traditional, domestic

role of motherhood while advancing the Newbery motherhood ideal. Despite the

crisis of war being declared, Susan completes her mothering duties. The rather

innocuous changes to mother and daughters' routines signify distress. Mother and

daughters communicate through leftovers, and the daughters become instantly aged by that first cup of coffee.

Additional characterization reinforces Susan's connection to femininity and the motherhood ideal by placing her within traditionally-defined gender roles. Sara Louise labels her mother a "real lady" who, rather than react negatively to Sara Louise's offensive appearance after crabbing, says, "By the time you wash up, we'll be ready to eat," a statement that signifies Susan's cordiality as well as her concern for cleanliness in the domestic space that she regulates (Paterson 12). Likewise, Sara Louise refers to her mother as the "elegant little schoolmistress" when relating the tale of how her father and mother met, a description that feminizes (and minimizes) Susan (14). Susan continues to represent both motherhood and femininity as she nurtures others and behaves as a proper "lady" (12). Both the word "lady" and the idea of "propriety" denote a controlled femininity that limits self-expression, and reinforces traditional gender roles. Here, Susan's actions reenact a limiting, arguably, repressiveness femaleness.

Susan extends her interest in acting proper to her daughters, specifically in regards to Sara Louise's interactions with the Captain. When Sara Louise befriends the Captain, her admission that she watches his hands incessantly suggests that she harbors an attraction to him that she cannot understand. After Susan suspects Sara Louise's interest in the Captain, who teaches Sara Louise math, she accompanies Sara Louise during the lessons, knitting, listening, and

"sensitive to the least hint of inappropriate behavior" (Paterson 169). The emphasis on propriety and self-control divulge Susan's motivations and further establish the motherhood ideal.

The motherhood ideal demands emotional stability and a calm demeanor. An example of Susan's ability to maintain her composure, diffuse a potentially volatile situation, and tend to the psychological needs of her daughter occurs when Grandma confronts Sara Louise about her interest in the Captain, calling the captain a "heathen" (Paterson 122). Caroline giggles, and Sara Louise admits that she would have thrown a jar of string beans at her grandmother had not her mother appeared at that moment. Rather than confront the scene in the living room, which Sara Louise describes as "thick" with "hatred," Susan helps grandmother out of the rocking chair and takes her upstairs" (123). Here, Susan arrives to calm the tension and to nurture as she helps grandmother to her nap. When she returns, she says only to Sara Louise: "Is the world so short on trouble that you two crave to make more?" (Paterson 123). As Susan diffuses the conflict, she performs motherhood, caring for both her daughter and her husband's mother. I read this scene as representative of the institution of motherhood against which Rich protests because the mother character chooses to model tranquility as she recreates peacefulness in the domestic space. Susan never considers another route because she associates her role as mother with domestic management; this is her *job*. This serene, calm, nurturing motherhood represents the motherhood ideal,

one focused on domesticity and a lack of controversy. Her pointed question to Sara Louise contains only mildly confrontational qualities; within it is the suggestion of propriety. Sara Louise should behave because that is what one *does*, regardless of the situation; a belief that Susan models in dealing with Grandma.

Susan's interactions with her husband's mother blur the line between propriety and passivity. Susan's disinclination to defend herself against Grandma adds to Sara Louise's interpretation of Susan as weak. In one scene, Grandma harasses Susan by reading passages about whoredom out of the Bible to Susan. Susan refrains from defending herself as she bakes bread and sweats with "her hair plastered against her head" (Paterson 173). Instead, father resolves the situation by walking over to Susan, and "pretending not to care who watche[s]," kisses her on her neck and whispers into her ear before turning to Grandma to tell her that dinner is ready (Paterson 174). Again, Susan creates the ideal motherhood as she practices passivity; her immersion in domestic duties and reliance on her husband to defend her further characterize both Susan and the motherhood ideal.

In a much later scene, Susan becomes the literary subject momentarily. The family returns from Caroline's wedding in New York, and Grandma resumes her passive-aggressive behavior, reciting Bible verses about whorish women. Sara Louise becomes more frustrated with her mother, who, when insulted, refrains from responding and continues her domestic duties as she maintains "her silent

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course around the house only with a murmured word or two when a reply seemed necessary and could be given without risking further rancor" (Paterson 197). Eventually, Susan takes Sara Louise on the porch to assist her in preparing dinner, leaving Grandma inside. Sara Louise's guilt at the pleasure she feels while her grandmother remains indoors quickly "shift[s] to a growing anger that [her] clever, gentle, beautiful mother should be so unjustly persecuted" until that feeling evolves into "a fury against [her] mother for allowing herself to be so treated" (Paterson 198). Unable to contain her frustration, Sara Louise confronts her mother. She questions the reasons for her passivity, and even when confronted by her daughter, Susan controls her emotions, appearing calm, and, never exhausted by mothering or "surprised by her children's questions" (Paterson 198). Her controlled emotions typify the motherhood ideal as she assumes the role of literary subject in order to narrate the story of her past. While explaining that she chose to move to Rass instead of Paris, Susan explains that moving to "an isolated island in need of a schoolteacher" sounded "so romantic" (Paterson 199). As she scrubs the floors, she admits to having felt "like one of the pioneer women, coming here" (Paterson 199). Through her narration, Susan identifies herself with traditional types of women – "schoolteacher" and "pioneer women" (Paterson 199). Certainly, pioneer women were rugged, but Susan's use of the word "romantic" suggests that she views the role as less realistic and more idealistic. The romanticism here strengthens the connection between the motherhood ideal

that I am identifying and a sense of nostalgia as Susan references female types

from the past. Even when she becomes the subject, then, Susan replicates the ideal

and performs a patriarchic duty by once again intimating "proper" femininity.

Upon rejecting her dream of becoming a poet and moving to an island, she never

considers vocations typically associated with the masculine, such as sailing or

crabbing, even though she lives near the sea. She models controlled femininity in

her imaginative aspirations of caring for others by romanticizing becoming a

schoolteacher.

In contrast to her mother, Sara Louise becomes angry because she

perceives Susan's decision as a "waste" of her life. Even as Sara Louise begins

crying and pounding on the house to stop her tears, Susan retains her composure,

walking around to Sara Louise as if she intends to embrace her. Certainly, the

reader is more aware of Susan's motivations, and, she serves as an agent of the

status quo by choosing to perform the institution of motherhood rather than a non-

traditional path (an independent move to Paris). Ultimately, Susan will support

her daughter's development and individuation, but, the model that she presents is

one of tradition and conservatism indicative of the motherhood ideal.[56]

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[56] Sara Louise's individuation receives more attention in Chapter 5. Briefly, Sara Louise achieves
her goal of moving away from Rass and becoming a nurse midwife, which demonstrates some
independence. She does reproduce the family patriarchy in a sense since she marries and raises
children with a man, who, like her father, can "sing to the oysters" (Paterson 236-237). In the end,
Sara Louise will reproduce some stereotypical motherly behavior, as when she states of her own
child, "I suppose every mother is reduced to idiocy when describing her firstborn" (Paterson 239).

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By embodying traditional femininity, self-sacrifice, and nurturing, Susan alludes to Caldecott texts; she reimages the motherhood ideal to include emotional stability and flawlessness. The motherhood ideal suggests an unobtainable ideal—a persistent idea in both culture and art. Conforming to the ideal does not invite the types of diversity, discord, and tension needed for a diverse representation of mothering in fictional texts.

3.2 Reenacting the Motherhood Ideal in *Shiloh*

Much like Susan, Marty's mother, "Ma," in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh* possesses many characteristics of the selfless, motherhood ideal. I chose this text because it received the Newbery award almost one decade after Paterson's text, in 1992. In the decade following Paterson's text, changes in the lived experience of mothering led to a seeming cultural acceptance of diverse mothering.[57] Yet, *Shiloh* dramatizes a mother character true to the motherhood ideal. Lowis, like Susan, remains solely motivated by a need to nurture and manage the domestic space. Her emotional stability, femininity, and conservatism further connect her to the motherhood ideal. She displays some character traits that may read as flaws; however, these traits do not impede either the plot development or growth of the child protagonist, nor do they persist throughout the text. Therefore, I argue that they offer some nuanced character development but do not prevent Lowis from being considered an example of the motherhood

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[57] This idea appears at length in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.

ideal.[58] Her ability to detect her son's feelings about Shiloh signifies a mental connection, a maternal omniscience, associated with the natural state of being a mother seen in the motherhood ideal.

Shiloh tells the story of a boy, Marty Preston, who finds an abused dog, and, rather than return it to its owner, Judd Travers, hides the dog. Marty secretly feeds the dog, and he lies to his parents when asked if he took the dog. In addition to the obvious theme of human/animal relationships, the text considers the appropriateness of lying and defying socio-cultural rules. *Shiloh* allows the adolescent protagonist to challenge the status quo as eleven-year old Marty makes ethical decisions that often seem to counter his familiar, religious, and community expectations. Not only does Marty lie to his family, but also, he breaks the neighborly rule in Friendly, West Virginia (the town in which the story is set) of ignoring neighbors' actions by questioning Judd's abuse of Shiloh. Ultimately, Marty discovers Judd hunting deer out of season and pays him for Shiloh in return for his silence about the deer.

True to the motherhood ideal, Lowis Preston (Ma) most often appears in the kitchen; she leaves the domestic space only once, to shop for shoes for Marty's sister. In her first scene, Lowis appears in the kitchen scolding the children for not eating enough dinner. In fact, many of Lowis's actions concern food—whether she is cooking, planting, or questioning Marty about his reasons

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[58] This distinction is important because significantly flawed mother characters are discussed in Chapter 4.

for eating so little (something he is doing in order to sneak food out to the dog). This association to the kitchen, the domestic environment, limits Lowis's development (indeed, she exists only in the object role, as Marty's mother) and places her within the motherhood ideal.

Although Marty does not confide in either of his parents that he kept Shiloh, Ma remains aware of his interest in the dog. At one point, she states that she knows Marty is thinking about the dog and that he wants it. Marty then narrates, "I nod. Ma knows me better'n I know myself sometimes . . ." (Naylor 30). Once again, as in the case of some Caldecott winners, the suggestion of a natural, biological link between mother and child appears; in *Jacob Have I Loved*, this connection required Susan to nurse Caroline in the hospital, here it suggests an intuitive connection between mother and son. The connection never exists between father and child characters; so, I read it as a *natural* bond reserved for mothers. As addressed in the previous chapter, I find this emphasis on the state of *being* a mother rather than *engaging* in motherhood reductive as it connects mothering to the female body, thus limiting the prospect of egalitarianism in parenting as well as signifying femaleness with mothering. Yet, this naturalness proves indicative of the motherhood ideal.

While Susan exhibits no flaws, Lowis possesses two character traits that could be considered minor flaws: jealousy and vanity. Lowis's jealousy appears when Marty explains that he told Lowis his friend's parents (the Howards) "had a

room just for company, a room just for books, and a room just for plants" (Naylor 57). Ma responds by stating "that was three rooms too many," and Marty comments that it was the "[f]irst time I ever saw any envy in my Ma" (Naylor 57). A reader may consider Lowis's envy a flaw, but I read it as indicative of her concern for the domestic space. Lowis's primary responsibility is to manage the home, and this aligns her with both the motherhood ideal and traditional femininity. Whether her reaction denotes envy, as Marty intimates, self-consciousness about the domestic space she manages for the family, or a sincere statement that the rooms are superfluous depends upon a reader's interpretation. Certainly, Lowis's association with the domestic as evidenced through her almost-exclusive positioning within the domestic space supports the reading that she feels inadequate rather than jealous. In any interpretation, though, her comments reinforce her role as supervisor of the domestic space.

In another scene, Lowis asks Marty if she has any frown lines, and after telling her no, Marty narrates: "Ma's got a pretty face. Plain, but smooth" (Naylor 68-69). Any hint of envy or vanity could be suggestive of flaws; however, I view these asides as minor incidents intended to provide some dimension to Ma.[59] Indeed, similar to Susan's choice to visit Caroline at the hospital during her infancy, Ma's vanity provides some parallels between the lived reality and fictional depiction of mothers (and, indeed, women as they age). Her vanity also

[59] Mothers with significant flaws will be discussed in Chapter 4.

aligns with Lowis's characterization of enacting traditional femininity. In asking about her frown lines, Lowis associates her value to physical appearance. She reduces her worth; rather than ask Marty about her intelligence, she expresses concern about her appearance. Ultimately, neither Lowis's possible jealousy nor her expressed vanity interferes with Marty's character development, which allows her to retain her status as a motherhood ideal.[60] She models honesty so that when forced to decide whether to behave truthfully, Marty follows his mother's advice and finally admits to hiding Shiloh. The admission leads to a positive resolution since Marty organizes a deal with Judd that allows him to keep Shiloh and supports the socio-cultural value of honesty.

3.3 Concluding Thoughts: The Lasting Ideal

These motherhood ideal characters provide the same sense of safety to a child reader as those illustrated in the Caldecott winners. Mother remains primarily an object for the child and presents as a stereotype—a person that may be relied upon to provide guidance and engage in selfless behavior, motivated solely by the desire to raise and protect her children. Neither Susan in *Jacob Have I Loved* nor Lowis in *Shiloh* engage in hobbies or pursue interests outside of their domestic duties. In addition, their calm, understanding demeanors offer a sense of comfort and stability. Both characters practice passive behavior that becomes associated with mothering and femininity. Likewise, the naturalness ascribed to

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[60] This distinction is important because the behavior of the selfish mothers in Chapter 4 is detrimental to the child protagonist's development.

their mothering behavior, seen primarily in Susan's nursing of Caroline as an infant and Lowis's mental connection to her son contribute to the creation of the motherhood ideal. Privileged in these characters is the white mother positioned in the domestic sphere. The motherhood ideal and its comforting myth creates a sense of nostalgic sentimentality by mitigating complexities in motherhood. As representatives of the motherhood ideal, Susan and Lowis will provide contrast to other mother characters in Newbery award winners. Subsequent chapters demonstrate that the continued existence of the motherhood ideal limits mothering representations and will introduce diverse mother characters as well as extend the conversation about the function of the motherhood ideal in the fictional space.

Chapter 4

Resisting the Ideal: Selfish and Developed Newbery Mothers

Compared to Caldecott winners, Newbery Winners contain greater complexity, primarily because many Newbery readers possess a heightened intellectual and emotional maturity level. As such, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the Newbery texts may invite space for greater ambiguities in literary elements as well as the potential for a type of cultural work that explores diverse mothering experiences and the boundaries of prescribed, normative cultural reproduction. Perhaps, for instance, the Newbery texts may explore mothering in a nuanced manner, somewhat akin to lived mothering experiences, so that mother characters possess a variety of traits that form their character. Since this project considers texts written following the academic and cultural movements of so-called second and third wave feminism, then a diversity, even disparateness in fictional representations of mothering seems probable. After all, as the cultural definition of "mother" has expanded to include divorced, working, adopted, surrogate, and other non-biological mothers, expecting that dramatized mother to appear in fictional texts for the child readers (many who have these lived, heterogeneous mothers) makes sense—especially since juvenile literature offers a safe, fictional place for both acculturation and exploration. In this chapter, I analyze the fictional representation of diverse mothering experiences of the child

protagonists' mother in Newbery texts. I situate these fictional representations against the motherhood ideal established in Chapter 3, ultimately arguing for the existence of diverse mothering experiences in the form of **selfish; developed, but marginal**; and **developed, but present** mother characters. I also conclude that aspects of the motherhood ideal appear in many of these representations of diverse mothering experiences.[61] Although the diversity present in discursive mothering experiences is encouraging, the potentiality of these experiences is most often mediated by characteristics of the motherhood ideal. Indeed, the motherhood ideal frequently becomes a reactionary force that works against diverse mothering experiences.

Briefly, the motherhood ideal embodies the following characteristics: traditionally feminine appearance, nurturing tendencies, situated in the domestic space, emotional stability, married, and selflessness. These characters are confident in their mothering and contain few, if any, character flaws. The ideal suggests a naturalness to mothering associated with the female body. Furthermore, I argued in Chapter 3 that the motherhood ideal presents this prescriptive mothering ideology as proper and preferred, valuing conservatism and a focus on creating a sense of nostalgia in literature for children over dramatizing egalitarianism in parenting and gender relations.[62] As in the previous

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[61] While motherhood ideal exemplar characters are not "diverse," the continued presence of elements from the motherhood ideal is important to discuss.
[62] For a longer discussion of the motherhood ideal, refer to Chapter 3.

chapter, the following questions were considered when evaluating the mother

characters:

- How often are the mothers given a voice?
- Are they allowed to tell their own story?
- Are they seen without the children?
- Do they have motivation other than mothering?
- Do they have interests?

The heuristics used in this chapter demonstrate that, unlike the Caldecott award-

winning texts, fictional mothering is not limited to mother characters either aware

of the conflicts faced by their child or totally ignorant to them. Rather, some

physically present mother characters are only moderately involved in their

children's' struggles (developed, but marginal mothers).

Developing definitions and categories while attempting to avoid

essentialism proved challenging. Unfortunately, as so many of the texts practice

essentialism, a number of the conclusions presented in this study may read as

essentialist. Great care has been taken to consider multiple cultures, sub-cultures,

voices, and motherhoods in the analysis of these texts as represented in the quest

for what I label "diverse mothering experiences." Undeniably, though, these

award-winning texts over-represent white, middle-class mothers. Only one

immigrant mother appears; in addition, the disabled mother, the lesbian mother,

the destitute mother, and the mother working in an executive or political position

remain absent. Arguably, these are over-simplified types as well; but, the

inclusion of a mother character possessing some of the aforementioned characteristics may dramatize some diversity in the mothering experience.

In Chapter 3, Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey's conclusion that "the maternal behavior of the middle class becomes culturally constructed and codified as the real, normal, and natural way to mother" was aligned with the motherhood ideal because normative mothering (white, middle class) is a characteristic of the motherhood ideal (30). Yet, it is important to recognize that normative motherhood exists within the definition of "diverse mothering experiences" because a "normative" mother character may not necessarily represent the motherhood ideal. In other words, "diverse" should not be read as a simple binary to "normative." Rather, it challenges the motherhood ideal and denotes a variety of mothering experiences—from the normative to the non-normative. While the motherhood ideal may share some traits of the normative motherhood, the two are not dependent upon each other. Indeed, a mother character who encompasses normative motherhood traits may not represent the motherhood ideal. In the case of *Dead End in Norvelt*, for instance, a normative mother (white, married, middle-class) represents a diverse mothering experience because her acts of mothering do not conform to the motherhood ideal.

The ideal does not consider contradictions or complexities in mothering. Rozsika Parker's statement that mothering forces one to mediate "dissonances and disjunctions between the lived experience of mothering and the sometimes

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contradictory yet usually prescriptive or normative ideals that mediate mothering"

influenced my methodology as I sought diverse mothering experiences that

dramatize mothering outside of the motherhood ideal (2). As such, tensions and

contradictions (primarily found through vulnerabilities and flaws in mother

characters) are read as indicative of diverse mothering experiences since the

motherhood ideal avoids controversy in favor of stability and myth-making.

Critics of this project may argue that literature for children simply resists

the types of diversity in mothering practices that I seek because generic

limitations prevent the complexities in literary devices needed to represent

complex, nuanced mother characters. In other words, literature for children does

not provide "the place" for developed mother characters. The initial response to

that criticism concerns the concept of genre and the definition of children's

literature. A lengthy discussion of this issue appears in Chapter 1; succinctly,

though, protestations about "genre" may not consider the difficulty scholars face

in providing an agreeable definition.[63] The diversity of texts awarded the

Caldecott Medal demonstrates that no one type of literature for children exits –

consider the complexity of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* versus the relative

simplicity of *A Ball for Daisy*, for instance. Likewise, mother characters in

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[63] As discussed in Chapter 1, "children's literature" proves difficult to define since scholars do not agree on generic expectations or on the purpose of literature for children. While some contend that literature for children constructs childhood and colonizes children, others emphasize its creative, subversive elements.

Chapter 2 do display some diversity, and the mother in *Black & White* falls outside the motherhood ideal.

The criticism that these "kiddie books" cannot address complex issues or introduce conflicted, nuanced mother characters also falls short when faced with the evidence that the texts appeal to a wide age range of child readers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Newbery committees evaluate texts written for an intended audience of children up to fourteen years old. Obviously, significant differences exist in the interests, psychological development, and reading abilities of an eight-year old versus a fourteen-year old, for instance. Issues like "reading abilities" and "increased complexity" are difficult to determine. I considered the age of the narrator as well as the length and complexity (in terms of plot, characters, and theme) of the texts. In addition, I accessed each publishing company's information about the intended age range and grade level for each text. That information appears below:

Table 4.1 Suggested Age of Readers
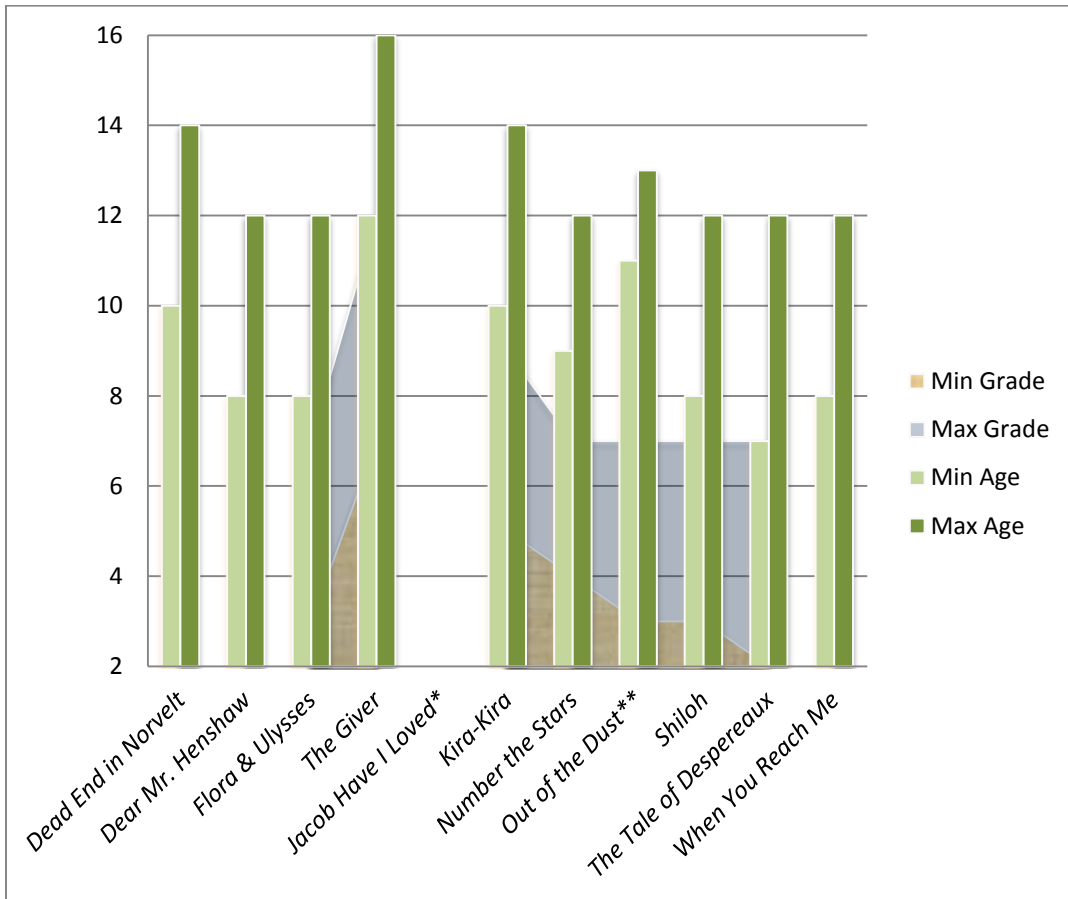
* *Jacob Have I Loved* was originally published by the Thomas Y. Crowell Company, which was sold to Harper & Row (after first being merged with J.B. Lippincott & Company). Harper Collins now publishes *Jacob Have I Loved*. However, they provide no age or grade guidelines on their page.

**The discrepancy between age and grade shown here appears on the publisher's Web site.

Six of the texts discussed in this chapter fall into the eight to twelve-year old range. Still, an eight-year old is undergoing far different life experiences than a twelve-year old, who is considered by some psychologists and doctors an

"adolescent."[64] Some texts address problematic social issues, so the probability that they could include multifaceted mother characters is reasonable. However, *Jacob Have I Loved*, which may appeal to older readers, includes the motherhood ideal exemplar. Likely, the discussion of the main character's developing sexual feelings appeal to older child readers since they are likely experiencing the same types of feelings. Nevertheless, claiming that literature for children does not provide a suitable space to explore complex mother characters and issues related to mothering seems dubious.

In general, the Newbery mothers *are* more complex than Caldecott mothers—many have their own motivations, some mother characters exhibit flaws, and many step outside of the role of nurturer endemic to the motherhood ideal. Selfish mothers appear as do those with a sense of the politics responsible for forming the world in which they live. In a positive development, mothering is frequently *practiced* in these texts and not an inherent component of female biology. In other words, actions represent mothering.[65] Mothers, whether birth-mothers or adopted, become literary subjects more often in the Newbery texts than the Caldecott winners. In addition to the aforementioned texts intended for

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[64] Indeed, the World Health Organization identifies adolescents as ranging from ten to nineteen-years old. Focusing on cognitive development, Jean Piaget places eleven-year olds in the formal operational stage, which lasts until fifteen to twenty-years old; this is considered adolescence. Focusing on psychological development, Erik Erikson also provides a division between the ages of eleven and twelve so that twelve to eighteen year olds are in the Identity versus Role Confusion stage in which they are questioning their identity and their relevance to the world in which they live.

[65] Later chapters will identify characters with no genetic relationship to the protagonists who act as mothers.

older children, a number of texts do dramatize traits of mothers outside of the

motherhood ideal as they invite heterogeneous representations of motherhood.

Yet, the motherhood ideal consistently regulates the attention given to the

types of diverse mothering experiences found in the more developed or difficult to

classify mother characters. A diverse mother will either contain elements of the

motherhood ideal that seem to restrict her non-traditional mothering practices; or,

another character contrasts her by adopting elements of the motherhood ideal; in

both cases, I argue that the ideal presents as a reactionary force. So, while the

motherhood ideal remains and expectations related to the role of mother as

provider of emotional support to the adolescent protagonist limit both the voice of

mother characters and the practice of mothering, some space does exist within the

Newbery texts for imperfect mother characters and for those who struggle to

navigate their relationship with their child(ren). In the end, these award-winning

texts do not provide fictional space for empowered mothering. However, they do

offer a glimpse into the cultural construction of motherhood and suggest the

continued acceptance of the motherhood ideal. I contend that any signs of

progressivism expressed in the experience of motherhood are tempered by the

normative motherhood so that cultural reproduction persists.[66] Even with the

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[66] For a discussion on "normative motherhood," refer to Chapter 3 I further support my reading of these middle-class values being privileged by writing that motherhood is linked to consumerism in more than one text, specifically, *Kira-Kira* and *Dead End in Norvelt*.

inclusion of diverse motherhood experiences, the motherhood ideal reads as a

reactionary force favoring the status quo and nostalgia.[67]

While the mother characters that represent the motherhood ideal practice

selfless mothering, the mothers in the first section of this chapter engage in self-

absorbed or misguided mothering. These **selfish mothers** are flawed characters

because they hinder the child protagonist's growth and/or individuation.[68] The

first selfish mother, Antoinette Tilling from Kate DiCamillo's *The Tale of*

Despereaux focuses on the effects of her son's choices on her life. Rather than

guide Despereaux, she considers his actions only in terms of their effects on her.

Also a selfish mother, Phyllis from Kate DiCamillo's *Flora & Ulysses* stifles her

daughter's individuality through manipulation. Phyllis's determination to ensure

that her daughter appears "normal" creates a discordant relationship between

mother and daughter. The second section presents the **developed, but marginal**

mother. This character contains nuances and/or flaws that separate her from the

motherhood ideal, and her physical and/or emotional absence from her child(ren)

prevents her from guiding the child protagonist through a conflict. Both Cynthia

Kadohata's *Kira-Kira* and Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* provide examples of the

developed, but marginal mother. Three texts with **developed, but present**

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[67] Refer to Chapters 1 and 2 for discussions on "nostalgia" in literature for children.
[68] Certainly, an interest of literature for children is not only safety (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, specifically in relation to *Feeling Like a Kid*, but also these texts provide a space to explore identity and individuation through the focalizer who often makes choices that further his or her independence.

mothers are discussed in the third section. Similar to the mother characters in the second section, these characters exhibit an emotional vulnerability and/or a flaw that separates them from the motherhood ideal; examples of this mother type appear in Beverly Cleary's *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, Jack Gantos's *Dead End in Norvelt*, and Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me*. Both the developed, but marginal mother from the second section and the developed mother characters from the third section display some aspects of the motherhood ideal that mitigate and complicate their mothering practices. The final section presents an argument concerning dualism in mother characterization. Specifically, the tendency within these award-winning texts to characterize a mother in relation to another character serves to reinforce the motherhood ideal and limit the representations and potentialities of diverse mothering experiences is examined.

4.1 Selfish Mothers: Self-absorbed and Misguided

Where the motherhood ideal practices child-centered parenting (arguably, to a fault since she neglects herself), the selfish mother's ego-centric philosophy manifests as behavior that places obstacles on the child's path towards individualism. Concerned with appearances and preoccupied with their self-interest, these selfish mothers find motivation in their desires, rather than in their children's well-being. Curiously, the two most self-absorbed mothers appear in Kate DiCamillo's Newbery winners, *The Tale of Despereaux* and *Flora &Ulysses*. In the definition of "diverse mothering experiences" used in this

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project, these selfish mothers do represent a diverse mothering experience; indeed, they lack any characteristics of the motherhood ideal. These fantastical mothers read similarly to the wicked step-mother in a fairy tale rather than as a possible fictional representation of any lived mothering experience.[69] Unlike the motherhood ideal, these mother characters resist becoming their children's object through a delusional selfishness that proves detrimental to the child. Still, these mother characters expand the rhetoric of fictional mothering within the award-winning texts.

An inexcusably horrible mother appears in *The Tale of Despereaux*. This 2004 winner tells the story of a young mouse, Despereaux Tilling, who becomes friends with a princess, despite the restriction on mice communicating with humans and the humans' dislike of mice because of their relation to rats – a rat caused the queen's death. Despereaux's mother, Antoinette, displays her selfishness at Despereaux's birth. Since only Despereaux survives the delivery, Antoinette remarks of the pregnancy that it was: "All that work for nothing" (DiCamillo, *Tale* 11). Rather than rejoice at the surviving child, she discusses her sadness and the physical toll of pregnancies. This self-absorbed, vain mother requests her makeup bag and announces that she will birth no more babies because: "They are hard on my beauty" (DiCamillo, *Tale* 13). The accompanying

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[69] Certainly, *The Tale of Despereaux* evokes fairy tale elements through its use of princesses, heroes, and distinct villains. *Flora &Ulysses* reads like a novelized superhero tale, complete with heroes, villains, and an arch-nemesis.

illustration shows Antoinette staring at her reflection while the father stands on the other side of the bed, pointing at a neglected, newborn Despereaux who lies on a bed with no clothes or blanket.

The vanity of Despereaux's mother continues throughout the text, and she arrives wearing a "tremendous amount of makeup" on the day that Despereaux is to be sent to the dungeon for talking to the human princess (DiCamillo, *Tale* 63). Interpreted as a minor component of character development in Lowis from *Shiloh*, vanity in this text problematizes Antoinette's ability to provide adequate emotional nurturing for her child. Flustered by Despereaux's outlawed friendship with the princess, Antoinette chooses to encourage Despereaux to renounce the princess. Rather than listen to his explanation and consider her child's desires, she focuses on the opinion of others. In this case, I argue that her choice originates from a place of self-interest. Antoinette prioritizes her refusal to be viewed as the mother of a disobedient (or disorderly) child over caring for Despereaux and supporting his individuation.

Antoinette's selfish motivations, indeed, her narcissism, create so much fear in Despereaux that, while waiting to begin his imprisonment in the dungeon, he looks at his mother and "concentrate[s] on standing before her without trembling" to refrain from "being a disappointment" (DiCamillo, *Tale* 63). The extreme opposite of the self*less* mothers in *Jacob Have I Loved* and *Shiloh*, Antoinette's self-absorption prevents her from allowing Despereaux to feel secure

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in her presence. Rather, Despereaux fears Antoinette's negative reaction because of her narcissism and not because she has instilled values into him.[70]

As Despereaux descends into the dungeon, his mother says "adieu," prompting the narrator to express: "But, reader, there is no comfort in the word 'farewell,' even if you say it in French. 'Farwell' is a word that, in any language, is full of sorrow. It is a word that promises absolutely nothing;" undeniably, through her mothering actions, Antoinette truly has "promise[d] absolutely nothing" to Despereaux (DiCamillo, *Tale* 66). Here, at what may be their final encounter, Antoniette leaves her son with no feelings of warmth or reassurance. Like other protagonists examined in this project, Despereaux resolves his own conflicts, but he does so without encouragement or guidance from his mother. Antoinette's remarkable selfishness situates her outside the motherhood ideal and contrasts her with most mothers found in award-winning texts. Moreover, Antoinette's selfishness appears cruel rather than misguided, unlike the mother in *Flora & Ulysses*.

Raised by a mother who serves as a self-absorbed antagonist, Flora in Kate DiCamillo's 2014 winner *Flora & Ulysses* overcomes her mother's attempts to control her individuation. Unlike Despereaux's mother, Phyllis's motivations are eventually revealed to be in the interest of her daughter. Phyllis's methods remain ego-centric until the end of the novel when she finally views Flora as an

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[70] Compare this to *Shiloh* in which Marty fears his mother's reaction to his dishonesty because she teaches and models honesty to Marty.

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individual rather than a possession or script to be controlled. Then, Flora realizes

that her mother's controlling, seemingly insensitive methods originate from a

misguided attempt to ensure that Flora's peers do not consider her abnormal and

ostracize her. Told by an omniscient narrator, *Flora & Ulysses* includes some

illustrations and focuses on the adventures of Flora and a flying squirrel (who also

types) that she finds.

In the first pages of the book, the reader learns that Flora "ignore[es] her

mother" as she reads a comic book (DiCamillo, *Flora* 5). Phyllis objects to Flora

reading comic books for fear that Flora will become too wrapped up in fiction.

Phyllis's hypocritical fear ignores her own weaknesses since, as a writer of

romance novels, Phyllis often becomes absorbed in the fictional worlds she

creates. In fact, Flora (and her father) believes that the romance novels

contributed to her parent's divorce. Phyllis's pretentiousness emerges in the

contract that she writes for Flora to stop reading comic books. The contract states

that Flora will "work to turn her face away from the idiotic high jinks of comics

and toward the bright light of true literature" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 5). Again, Phyllis

fails to consider the possible faults in her own beliefs since the literary qualities of

romance novels are questionable. The contract represents the first time that

Phyllis attempts to influence Flora's personality and interests. Since she remains

"very busy with [her] novel writing," Phyllis is "worried that it has made [Flora]

strange" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 55). Therefore, Phyllis insists that Flora befriend

William Spiver, a boy from next door because she believes that Flora needs a friend. Consumed by her own beliefs in the necessity of the friendship, Phyllis dismisses Flora's disinterest in William Spiver.

Unlike previously examined mothers who teach children ethical values, Phyllis attempts to force Flora into adopting her likes and dislikes, thereby acting as a controlling, inflexible, and self-absorbed mother.[71] Contrasting Phyllis to Marty's mother in *Shiloh* reveals that Marty's mother refrains from manipulating him; rather, she suggests solutions to her son. For instance, she merely suggests that Marty purchase the dog from its previous owner but makes no attempt to facilitate or engineer such a deal. Likewise, Susan in *Jacob Have I Loved* supports Sara Louise's decision to avoid school to earn money crabbing with her father. The calm, rational behavior of these two motherhood ideal characters contrasts with Antoinette's melodrama and Phyllis's emotional reactiveness. Antoinette and Phyllis read as the opposing figures to the "angel" mothers identified by E. Ann Kaplan who adhere to the cult of true womanhood.[72] These melodramatic mothers read as self-centered and inattentive to their children. Specifically, Phyllis experiences anxieties that she cannot control and blames on other people. These anxieties often prove difficult for Flora to navigate, as shown when Flora talks to her mother while Phyllis types. Disturbed and distracted by Flora's

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[71] In Chapter 3, the motherhood ideal characters teach their children values such as honesty and community, primarily through example.

[72] *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (Routledge)

presence, Phyllis "whack[s] the carriage return," eventually stating, "I'm on a deadline here. It's hard to concentrate with you standing over me breathing like that" (DiCamillo 28). Likewise, she irrationally accuses Flora's father, George, of trying to "make [her] feel guilty when he arrives at the apartment and buzzes the doorbell after she has a disagreement with Flora (DiCamillo, *Flora* 46). This pattern of considering other people's behavior as the cause of her distress occurs throughout the novel and suggests a weakness of character not typical of the mother character in these award-winning texts, and it certainly contrasts with the emotionally calm motherhood ideal.

Following Flora's declaration that Phyllis is her "arch-nemesis" after she orders her ex-husband (Flora's father, George) to place the squirrel in a bag and bash its head in with a shovel, DiCamillo dramatizes Phyllis's manipulation and reactiveness as Phyllis forces Ulysses to write a goodbye note to Flora. Looking rather sinister, she directs him as cigarette smoke "exit[s] her nostrils in two thin streams" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 182). Further contributing to Phyllis's malevolence in this scene, Ulysses describes the words that Phyllis forces him to type as void of "joy" and "love;" they are "words that would hurt Flora" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 183). Phyllis, consumed with her own purpose, kidnaps the squirrel. She explains to him that it is "nothing personal" and her one concern is Flora because she is a "strange child" who talks to squirrels, and "the world is not kind to the strange"

(DiCamillo, *Flora* 195).[73] The concern Phyllis expresses—her daughter's

successful integration into society—reads as legitimate (possibly even an anxiety

experienced through lived mothering). Still, Phyllis represents an oppressive force

as she neglects her child's individuality in a manner representative of the

repression felt by many child readers as they navigate the rules and expectations

of the "adult world."[74] Here, mother becomes a powerful, negative force as her

conceit prevents the child protagonist's autonomy.

Eventually, the family reunites, and her mother responds to Flora's

reappearance, calling her "My baby" and explaining that she was "terrified" when

she could not find Flora (DiCamillo, *Flora* 225). Flora finds her parents sitting

next to each other and "holding on to each other" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 226).

Apologizing to Flora, her mother explains: "I wanted to make things right

somehow. I wanted to make things normal" and then "And when I returned and

you weren't there . . ." said Flora's mother. She started to cry again. "I don't care

about normal. I just wanted you back." (DiCamillo, *Flora* 227). Ultimately,

Phyllis's selfishness abates as she accepts her daughter's value and allows her to

act according to her own interests. The pattern of battling mother in order to

become an individual appears in juvenile literature.[75] In this case, though, the

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[73] Of course, Ulysses realizes what Phyllis does not in her quest for Flora to be "normal" — Flora is strange in a good way," "in a lovable way" (DiCamillo 195).
[74] Navigating the adult world appears throughout literature for children, appearing as far back as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.
[75] A longer discussion of this occurs in Chapter 5.

strikingly insensitive actions of Phyllis make her unique; at least she realizes that

her controlling behavior almost results in the loss of her daughter. Certainly, the

text promotes Phyllis's choice to cease her manipulative ways since one of the

final scenes depicts Phyllis, Flora, and her father sitting together following their

reconciliation. After fighting the repressive force (her mother), Flora's story

concludes in a conventional, normative setting since the scene suggests the

comfort of a nuclear family. In this case, defeating the selfish mother provides a

catalyst for the re-establishment of the status quo. Although Phyllis does not

embody the motherhood ideal, her rejection of egocentrism augments the

preference towards selfless mothering in the fictional space and suggests at its

predilection in the normative, lived mothering experience.

4.2 Developed, but Mostly Absent: Mothers in the Margins

As addressed in Chapter 1 and in the introduction to this chapter, in

analyzing these characters, I considered whether a mother character is granted

agency and/or voice. Many of the Newbery winners use a first person narrator, so

the child protagonist often mediates the mother character's voice. Therefore, I

considered whether the narrator allows his or her mother to express interests and

make statements that reveal the mother's character and motivations. The term

"developed," then, refers to mother characters granted voice and/or agency who,

in turn, influence either the plot or character development of the child protagonist.

Certainly, degrees of voice and/or agency exist within these texts. This section

demonstrates that shades of the motherhood ideal appear within these developed

mother characters. To establish the diverse mothering experience of the developed

but mostly absent mother, I use Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira* and Karen Hesse's

Out of the Dust. Unlike the mother characters in the following section, these

mothers appear in the margins; Kiyoko in *Kira-Kira* works long hours, and Ma in

Out of the Dust dies prior to the novel's conclusion. Yet, their marginal status

does not reduce their influence on the child protagonists. Their mothering

practices fall outside of the traditional nurturing model. Kiyoko chooses to work,

which reduces the time she spends with her children, and Ma's often abrupt

delivery of advice belies her sincere concern for her daughter, which is primarily

symbolized through the piano lessons she gives to her daughter.

Kiyoko in *Kira-Kira*, serves as transitional figure. Her traditional

femininity and intuitive connection to her children correspond to the motherhood

ideal. She expresses agency through her unwavering resolve to purchase a home;

however, the goal requires her to work extra shifts and separates her from the

family. Other characters refer to home ownership as solely Kiyoko's goal, and I

argue that a complexity exists in this plot device that invites a reading aligning

Kiyoko to the selfish mothers discussed in the previous section. Likewise, Kiyoko

often behaves in an emotionally reactive way, which situates her outside of the

motherhood ideal. Traits associated with the ideal appear in her characterization;

but Kiyoko provides an example of a diverse mothering experience outside of the motherhood ideal.

The 2005 winner *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata tells the story of a young Katie Takeshima and her Japanese-American family as they settle into a new life in Georgia after leaving a farming community in Iowa, During the course of the novel, Katie's sister, Lynn, is diagnosed with lymphoma and eventually dies. Katie must accept the death of her sister (who served as a mother to her) mostly alone as her mother's work schedule and emotional fragility prevent her from supporting Katie after the crisis.

Kiyoko's femininity, a component of the motherhood ideal, becomes evident primarily through the physical descriptions that emphasize her small size. Katie explains that her mother "always seemed younger than the other mothers, partly because of her size, but also because her face possessed a childlike quality" (Kadohata 16). Katie elaborates: "My mother was a delicate, rare, and beautiful flower. Our father told use that. She weighted hardly more than Lynn" (Kadohata 16). Kiyoko's diminutiveness suggests femininity and even docility. Beyond this adherence to traditional gender roles, Kiyoko's femininity harbors a negative connotation through discussion of her fragility. In the same paragraph in which she provides a physical description of Kiyoko, Katie explains that her mother is described as a somewhat fragile person who "never seemed to feel safe" and could suffer a bruise if accidentally bumped by another person (Kadohata 16).

The motherhood ideal rejects any physical or mental impairment that restricts

one's ability to mother. So, Kiyoko's femininity both associates her with the ideal

and separates her from it since her fragility (associated with her feminine trait of

smallness) manifests into irrational restrictions placed upon the children's

activities. Katie explains that "Our mother didn't like us to run or play or climb,

because it was dangerous. She didn't like us to walk in the middle of our empty

street, because you never knew. She didn't want us to go to college someday,

because we might get strange ideas. She liked peace and quiet" (Kadohata 17). In

fact, her favorite word for the girls is "Shizukani" which means "hush" (Kadohata

17). Here, Katie's mother favors calmness over the chaos of mothering. Unlike

Susan in *Jacob Have I Loved*, she becomes noticeably flustered by her children's

behavior, another trait which separates her from the motherhood ideal.

The familiar trope of mother possessing an intuitive connection appears

throughout the text and provides evidence of the motherhood ideal in Kiyoko's

characterization.[76] Katie and Lynn claim that they must think nonsense words in

order to prevent their mother from reading their thoughts. When Katie feels guilty

because the desk she needs for her studies will replace her mother's sewing area,

she "forgets to think nonsense words" (Kadohata 43). Although she says nothing,

her mother looks at Katie and says "suddenly and cheerfully" that feeling guilty is

not Katie's "fault" (Kadohata 43). This idea that "mother always knows" appears

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[76] She does not express true intuitiveness because she becomes estranged from Katie in the novel.

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in a number of the award-winning texts and suggests an innate ability for a mother to understand her child. Similar to the Caldecott texts, this particular personality trait is indicative of a natural result of childbirth since only the mother possesses the ability. Even in a text like *Kira-Kira* where the sisters share a close relationship, only Katie's mother possesses the seemingly-instinctive ability to read her emotions. This innateness, or naturalness, intimates the motherhood ideal and simultaneously reduces mothering by emphasizing being a mother over acting as a mother. Conversely, the relationship between Katie and Lynn explores the act of mothering because Lynn provides the care-giving and emotional support typified in traditional mothering practices; although I interpret these as reductive, analyzing their inclusion in the sister/sister relationship compared to their relative exclusion from the mother/daughter relationship complicates rhetorical mothering through Kiyoko. She provides adequate care, but situating her against the sister/sister relationship accentuates her non-nutritive behavior and dramatizes the negative consequences of a mother's physical absence—children must behave like adults and care for one another; they lose their childhood, and then nostalgia cannot occur in juvenile literature.

Despite Kiyoko's physical presence throughout the text, according to Katie's narration, her sister Lynn performs many care-giving duties traditionally associated with mothering. Also, she teaches Katie life lessons and assists with her school work; this makes Kioyko emotionally distant, or marginal. In the

exposition, Katie shares a memory that includes the titular phrase of the novel and symbolizes the relationship between Katie and Lynn. Katie explains that, when she was a baby, Lynn "used to take me onto our empty road at night, where we would lie on our backs and look at the stars while she said over and over, 'Katie, say *kira-kira*, *kira-kira*" (Kadohata 1). The use of this Japanese phrase upsets their mother because she feels they are misusing it, claiming, as Katie states, "you could not call a Kleenex *kira-kira*" (Kadohata 2). The separation between generations here also demonstrates the value Katie places on Lynn's opinion over her mother's as well as Lynn's playfulness with Katie "because she liked me to be happy" (Kadohata 23). Like the mothers in Caldecott texts, Lynn (acting as caregiver) is motivated by Katie's happiness; further, Lynn provides the nurturing young Katie needs in Kiyoko's absence.

In addition to nurturing Katie, Lynn discusses important issues with her. As Katie expresses: "She gave me talks only when something very, very serious was happening. She always told me the truth and didn't treat me like a baby" (Kadohata 49). Lynn, not their parents, tells Katie about the move from Iowa, about her mother's pregnancy, and about how to engage with the children on the first day of school. Lynn provides the emotional support Katie needs on the night before the first day of school. Kiyoko performs a ritual on that same night by cutting Katie's hair short but refrains from offering advice or emotional support. Since Lynn provides so much of Katie's emotional nurturing, Kiyoko serves as a

"marginal" mother. Likewise, the physical separation between mother and daughters contributes to their emotional distance (as seen when Kiyoko does not comfort Katie prior to the first day of school or share important family news with her).

Kiyoko, does, of course, engage in some nurturing activities; for instance, she habitually enters the girls' "bedroom in the middle of the night. . . to make sure we were asleep" (Kadohata 18). When Katie asks for a security object, a bear named Bera-Bera, her mother obliges but then remarks: "Someday you won't even remember Bera-Bera" (Kadohata 19). Katie explains that her mother made the comment "gently," and that she appeared "sad" (Kadohata 19). Here, Kiyoko reassures Katie by comforting her with Bera-Bera and displays a mournfulness about Katie becoming older. Briefly, Kiyoko constructs childhood here by connecting Katie, as a child, to Bera-Bera; the gentle comment suggests at Kiyoko's nostalgic feelings, possibly for her own childhood or Lynn's. Again, Kiyoko reads as a complex mother character—both emotionally absent (as shown on the night before Katie begins school) and present (as shown here). These contradictions present a nuanced character. However, the motherhood ideal always shadows Kiyoko's mothering as she is most often shown *not* enacting elements of the ideal while other characters, including her children, do perform the ideal.

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Overall, though, the children care for one another. As Katie explains: "Lynn took care of me, and I took care of Sammy. And we all took care of one another" (Kadohata 59). This is the only award-winning text with a present mother in which the children assist in childrearing. In Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, the sisters serve as confidants and playmates to one another prior to the war; but, with the exception of generally being mindful of one another's safety, they do not consistently engage in child-raising activities. *Kira-Kira*, then, explores diverse mothering experiences since Kiyoko's absence due to work keeps her from providing the emotional and nurturing needs of her children. Rather, the children nurture one another as Katie performs the mothering she learns from Lynn in caring for Sammy.

In addition to not practicing exclusive mothering, Kiyoko deviates from the motherhood ideal through emotional instability. Initially, Kiyoko conforms to the motherhood ideal by refraining from indulging her emotions and allowing an outburst so that when Katie explains that her mother holds the responsibility for becoming angry with the children, there is a sense of fragility as she describes her mother's appearance when she becomes angry: "Her soft face turned hard and glasslike, as if it would break into pieces if something hit it" (Kadohata 10).[77] Here, Kiyoko possesses characteristics of mothers whose anger is feared by children, like those in *Out of the Dust* and *Dead End in Norvelt* but also the quiet

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[77] Katie describes becoming angry with the children as her "mother's job" instead of her father's (Kadohata 109).

grace seen typically in the motherhood ideal as she refrains from raising her voice in anger.[78] Later, though, Lynn's illness causes Katie's parents to focus on Lynn, and they become less tolerant of Katie and Sammy due to the financial and emotional stress of caring for a sick child. This lack of patience reaches a breaking point one evening after Katie gives Sammy a bath and then does not clean the bathtub properly. In an uncharacteristic reaction, Mom "yank[s] [Katie] up by [her] arm" in a move so unsettling that Katie's father "rest[s] his hand on her to restrain her," at which point, her mother begins crying (Kadohata 103). This emotional, imbalanced behavior provides a striking contrast to Katie's rational behavior as she cares for her sister. When Lynn struggles with eating, Katie sits with her and feeds her, at one point, even offering to chew food for her. She ensures that Lynn takes her iron pills and even "force[s] the pills down her throat and hold her mouth closed until she swallowed" (Kadohata 129). Katie characterizes these experiences, stating: "For a moment I got a funny feeling that I was the older sister and Lynn was just a little girl" (Kadohata 130). Yet, Katie's consistent care of her sister reflects an emotional stability and patience that Kiyoko lacks during the crisis. Katie enacts the motherhood ideal without her mother's guidance, and since the reader sympathizes with Katie, the ideal suggests appropriate, preferred, even normative mothering practice.

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[78] Compare Kiyoko to Susan from *Jacob Have I Loved* here.

Furthermore, Katie's care-giving extends to her brother. So, in the middle of taking care of Lynn, Katie remains focused on Sammy as she checks on him when he is not feeling well, much as Lynn used to do with her, laying "on the floor next to the couch" and "check[ing] to see if my brother's forehead felt either too hot or too cold" (Kadohata 104). Katie reproduces the mothering activities taught to her by Lynn as she attempts to comfort and nurture Sammy. Nowhere does she mention modeling the behavior of her own mother to care for Sammy. Again, the active performance of mothering is privileged over the biological state of motherhood since Katie chooses to model the nurturing, calm actions of her sister, rather than those of her mostly-absent mother. Of course, this emphasis on nurturing places Kiyoko outside of the motherhood ideal as it simultaneously lauds Katie's choice to nurture.

Kiyoko's experience, though, complicates mothering; she cannot be read as "anti-Mother," but rather a diverse mother. She makes choices that result in her physical absence, and these invite multiple interpretations. Since Kiyoko's feelings regarding her separation from the children are not discussed and the family makes significant lifestyle adjustments to achieve Kiyoko's goal of home ownership, it is possible to read Kiyoko as a selfish mother character because she consistently justifies her desire to own a home and neglects to evaluate its effects on the family. The family makes choices based on Kiyoko's emotional state. For instance, when the family moves into the new apartment, Kiyoko's dislike for it

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develops into physical symptoms. Katie explains that, while Kiyoko did not complain, the family "could all tell how she felt because she wore a look like she did when she had a headache" (Kadohata 42-43). Kiyoko's fragility proves somewhat controversial since she appears delicate in her physicality and health but strong in her ability to work long hours. A cynical reading suggests that she uses her fragility to control the family's decisions, which would align her with the selfish mother characters. In fact, Kiyoko's physical reaction to the apartment (her instantaneous and continuous headaches) reinforces her desire to save enough money to buy a home—a goal that requires the entire family to sacrifice interests and adjust their routines. For instance, Lynn and Katie chose to save nickels that their father gives them to eventually give them to Kiyoko to help purchase the home; previously, the girls relished in the ritual of receiving the nickels and making a small purchase with them.

Eventually, the cost of the mortgage and Lynn's medical bills force Kiyoko to accept an overnight position at a processing plant. Katie and Sammy must wait in the car while Kiyoko works her shift. Again, Kiyoko ignores that her myopic goal of home ownership requires family members to make sacrifices. In this case, it causes Katie and Sammy to complete homework tasks in the car and sleep restlessly. In fact, Kiyoko makes choices consistently that remove her from the family as she effectively assigns material value to her purpose as a mother by uniting it to purchasing a home, and this may be read as selfish since the family

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adjusts to Kiyoko's objective primarily because of their concern for Kiyoko's

health following her physical reaction to the apartment. Kiyoko justifies her

decision to purchase a home by interpreting Lynn's slight health improvement

following settling into the new home as evidence that the home protects them.

Also, Kiyoko equates the home with her domestic duties and mothering becomes

quantified here, associated with capitalistic consumption.[79] Kiyoko chooses to

work outside of the home, but her motivation for working is informed by a desire

to manage the domestic space. So, in the final analysis, Kiyoko's agency

reinforces her role as the guardian of the domestic (associating her with the

motherhood ideal), even as it physically removes her from that space. This diverse

mothering experience challenges the motherhood ideal by complicating a

mother's ability to fulfill her domestic responsibilities since doing so removes her

from the family. Whether Kiyoko feels separated from her children or remorseful

is never addressed in the text because she considers her choices necessary and

important. Likewise, no judgment against Kiyoko is levied; rather, the text allows

for multiple interpretations – Kiyoko may be read as selfish or as a brave mother

willing to sacrifice moments with her children for a long-term goal that benefits

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[79] On a side note, I read this goal of home ownership as a form of assimilation for the immigrant family because Kiyoko associates the home with opportunity and possible socio-economic advancement as evidenced when she declares the family will move into a larger house in a more established neighborhood almost immediately after they move into the first home. To me, this reads as an acceptance of American cultural belief in meritocracy more than a simple desire for home ownership.

the family. Undoubtedly, Kiyoko does not replicate the motherhood ideal, even though she retains characteristics of it. By challenging the motherhood ideal, *Kira-Kira* presents a diverse mothering experience that complicates the fictional characterization of mother. Since Katie enacts aspects of the motherhood ideal by caring for her siblings, the text celebrates the ideal and suggests at its cultural significance.

Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* (1998 winner) also presents a diverse, marginal mother situated outside of the motherhood ideal through the characterization of Ma. The following brief analysis focuses on Ma's interests apart from domestic duties that develop her character, and, thus, separate her from the motherhood ideal. Perhaps the most disturbing of the award-winning texts, Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* (1998 winner) includes a horrifying scene in which the child narrator, Billie Jo Kelby, accidentally throws kerosene on her mother in an attempt to put out a small fire at her mother's feet. The kerosene fuels the fire, and Ma suffers from serious burns. Still recovering from her burns that left her unrecognizable, Mrs. Kelby (Ma) dies giving birth. Fourteen-year old Billie Jo, narrates the story as a collection of poems, and I consider the novel a *bildungsroman* since it traces Billie Jo's path towards individuation.

Although Ma dies prior to the halfway point of the novel, she serves as Billie Jo's primary caregiver. Unlike the motherhood ideal, Ma is described as unattractive and stubborn. In "Give Up on Wheat," Ma and Daddy disagree about

whether to continue growing wheat. Not afraid to state her opinion, quick-witted and stubborn, Ma challenges Daddy, which distinguishes her from the motherhood ideal since both Susan in *Jacob Have I Loved* and Lowis in *Shiloh* refrain from disagreeing with their husbands. Ma rejects a controlled, or civilized femininity in her actions. Despite her expressiveness, Ma bears sole responsibility for domestic duties. Indeed, the horrible accident occurs in the kitchen, and Billie Jo associates Ma symbolically to the kitchen by describing her anger as "shimmering over like a pot in an empty kitchen" that "boils itself down doing chores" (41). The description almost mitigates any independence Ma expresses through her temper by situating her inside the domestic space most often associated with restrictive femininity, the kitchen. Still, Ma's distinction from the ideal is represented through her piano playing. When Ma plays, Billie Jo views Ma as a complex subject, an individual.

Billie Jo writes a poem, "Dazzled" in which she describes her mother as expressing multiple identities: "In the kitchen she is my ma,/in the barn and the fields she is my daddy's wife,/but in the parlor Ma is something different" (24). Even though she "isn't much to look at" because of her bad teeth and skinniness, Billie Jo and Daddy are both "dazzled" by her when she plays the piano (24). This differentiation in Ma's character and her personal motivation distinguishes her from the Caldecott mother characters as well as many Newbery mother characters, and it represents the type of progressivism I sought at the onset of this

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study. Motivated not only by family, but also by a continued expression of her independence, Ma finds solace in her piano playing. Here, she reads as a fully realized mother character allowed to make choices, and, in this sense, she provides a contrast to the motherhood ideal.

Curiously (and disappointingly), though, Billie Jo interprets Ma's playing primarily in terms of its effects on people, and not in terms of Ma's character development. So, Billie Jo ends the poem by stating that she wants "someone to look at me" like her father looks at her mother when she plays, with "soft eyes" (Hesse 24). She expresses hopefulness that her playing, while not superior to her mother's, is "good enough" for a boy she likes named Arley (24-25). Here, Billie Jo sees the piano playing as a way to soothe a husband after a hard day's work. Mother's piano playing reproduces normative heterosexual behavior and gender roles, and this effectively reduces a trait that individualized Ma. Likewise, in the process of playing, Ma receives approval after entering the male gaze. Still, I contend that the piano provides both Ma and Billie Jo the opportunity for creative expression and individuality. Billie Jo's interpretation of the piano and its connection to her own character will evolve following her mother's death. The development granted Billie Jo's mother, despite the traditional setting of the story, results in the inclusion of a diverse mothering experience distinctive from the motherhood ideal.

4.3 Beyond the Ideal: Flaws, and Emotional Vulnerability in Developed, but

Present Mothers

This section considers mother characters granted agency and placed in the position of literary subject. Unlike DiCamillo's melodramatic, fantastical mothers, these mother characters introduce diverse mothering experiences in the form of flaws, vulnerabilities, and emotionality.[80] Lifestyle choices, such as divorce, suggest progressivism and a cultural acceptance of diverse motherhoods; however, even these mother characters contain intimations of the ideal; occasionally, characteristics of the ideal temper the individualism expressed by the mother characters. The three mother characters evaluated in this section display independence and vulnerability as they dramatize diverse mothering experiences. Yet, similar to the mother characters in the previous section, remnants of the motherhood ideal emerge in these characters, and I argue that they often read reactionary.

The three mother characters in this section are highly involved in the child protagonist's conflicts and become the literary subject recurrently. I examine whether a space for feminism emerges as these mother characters are granted agency, as their flaws are more developed, and as they consider their subjectivity by commenting on power dynamics, especially in relation to politics and

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[80] Antoinette and Phyllis are certainly flawed, but I read them as completely fantastical.

classism.[81] This final section analyzes the mothers in *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, *Dead End in Norvelt*, and *When You Reach Me*. I argue that these characters fall into the category of diverse mothering experiences and provide a creative space to explore emotional reactiveness and/or flaws in mother characters. Since these reactions and/or flaws significantly affect the child protagonist, they differ from a minor imperfection that simply provides character development for the motherhood ideal.[82] As these characters reject a controlled femininity, they express emotional vulnerability, primarily through sadness, fear, and/or anger. Emotional vulnerability does aid in character development; but, more importantly, it forces mothering to be examined as an action rather than a state of being because naturalness in mothering, as seen in the motherhood ideal, rejects imperfections.

Possibly the most well-known Newbery winner that dramatizes a child protagonist's reactions to his parents' divorce, Beverly Cleary's 1984 winner, *Dear Mr. Henshaw* follows the experiences of Leigh Botts as he writes letters about his life to a famous writer. Leigh's mother (Bonnie) speaks through the letters in a mediated voice, but Leigh allows the reader to learn about her motivations and vulnerabilities. Those vulnerabilities serve to develop her character and offer a generally unseen glimpse into the emotional side of

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[81] Consider Susan in *Jacob Have I Loved*, who explains her past but does not evaluate the reasons that she made choices based on a sense of romanticism.
[82] c.f. discussion of Lowis Preston from *Shiloh* in Chapter 3.

motherhood as they contribute to Leigh's eventual catharsis about his parents' divorce.

Comparable to Kiyoko from *Kira-Kira*, Bonnie's physical appearance situates her within the motherhood ideal. Leigh describes Bonnie as "so little compared to most moms," and, like Kiyoko, Bonnie "works so hard" (Cleary 57). The similarities end there, though. The fiercely independent Bonnie lacks the physical fragility of Kiyoko, and she enacts an independence that Kiyoko lacks. In fact, rather than return to Bakersfield, California following her divorce, Bonnie moves to another part of the coast when she can still enjoy the ocean. As a single mother in an unfamiliar town, she lacks a support system and must display strength as she works, attends nursing school, and raises Leigh, alone. This isolation in addition to the dissolution of the nuclear family simultaneously removes Bonnie from the motherhood ideal and advances an imagined mothering experience that parallels certain lived experiences of divorced mothers.

Unlike the motherhood ideal, Bonnie does demonstrate emotional vulnerability, primarily through her lingering feelings about her ex-husband. Bonnie's ambiguous emotions regarding the divorce emerge as she struggles to resolve her love for Leigh's dad with his irresponsible behavior. Leigh blames his father's occupation on the divorce because the financial toll of purchasing the rig limited the family's choices, forcing them to remain in a mobile home, and his frequent cross-country trips removed him from the domestic space so that Bonnie

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felt disconnected from him. She aligns to Sara Louise's mother in *Jacob Have I Loved* when explaining her reasons for marrying Bill: "He was big and handsome and nothing seemed to bother him, and the way he handled his rig—well, he seemed like a knight in shining armor;" yet, the failed marriage disconnects the two mother characters' experiences and classification (Cleary 75). Bonnie's narration of her past places her in the position of literary subject. Her saga, interconnected with Bill's, situates her outside of the nuclear family structure as it hints towards a mistake—marrying the wrong man. The suggestion of a misstep by a mother character, especially one that may invite critics to judge her choices does not appear in the motherhood ideal. Certainly, an ideal connotes flawlessness, and, as established throughout this project, the embodiment of perfection lies in direct conflict with the lived experience of mothering. As Beverly Birns and Dale Hay write, motherhood myths most often "bear no resemblance to reality," and I argue that the erroneousness of the motherhood ideal emanates most visibly in the ideal character's flawlessness (4). Indeed, even when motherhood ideal exemplar Lowis in *Shiloh* appears dishonest, it is truly an *appearance*. She intends to tell Marty's dad about Shiloh, but he discovers the dog before she can talk to him. She does not make a choice that invites judgment; she simply reacts too slowly. The inclusion of vulnerabilities in mother characters materializes in only a few of the Newbery winners.[83] This break from the

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[83] *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, *Dead End in Norvelt*, and *When You Reach Me*

motherhood ideal seen in *Dear Mr. Henshaw* offers space to explore diverse

mothering practices and proposes that mothers contain imperfections.

Bonnie's vulnerabilities do not prevent her from providing adequate care

to her child; so, she does not invite the classification of selfish mother.[84] She tries

to address Leigh's emotional concerns as demonstrated with her advice to him

about walking to school. Leigh walks to school alone in the morning because

Bonnie attends an early nursing class. Since he finds the house "so lonely in the

morning when she is gone that I can't stand it," Leigh chooses to leave with

Bonnie (Cleary 27). Bonnie attempts to resolve Leigh's distress here by

suggesting that he walk to school slowly, something which Leigh dislikes because

it makes the walk tedious. The example distinguishes Bonnie from the selfish

mothers because it demonstrates a thoughtful attempt to resolve her child's

distress. Also, it distinguishes her from a developed, but marginal mother like

Kiyoko from *Kira-Kira* whose perpetual absences prevent her from providing

substantial advice to her children.[85]

Likewise, prior to the divorce, Bonnie demonstrates a selflessness typical

of the motherhood ideal as she prioritizes her child's well-being. While her

marriage crumbles, Bonnie chooses to protect Leigh by refusing to disparage

Leigh's father in conversation; rather, she spends time with Leigh. A common

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[84] Consider Bonnie in opposition to Antoinette Tilling from The Tale of *Despereaux* or Phyllis in *Flora & Ulysses*. The latter two characters' flaws (narcissism and manipulation, respectively) interfere directly, and obviously, with the child protagonist's growth.
[85] Rather, the older sister, Lynn, assists the child protagonist during distressful moments.

destination for mother and son is the library, and Bonnie reads to Leigh regularly.

The time spent reading likely nurtures Leigh's interest in becoming an author, and

it provides a discursive mothering practice that prioritizes *acting* as a parent

(mother), rather than *simply* being one since Leigh's father's absence precludes

him from fostering Leigh's interest in writing. The link between mother and son

originates not from naturalness, then, but from experiences that bond the two

characters.

In one of the final scenes during which Bonnie thinks about the divorce,

she cries. Her emotional vulnerability causes Leigh to cry. Bonnie then states:

"It's not your fault, Leigh. You mustn't ever think that. Your Dad has many good

qualities. We just married too young, and he loves the excitement of life on the

road, and I don't." (Cleary 76). The catharsis, instigated by Bonnie's non-ideal

emotional reactiveness, portends Leigh's eventual acceptance of the divorce.

Contrary to the motherhood ideals who rarely (if ever) cry and perpetually refrain

from expressing emotional vulnerability in front of their children, Bonnie

complicates motherhood in the fictional space by dramatizing a response to

challenges faced by lived mothers in the latter half of the 20the century to the

present – specifically, divorce and its subsequent psychological effects. The text

refrains from restructuring the broken nuclear family; rather, the reconciliation of

Bonnie and Bill at the end during Bill's brief visit allows for a sanguine resolution

with the suggestion that Leigh (and Bonnie) are moving closer to accepting the

breakup of the family. Correspondingly, Bonnie states she does not know if she

will marry again (of course, the fact that the subject of marriage is introduced

suggests the patriarchal norm of heterosexual marriage). Throughout *Dear Mr.*

Henshaw, Bonnie challenges the motherhood ideal, eventually enacting a diverse

mothering experience through nuanced character traits. Bonnie resists the ideal

through her status as a single mother and her emotional vulnerabilities—that the

latter contributes to conflict resolution defies the notion that the motherhood ideal

must be employed in juvenile literature to create the requisite comfort and

nostalgia found in the genre.

One of the more developed mothers appears in the 2012 Newbery winner

by Jack Gantos, *Dead End in Norvelt*. A multi-dimensional character, the mother

(Mrs. Gantos) remains convinced of the communal philosophy that informed the

founding of Norvelt, despite her husband's belief in meritocracy and capitalism.

Mrs. Gantos defends her beliefs and possesses a strength of intellect as well as a

command of the domestic space unique among these Newbery winners. While her

intellect (most often displayed through a caustic personality) separates her from

the motherhood ideal, her sentimentality, command of the domestic space, and

practice of exclusive mothering are reminiscent of the motherhood ideal and

provides a reactionary force to counter Mrs. Gantos's independence.

Partly autobiographical, *Dead End in Norvelt* relates Gantos's

experiences during the summer of 1962 in his hometown of Norvelt,

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Pennsylvania. Originally founded as a co-operative community with a barter system, Norvelt has been almost completely consumed by the modern era. Jack finds himself grounded for the summer after following his dad's orders to mow the corn his mother intended to sell for charity dinners. Although the narration is first-person, Gantos allows his mother to speak with her own voice throughout the text.

Mrs. Gantos comments at one point that she wears the pants in the family, and her continued feistiness throughout the text combined with her aforementioned domestic management validate that statement. Mrs. Gantos initially displays her fierce determination when Jack mows a few of the cornstalks. At the sight of Jack's action, she "r[uns] across the field and plant[s] herself in front of the tractor" (Gantos 50). While confronting Jack, she "point[s] wildly at the cornstalks as if they were little half-formed bodies." (Gantos 50). Finally, Jack responds to her question of what he is doing by stating that he is looking for "Inca gold," and Mrs. Gantos responds in a very direct way: "Then you better buy a hearse" before throwing a cornstalk at Jack (Gantos 50-51). Here, not only does she remain steadfast, but also she exhibits the surprisingly rare trait of humor, and thus exhibits both intellect and agency.[86] Mrs. Gantos's snappishness and occasional sarcasm contrasts with the calm, passive nature of the motherhood ideal, and she enacts a motherhood of less traditionally feminine

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[86] In my reading. *Dead End in Norvelt* is the only text in this chapter that includes a mother character who uses both humor and sarcasm as a weapon.

traits. Indeed, she connects argumentation to her personality and mothering when she explains to Jack that she enjoys arguing with her husband.[87]

The next time that Jack attempts to mow down her cornstalks, at his father's request, he succeeds. Gantos writes a humorous scene in which Jack's mother "looked like she was coming to scalp me because she had a long wooden cooking spoon clutched in one hand" (Gantos 68). Knowing that he has done something "terribly wrong," Jack attempts to run away, but Mrs. Gantos chases him around the baseball diamond, in front of his friends. She is faster than Jack expects, catches him, and then "clamp[s] one hand around the back of [his] neck and marche[s] [him] across the outfield grass and up the Norvelt road" (Gantos 68-69). Unlike the mothers in *Jacob Have I Loved* or *Shiloh* who represent the motherhood ideal through their calm emotional responses, Mrs. Gantos shows no restraint. Her anger does not appear irrational, like Kiyoko's overreaction to Katie's poor cleaning of the bathtub in *Kira-Kira*.[88] Rather, this anger presents dimensions that strengthen and authenticate Mrs. Gantos's development beyond a stereotype. Scenes depicting Mrs. Gantos's anger occur throughout the novel. In fact, Jack explains of his father: "He thought Mom might back down, but he could have been away for two years and she would still have been just as angry. It was as if she could preserve her anger and store it in a glass jar next to the hot

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[87] Consider Mrs. Gantos's willingness to argue with her husband in comparison to Susan's refusal to defend herself against the harassment of her husband's mother in *Jacob Have I Loved*. Mrs. Gantos reads as assertive, and this distinguishes her from motherhood ideal exemplar, Susan.
[88] Refer to page 143 for a detailed discussion of this scene.

horseradish and yellow beans and corn chowchow she kept in the dank basement pantry" (Gantos 73). Still, no indictment of her anger occurs, nor does any indication that she repress emotions; controlled femininity receives no attention in the text. Acceptance of her emotionality corresponds with an expanded fictional representation of mothering and infuses the mother character with distinctiveness and depth.

However, I argue that an emphasis on her sentimentalism tempers her feistiness because these moments of sentimentality suggest the motherhood ideal. Despite her willingness to give Jack a "tongue lashing" when needed, she can become "sentimental" with Jack. The most obvious of this is on Jack's birthday when she gives Jack "a goofy love look, like she was remembering the day I was born" (Gantos 172). Jack explains that, although, he would usually resist "all this kind of Mom attention," "it was my birthday and we always acted like it was her birthday too, because it was the day I was born and the day she gave birth to me" (Gantos 172). The obvious suggestion here is that an expression of sentimentality from Mrs. Gantos occurs commonly on Jack's birthday, and it rekindles the bond shared by mother and child who were once part of each other. Likewise, her reluctance to depart with her dead parents' clothes expresses an emotional attachment, especially since the insistence to retain unusable items belies her practicality. The sentimentalism also appears in relation to her feelings about the town, as Jack explains she still knows everyone and she turns her head away from

the abandoned buildings because they bring her sadness. As one of the founding families, she raised this town and continues to mother it as both she and Norvelt age. While this sentimentalism provides nuance to her character and mothering experience, I argue that Mrs. Gantos's sentimentalism harkens back to the motherhood ideal. As it softens Mrs. Gantos, it reacts to expressive, disparate mothering and mediates the rhetorical mother voice.

The final text in this section, *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead, introduces twelve-year old Miranda Sinclair, the daughter of a single mother. Miranda narrates this 2010 award winner, which includes science-fiction elements and is set in 1978-1979. Despite the first-person narration provided by Miranda, her mother exhibits a variety of traits and motivations that make her a developed character. Specifically, Miranda's mother displays a lack of the emotional stability found in the motherhood ideal. She exhibits character flaws, primarily through stealing office supplies, and she expresses some emotional vulnerabilities. I contend that *When You Reach Me* creates a mother character with dimensions, nuances, and flaws suggestive of lived mothering experiences. Miranda's mother displays contradictions in her behavior that contrast to the motherhood ideal; yet, the resolution recreates the nuclear family, thus privileging normative motherhood.[89]

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[89] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this term in relation to this project.

Not unlike other mother characters, Miranda's mother is "short and tiny,"

a trait that associates her with the traditional femininity indicative of the

motherhood ideal (Stead 5).[90] In fact, "she has to buy her belts in the kids'

department and make an extra hole in her watchband so it won't fall of her arm"

(Stead 5). Also, she has a tendency to wear clothing purchased from the Juniors'

section of a department store. Incongruities arise between her small stature and

the obstinacy she demonstrates. Miranda and her mother moved to an apartment

in New York City during Miranda's infancy. In relating the story of their arrival,

Miranda reveals her mother's fortitude:

> Mom cried the first time she saw our apartment. The whole place
> was filthy, she says. The wood floors were "practically black," the
> windows were "cakes with dirt," and the walls were smeared with
> something she "didn't want to even think about" Always in those
> same words. I was there that day—in a little bucket-seat baby
> carrier. It was cold out, and she had a new coat on. There were no
> hangers in the closets, and she didn't want to put the coat down on
> the dirty floor or drape it over one of the peeling, hissing radiators,
> so she carried it while she went from room to room, telling herself
> it wasn't so awful (Stead 15).

Miranda explains that, rather than assume a defeatist attitude, her mother chose to

find a grocery store, buy the necessary supplies, and scour the apartment. This

same strength of character appears through the community meetings that

Miranda's mother holds once a month in which neighbors share concerns about

maintenance issues in the apartment complex. Despite the fact that "nothing ever

changes, " Miranda's mother continues to send letters to the landlord or city

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[90] Physically small mothers appear in *Kira-Kira* and *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, for instance.

officials about issues that affect residents, like faulty heating units or clogged

water pipes (Stead 13). In addition, Miranda's mother expresses political

opinions about health care and women's rights; she even volunteers to counsel

pregnant, incarcerated women in an attempt to prepare them to rejoin society.

Like Mrs. Gantos, Miranda's mother's interest in politics suggests an

understanding of the world outside of family, or rather, the world that affects her

family. Far from the motherhood ideal, Mrs. Gantos and Miranda's mother

dramatize a motherhood concerned with the power relations that affect their

families. Of particular interest is that even though no one listens and nothing

changes, Miranda's mother continues to hold her meetings, which is indicative of

her resilience. Indeed, her interest in politics alone rejects controlled, or passive

femininity.

Although her mother exhibits this type of resilience, she becomes

emotionally reactive at times. As discussed, this emotional reactiveness in mother

characters separates them from the motherhood ideal but does portray a diverse

mothering experience. After a particularly frustrating day at work, Miranda's

mother arrives home upset and complaining. When her boyfriend, Richard

attempts to calm her down, she does not relax. Instead, she barks back: "Did

anyone ask *you* to type three copies of a sixteen-page document?" (Stead 86).

Richard is not deterred and states simply, "But you're done now. It's over. Why

let it wreck your whole evening?," which causes Mom to leave the room angrily

(Stead 86). Here, Richard, a boyfriend and non-relative, exhibits rational behavior in place of mother. Still, her outbursts do not keep her from adequately raising Miranda. Like Mrs. Gantos from *Dead End in Norvelt*, Miranda's mother is not encouraged to practice controlled femininity. This dimension of character, then, allows the cultural work of a book like *When You Reach Me* to propagate the acceptance of multiple motherhoods. A less mediated mother voice places fewer restrictions on the expression of mothering, allowing more diverse mothering experiences to emerge.

Another character dimension that could be considered a flaw is Miranda's mother's habit of taking office supplies. In preparing for her spot on the *$20,000 Pyramid*, she has taken "a big paper calendar," markers, notecards, and other supplies (Stead 3). Miranda explains that: "Richard and I figured out a while ago that the more stuff Mom swipes from the office supply closet, the more she's hating work" (Stead 6). Here, an adult figure practices untruthful behavior, and receives no punishment. (Theft is essentially lying, a transgression that runs throughout the body of texts in this study. Child protagonists who lie are punished).[91] As her stress levels heighten, Miranda's mother's steals more office supplies; in fact, her stealing alerts Miranda and Richard that she is suffering some distress. Rather than shun her, they seek ways to calm her stress. Here, Miranda's mother's flaws challenge the boundaries of mothering by introducing

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[91] See *Shiloh*, *The Giver*, *Out of the Dust*, and *Dead End in Norvelt*

the need for mothers to receive emotional support. Notably, they do not interfere with her mothering and somewhat unifies mother and daughter since Miranda responds to her mother's emotional vulnerability with concern.

Miranda's mother's susceptibility becomes most pronounced when she walks onstage to participate in the *$20,000 Pyramid*. Miranda explains that her mother seems "nervous," "terrified," and that her "voice sounds too high" as she asks for a sweater (Stead 182). Then, Miranda states that Mom looks "smaller than ever" when she walks onstage with her hair pulled back into barrettes (Stead 185). This feminine, indeed childlike description, tempers Miranda's mother's determination and assertiveness. The determined character who once cared for a newborn while she navigated an unfamiliar neighborhood in New York City in order to purchase supplies to clean a filthy apartment suddenly becomes weak prior to being placed on a national stage. The gaze of the television viewers causes Miranda's mother to appear more childlike, which suggests a reaction to the assertiveness that distinguishes her from the motherhood ideal; her autonomy becomes restrained. In this very public space, mother becomes tamed.

Finally, Miranda's mother exhibits nurturing characteristics indicative of the motherhood ideal; her independence does not prevent her from making decisions while thinking about her daughter. For instance, when Richard asks Miranda's mother to marry him, she hesitates. She explains to Miranda that she doesn't know if it is the right choice for Miranda. In one of the more revealing

scenes in the novel, she states: " I just—I don't want to make any more mistakes. I don't think I can bear to make one more single mistake" (Stead 116). She follows this with "I just feel stuck, like I'm afraid to take any steps, in case they're the wrong ones. I need a little more time to think" (Stead 117). Like Bonnie from *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, the mother character's choices may be read as mistakes, thus rejecting perfect motherhood. "Mistakes" complicate mothering, hinting at its messiness, especially since both Bonnie and Miranda's mother practice active, positive mothering in which they attempt to meet their children's emotional needs. In considering the proposal, for instance, Miranda's mother associates the choice with her mothering duties and Miranda's happiness. By the end of the text, she does accept Richard's proposal. In that sense, the text ends differently than *Dear Mr. Henshaw* since it affirms normative values through a resolution that includes an impending marriage and recreation of the nuclear family.

4.4 Mother is Not-Mother: Duality and Character Development

Overall, the inclusion of mother characters outside of the motherhood ideal (identified previously as selfish and developed mothers) is encouraging. I did not expect the diversity displayed in fictional mothering, especially after examining the Caldecott mother characters who are generally one-dimensional stereotypes. A somewhat disturbing pattern, present in almost every text, though, is the tendency to characterize mother primarily through dualism. In other words,

her traits are almost always placed in opposition to another character's (usually

father). Certainly, this distinguishes mother from father and emphasizes that she

either fulfills or neglects her duties to manage the domestic space and provide for

the needs of her children. Yet this distinction most often supports gender

stereotypes. In evaluating the possible acculturative capabilities of these texts,

then, I analyzed binaries.[92] Specifically, I considered Vivien Burr's comments in

her *Introduction to Social Constructionism* that "to give anything an identity, to

say what it is, is necessarily also to say what it is not" so that " to say that a

quality is present depends upon implying what is absent" (107). While the

previous sections assign generalized definitions to mother characters in Newbery

texts, this section claims that that the use of binaries through dualism in character

development further conventionalizes the motherhood ideal by placing the mother

character either inside or outside of the ideal. I consider the use of this dualism in

characterization as found in *Jacob Have I Loved*, *Shiloh*, *Flora & Ulysses*, *Kira-

Kira*, and *Dead End in Norvelt*. Ultimately, I argue that this method of

characterization emphasizes desirable traits in mothers that parallel those found in

the Caldecott texts and reinforce the motherhood ideal. In the case of the diverse

mothering experiences found in *Flora & Ulysses*, *Kira- Kira*, and *Dead End in

Norvelt*, the dualism not only reinforces the motherhood ideal and emphasizes

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[92] In regards to the acculturative capabilities, some children's literature theorists contend that childhood is a "separate culture" with unique "rituals" and rules; which supports previous statements about the acculturation that occurs through juvenile literature (Lurie 194). Perry Nodelman and John Stephens also postulate that childhood is a culture separate from adulthood.

nostalgia, but also it mitigates the diverse mothering experience. The dualism restricts language and becomes a creative force of acculturating children into expecting mothers to enact the ideal. While adults may choose whether to adhere to the myth, children absorb these reductive cultural codes in a way that I contend promotes gender essentialism over individuality.

The contrasts between the mother and father characters in *Jacob Have I Loved* and *Shiloh* relate primarily to the domestic duties—mother works inside the home while father tends to the physical labor outside of the home. Of course, these seemingly simple binaries construct gender, suggesting a "normal" male and female gender. "Good" mothers conform to the motherhood ideal while "bad" mothers read as opposite to the ideal. The reductive association of mother to the domestic *creates* the motherhood ideal and the idea of essentialism while it dramatizes gender roles. Sometimes, the polarity between mother and father situates the mother character outside of the ideal but still privileges the motherhood ideal in the text, suggesting that, when not aligned with the ideal, the mother character is not as feminine.

The strained mother-daughter relationship in *Flora & Ulysses* creates tension within the text and initiates the dualism in characterization between mother (Phyllis) and father (George). Flora and her father share a love of comics; he reads to her from the same books Phyllis forbids her to read. In contrast to Phyllis's domineering presence, George is described as a "sad, quiet man," who,

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since the divorce, has "become even sadder and quieter" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 38).

Despite his sadness, Flora enjoys her father's company and feels safe with him

rather than with her mother. Her father agrees with Flora that the squirrel she

finds (Ulysses) is a superhero. On the contrary, Phyllis calls Ulysses "diseased,"

and when she sees the first typed message from the squirrel on the keyboard that

she uses for her novel writing, rather than pique her curiosity, the sight sends her

into a rage. The differing reactions of mother and father to Ulysses contribute to

Phyllis's characterization as Flora's antagonist. Likewise, these binaries enhance

Phyllis' distinction as a selfish mother because George's contrasting selfless,

understanding demeanor towards Flora invites the reading that places Phyllis

outside of the ideal by highlighting her egocentrism.

In *Flora & Ulysses*, it is most often what Phyllis does not do that sends

coded messages about mothering expectations—she does not provide a stable,

safe, emotionally-secure, and accepting environment. Furthering the antagonism

between mother and daughter, Phyllis sends Flora and George on a journey to kill

Ulysses. In opposition to her mother's controlling environment, the ride in her

father's car results in a sense of freedom, which is dramatized strongest when

Flora asks to feel her father's heart. He obliges, and "for the first time ever,

George Buckman took both his hands off the steering wheel while the car was in

motion," and Flora decides that his heart "felt very certain, very strong, and very

large," and the reader remembers that, although Phyllis expresses her love for the

lamp Mary Ann, she "never said that she loved [Flora] with all her heart" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 137; 30).[93] As a mother, Phyllis fails to acknowledge and respond to Flora's emotional needs. She ignores the imperative to ensure Flora's security and contentment.

As Flora rides in her father's car, the soothing scene includes a slight, comforting "singing" of the windshield wipers, a sleeping Ulysses, and a "happy" Flora (DiCamillo, *Flora* 137). The serene car ride contrasts with the next scene in which Flora must return to her mother's home; she describes the apartment as "foreboding" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 138). The inability of Phyllis to create a stable home environment separates her from the motherhood ideal. The dualism between Phyllis and George emphasizes the motherhood ideal because, while he does not represent the ideal, George aligns more closely to it than does Phyllis through his selflessness and ability to protect Flora's well-being. Furthermore, it emphasizes Phyllis's selfishness, supporting a negative reading of that trait because the child protagonist appears content and confident when with the father who displays traits that oppose the mother's self-centeredness.

As mentioned in the previous discussion of selfish mothers, a distinguishing characteristic is that their selfishness prevents them from providing a positive, safe home environment. In *Kira-Kira*, Katie's narration of her mother and father suggest that, only together, do they maintain stability for the children.

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[93] As discussed in section 4.1, the ceramic lamp is Phyllis's prized possession.

Optimistically, this may be read as egalitarianism. However, the dualism in

characterization demonstrates that Kiyoko's emotional reactiveness is remedied

only by Katie's father. Katie's descriptions of her parents represent her thoughts

about them: "Our father was solid and tall, six feet, and mother was delicate and

tiny, four feet ten" (Kadohata 9). Throughout the text, and especially following

Lynn's death, Katie follows her father's advice and interprets his behavior as

more steady than her mother's. Her father's emotional stability protects both

Katie and her mother as he guides them forward instead of allowing them to

remain in any conflict that they experience. Therefore, when her father does react

emotionally by crying after throwing a rose on Lynn's grave, Katie feels her sense

of comfort slipping. Katie explains that she has not seen him cry since Lynn's

death and that "[c]rying made his whole body shake wildly, as if he were

possessed" (Kadohata 220). Katie's fear at her father's reaction and her inability

to rely on her mother leaves Katie unsupported once again. Here, the dualism in

parental figures functions to isolate Katie, which forces her to navigate mature

emotions and experience alone—a step on her path towards individuation.

Kiyoko's inability to support her daughter emotionally Katie's relative lack of

faith in her mother's parenting abilities situate Kiyoko outside of the motherhood

ideal and suggest that her flaws, like Phyllis's, affect the family negatively.

4.5 Concluding Thoughts: A Few Steps Forward

Texts that influence young readers could (and sometimes do) offer a space to explore diverse mothering experiences. Certainly, the inclusion of mother-as-subject (especially in *Dead End in Norvelt* and *When You Reach Me*) invites these voices. Still, I contend that the push towards the status quo (such as the reproduction of the nuclear family) and the continued mediation of the mother character (especially through a connection to the ideal, even in the most nuanced mothers like Mrs. Gantos and Miranda's mother) continues to appear in the award-winning texts.

While a lack of convincing progressivism in award-winning texts may not be surprising to some, this fictional trend does not parallel the evolved (and evolving) lived experiences of motherhood in the decades following the onset of second-wave feminism. However, it aligns with the sluggish move towards an acceptance of multiple versions of femininity identified by feminist scholars in a way that demonstrates an "undersupported, sentimentalized" motherhood (Wolf 1). Any tension levied against the ideal is most often accompanied by a reaffirmation of the myth in a way that mediates discursive mothering. Despite their celebration of the status quo and continued inclusion of the motherhood ideal, most of these texts privilege the action of mothering over the state of being a mother. However, the use of dualism counters some of these positive developments since it suggests an appropriate way to mother. Shared parenting is

mostly absent as well, used primarily as a means to contrast mother against father. So, when father does assist, it is almost always because of mother's failings (as seen especially in *Kira-Kira*). Still, the influence of the mother character within these texts is obvious as these generally minor characters yield great influence on the protagonists. In the end, these texts provide only a narrow space for the representation of multiple motherhoods. Within these cultural arbiters are deeply-seeded cultural biases about expectations of motherhood, from maintaining self-control to providing emotional support to children that create a normalized reference for motherhood. Indeed, the "idealized figure of the Good Mother casts a long shadow" (Ruddick 31). The seeming acceptance of diverse motherhoods found in the Newbery texts is often regulated by a reactionary inclusion of the motherhood ideal. Propagating the ideal regulates the impression of dissatisfaction with the mothering experience as well.

As "mother" becomes more defined, nuanced, and flawed and moves further from the ideal, a potential for the feminist space emerges. As demonstrated in the texts in this section, that space is sometimes used to allow fictional experiences that parallel lived experiences of motherhood, thus somewhat escaping the stylized, sentimental motherhoods represented in the Caldecott books explored in Chapter 2. Still, in the end, the texts selected for awards tend to prevent radical mothering voices and motherhoods; the motherhood ideal

infiltrates developed mother characters and non-traditional, fictional mothering

practices.

Chapter 5

Regulating Mother/Daughter Conflict and Creating Maternal Anxieties though the

Motherhood Ideal

In addition to creating nostalgia, the motherhood ideal (either through an

exemplar character or diverse mother character influenced by traits of the ideal)

may be used to assuage mother/daughter conflict in the Newbery texts. This

chapter presents two arguments regarding the motherhood ideal and conflict; one

relates to mother/daughter conflict and the other to maternal anxieties. First, I

contend that characteristics of the motherhood ideal contribute to mother/daughter

conflict resolution and/or benefit the female child protagonist's growth.[94] Rather

than consider the potentiality of the mother/daughter relationship through

reasonable conflict resolution, the motherhood ideal becomes a tool, a

prescription to solve mother/daughter disputes. Also, I evaluate internal mother

conflict as represented in Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons*. The motherhood

ideal produces anxieties for the two mothers in Creech's novel. I argue that *Walk

Two Moons* embraces the imperfectness of mothering, intimating that any

expectation of an idealized mother proves destructive.

Mother/daughter relationships appears throughout feminist theory,

appearing even in Virginia Woolf's statement that we "think back through our

mothers" (26). Woolf's comments refer primarily to literature produced and

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[94] Depending on the text, "growth" may refer to psychological growth and/or the process of
individuation.

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consumed by women, but I argue that this may apply to literature read by children, especially if those texts may contribute to the child reader's conception of mothering. In other words, the texts provide another way to think back to those cultural values and symbols that influence the lived practice of mothering (or at least the cultural expectations that surround it).[95] These texts present fictional examples of mothering to children who may then internalize them. John Stephens writes that focalizers (usually the child protagonist) in juvenile literature provide "one of the chief methods by which a text socializes its readers, as they efface their own selfhood and internalize the perceptions and attitudes of the focalizer" (60). Therefore, the child protagonist's reactions to the motherhood ideal may influence the child reader's acceptance of the motherhood ideal. Likewise, if we accept Adrienne Rich's statement that "we teach the girl that there is only one kind of womanhood and that the incongruent parts of herself must be destroyed," then it is possible to view the consistent appearance of a motherhood ideal in juvenile literature as capable of supporting a specific womanhood (xxii). Furthermore, I contend that, if the ideal regulates conflicts and contributes to a child protagonist's psychological growth and/or individualism, then it dramatizes a correct, or proper way to mother.

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[95] Specifically, I am referring to the potentiality of the motherhood ideal to limit the individual experience of mothering because the ideal condones certain, preferred mothering behavior. A longer discussion about the Newbery motherhood ideal appears in Chapter 3.

In this chapter, I argue that characteristics of the motherhood ideal contribute to mother/daughter conflict resolution and/or benefit the female child protagonist's individuation. Considering the concern with mother/daughter conflict in feminist scholarship and the previously established premise of this study that the motherhood ideal codifies gender, discussion of the mother/daughter conflict applies to this study.[96] As so many of these award-winning texts explore strains in the mother/daughter relationship, the relationship itself denotes conflict. Yet, as Suzanna Danuta Walter writes, the idea of the mother/daughter relationship as one rooted in conflict may be "a phenomenon limited to white, bourgeois society" (Bode 173). Beyond the association to race in Walter's statement, I read that any insistence that *naturalness* dictates the inevitability of a contentious mother/daughter relationship as originating in culture and proves limiting to mothers and daughters. In other words, no biological or genetic basis exists to justify the friction. A cultural expectation of mother and daughter to clash restricts the power of this relationship, and the potentiality to explore the "cathexis between mother and daughter," which may contribute to mother/daughter conflicts disappears in the fictional space (Rich 225).[97] I posit that, since conflict resolution and individuation in the fictional space invite a positive or optimistic reading, their connection to the motherhood

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[96] Roberta Trites writes that "People are constructed into their gender roles
[97] Indeed, Rich labels the cathexis as "the great unwritten story" between mother and daughter (225).

ideal further normalizes and privileges the ideal in a way that promotes a "right" way to mother—primarily through selflessness and nurturing.[98] While selflessness may affect others positively, its link to nurturing in these texts through the motherhood ideal proposes naturalness and prescriptive mothering practice.

Possibly, lived mother/daughter conflicts relate to moments of maternal ambivalence in which a mother feels concurrent and conflicting emotions of love and hate for her child. As Rozsika Parker argues in *Mother Love/Mother Hate*, ambivalence may allow a mother to think about her relationship with her child, possibly learning about herself as a mother. Perhaps in contemplating her mothering practices, she may realize that idealism influenced her decisions and lead to her distress. The only text that considers any negative effects of mothering on the mother is *Walk Two Moons*. In Creech's novel, the mental distress caused by mothering originates primarily from mother characters' interpretations of the motherhood ideal. Unable to achieve the perfection endemic in the ideal, these mother characters suffer from anxieties and depression.

An analysis of five texts follows. First, Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved* resolves the mother/daughter conflict through the practices of the motherhood ideal exemplar, Susan. Ultimately, the mother's nurturing aids in the child's individuation, giving the daughter (Sara Louise) the confidence to leave

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[98] For the purposes of consistency and conciseness, the traits of the motherhood ideal examined in this chapter are selflessness and nurturing. For a more detailed discussion of the motherhood ideal, refer to Chapter 3.

home. Sara Louise's initial judgment of her mother as passive evolves, and she eventually recreates some of the mothering practices learned from her mother, which signifies the propriety of these practices. In the second text examined, Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me*, the mother/daughter conflict originates from the daughter's insistence that her mother conform to the motherhood ideal. The mother's nurturing leads the daughter to psychological growth as she adopts an empathetic view of her mother. In Stead's novel, the inclusion of a developed mother character does not prevent values of the motherhood ideal from influencing mother/daughter relations. In *Kira-Kira*, the developed but marginal mother character's emotional detachment and neglect of domestic responsibilities causes the child protagonist to adopt care-giving activities typically associated with the motherhood ideal. Ultimately, her immersion in these duties directs her towards psychological growth through the acceptance of her sister's death – a process with which her mother does not assist. Finally, the mother in Kate DiCamillo's *Flora & Ulysses* rejects her egocentric motivations to manipulate her daughter, instead adopting the selflessness associated with the motherhood ideal. Here, the mother character's decision to employ the child-centered philosophy associated with the ideal ensures resolution of the mother/daughter conflict and honors the child's individualism. In each text, the adoption of some characteristics associated with the motherhood ideal assists in positive conflict resolution, thereby promoting the motherhood ideal. Finally, *Walk Two Moons* receives

attention because of Creech's willingness to dramatize two mothers' emotional distress when they cannot reconcile idealized expectations of mothering with its imperfect state.

5.1 Resisting Mother: Mother/Daughter Conflicts and the Motherhood Ideal

> I opened my mouth but shut it again hard. *Momma*, I wanted to cry out, *tell me I'm not in danger of hell fire*. My childhood nightmares of damnation were rising fast, but there was no place for me to run. How could I share with my mother the wildness of my body or the desperation of my mind? (142)

The preceding statement from Sara Louise in *Jacob Have I Loved* follows a brief disagreement between mother and daughter in which mother (Susan) scolds her daughter for arguing with her grandmother. Sara Louise shares her inner conflict with the reader, but not Susan; as the quote indicates, Sara Louise often remains silent when interacting with her mother. Rather than providing fictional space to explore the potential of the mother/daughter relationship, the mother's voice is silenced. Sara Louise may choose to not speak or to "glar[e] her into silence" when her mother attempts to offer encouragement (Paterson 180). This limiting of the mother voice is a type of aphasia. I read it as promoting the motherhood ideal by reducing the prospect for complexities in the mothering experience – if mother cannot speak, then she cannot create tension or express individuality. Of course, Sara Louise's reluctance to speak with her mother does not alleviate the conflicting, and often dismissive, opinions she holds of her mother. As such, the unspoken comments between mother and daughter erupt into a confrontational

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scene towards the end of the novel that ushers Susan into the subject position

momentarily. Through this scene, Sara Louise will gain an understanding of her

mother's parenting philosophy. Prior to that moment, their continued, but mostly

silent, conflict suggests a disconnect from each other.

Sara Louise desires to detach from her mother (and, indeed, her childhood

home). I read her dream in which the ferry to Rass sinks with both her sister and

mother on board as symbolic of her need to liberate. Despite her mother's

symbolic death, Sara Louise's usually silent disputes with her mother contrast

with the spirited arguments between Sara Louise and her grandmother. In other

words, although dreaming of her mother's death gives the impression that Sara

Louise dislikes her mother, that reading must be contextualized by understanding

her relationship to Grandma. Sara Louise views her grandmother as an irascible

parasite and lobs verbal insults at her, frequently. Yet, she values her mother's

guidance, as evidenced in the quote at the beginning of this section in which Sara

Louise mentally begs her mother to assure her that she will not burn. Susan's

calm, thoughtful demeanor contrasts with Grandma's reactive and hurtful

treatment of Sara Louise.

Susan, as previously established, serves as the motherhood ideal exemplar

for this project.[99] Therefore, Sara Louise's need to differentiate herself from her

childhood home reads as a natural, expected process of maturation and as a

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[99] Refer to Chapter 3 for an analysis of Susan as the motherhood ideal exemplar.

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reaction against the motherhood ideal rather than a dislike of her mother. I read

Sara Louise's reaction to her mother as a fictional representation of Adrienne

Rich's comments on matrophobia; not only does Sara Louise fear becoming her

mother, but also she "perform[s] radical surgery" by differentiating herself from

her mother (236). In her attempts to individuate, Sara Louise crosses gender

boundaries as she fishes and crabs with her father. She takes pride in the

activities, stating: "It made me feel less helpless to be a girl of fifteen doing what

many regarded as a man's job" (Paterson 162). Susan encourages her daughter's

choices, unconcerned with the ways in which others may view Sara Louise.[100]

Rather, Susan focuses on her daughter's well-being, and, although she would

prefer for Sara Louise to attend school, her motivation to ensure her daughter's

happiness (a characteristic of the motherhood ideal) results in her support of Sara

Louise. Through a "man's job," Sara Louise finds strength, and she enjoys the

authenticity of the work. She contrasts it to the domestic space and her opinion

that it requires inauthentic posturing, as demonstrated through her mother's

reactions to Grandma.

Jacob Have I Loved equates femininity with passivity through Susan, and

Sara Louise (herself not an overly feminine character) views her mother's

reluctance to react emotionally or to defend herself as a weakness. For instance,

Sara Louise's sympathetic feelings for her mother at her grandmother's harassing

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[100] Contrast Susan with Antoinette in *The Tale of Despereaux*.

and "persecut[ion]" evolve into a "fury" because Susan refuses to defend herself (Paterson 198). In contrast to Sara Louise's habit of lashing out at her grandmother, Susan remains perpetually calm. The dualism between mother and daughter alludes to Jo and Marmee March in *Little Women*. While Susan does not engage in biting her lip to hold her temper, her actions suggest Marmee's quiet resolve while Sara Louise shares Jo's assertiveness. In fact, a number of parallels exist between *Little Women* and *Jacob Have I Loved* – from the main character not marrying the boy next door to her positioning both within and outside of the domestic, feminine space. Likewise, the comparison to *Little Women* strengthens Susan's characterization as motherhood ideal since it unites her with Marmee, herself representative of traditional, selfless mothering practices.

Susan, like Marmee, does narrate her past in her own voice at one point in the novel in response to her daughter's pointed question about her seemingly passive behavior. Susan then explains that she will not deny Sara Louise the chance to leave the island, and Sara Louise asks if her mother and father will miss her like they miss her sister Caroline. Her mother's one-word response, "More," is accompanied by a nurturing gesture of "reaching up and ever so lightly smoothing [Sara Louise's] hair with her fingertips" (Paterson 201). Even at the thought of losing her daughter and immediately following a confrontational scene with her, Susan remains encouraging – true to the motherhood ideal. Practicing the ideal leads to conflict resolution, and it allows Sara Louise to understand that

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her mother's seeming passivity has encouraged Sara Louise throughout her childhood.

Sara Louise expresses gratitude for that "one word that allowed [her] to leave the island and begin to build myself as a soul, separate from the long, long shadow of my twin" (Paterson 201). Rejecting femininity by fishing and crabbing does not provide Sara Louise with the confidence to leave; rather, reassurance from the motherhood ideal, and the understanding that Susan's passivity has represented an acceptance and subtle encouragement of Sara Louise's choices, grants Sara Louise the confidence to forge her path.[101] Here, I am reminded of Andrea O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey's argument in *Mothers and Daughters* that the mother/daughter relationship may encourage the daughter to reach selfhood (1-18). While I would like to offer a wholly positive reading, I cannot ignore that Sara Louise's guide to autonomy (her mother) embodies the motherhood ideal. In a final affirmation of the motherhood ideal, Sara Louise chooses motherhood after becoming a nurse midwife (itself a career imbued with nurturing activities). She recreates many of Susan's mothering practices. Like her mother, she rejects a non-traditional path (her initial ambition was to become a doctor) in favor of nursing and raising a family.

Miranda, the child protagonist in *When You Reach Me*, harbors resentment towards her single mother for her absence and inability to reproduce the

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[101] Susan refrains from correcting Sara Louise's "unfeminine" behavior, choosing instead to support her exploration of identity.

motherhood ideal. A fan of *A Wrinkle in Time*, Miranda laments: "I couldn't help

thinking about how, in my book, Meg's mother had French toast waiting for Meg

in the morning. She was a single mom, too, with Meg's dad being held prisoner

halfway across the universe" (Stead 97). Some of Miranda's negative feelings

toward her mother's absence relate to discourse about classism in the novel.[102]

Miranda, a latchkey kid who lives in a run-down apartment, first associates

parenting with material wealth. So, when her middle-class friend Annemarie

remarks that Miranda's mother is "so cool" because "she treats you like a real

person" unlike Annemarie's father who treats her "like a baby," Miranda thinks of

the parenting that she does not receive because of her mother's work schedule

(Stead 121). While Annemarie's father spoils his daughter, Miranda arrives home

to an empty apartment. Miranda allows the differences between their living

arrangements to lower her self-esteem. She begins to feel separate from her peers,

and she assigns blame to her mother whom she believes cannot understand that

living in a seedy part of town in an apartment that the landlord neglects

contributes to Miranda's low self-confidence. Classism emerges again when the

girls visit a department store where Miranda has a charge account. Upon learning

this, Miranda thinks: "One has a charge account at Gold's. One has keys in her

pocket" (Stead 133). She does not discuss her feelings of inadequacy with her

mother but internalizes them, which creates conflict between Miranda and her

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[102] *When You Reach Me* also illustrates the tendency of the Newbery texts to refrain from labeling a child protagonist's socioeconomic status, unless the child is impoverished.

mother. Miranda realizes that her mother's status as a single mother prevents her from being physically present and performing certain domestic duties, but she simultaneously views her mother as incompetent in the domestic setting.

Privileging the motherhood ideal, Miranda daydreams about a mother who will "have all my snacks tied up with ribbon" and arrive home with her after school (Stead 121). She discounts the positive choices her mother makes, even protesting against the community service her mother provides.[103] Consumed by her opinion that her mother lacks the domestic skills that would solve all of Miranda's self-confidence issues, she ceases to confide in her mom; so she does not tell her mother about the mysterious letters she receives or the laughing man that she sees on the corner. I am reminded here of Sara Ruddick's comments in *Maternal Thinking* that mothers' voices have been "drowned by professional theory, ideologies of motherhood, sexist arrogance, and childhood fantasy" (40). Miranda's fantasies of the ideal compel her to evaluate her mother rather than request her counsel.[104] Miranda's mother loses authority and power as a mother because of her daughter's silence; this prevents an exchange between the two and allows the ideal to perpetuate in Miranda's mind.

In fact, she begins to view her mother differently only after her mother engages in a selfless, child-centered activity in the kitchen. When Miranda's

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[103] Her mother counsels pregnant inmates.

[104] Similar to Sara Louise in *Jacob Have I Loved*, Miranda engages in a silent protest against her mother until she finally has an emotional outburst.

friend Annemarie spends the night, Miranda wakes to find her own mother

cooking breakfast: "I was staring. Mom had serious bed head and her eyes were

puffy with sleep. But she was up at seven-thirty in the morning, making us bacon

omelets. I wanted to hug her. But didn't" (Stead 122). Thus, her mother's choice

to practice the motherhood ideal through the selfless, nurturing act of cooking an

early breakfast, causes Miranda to resolve her negative feelings towards her

mother. Notably, this scene occurs in the kitchen, and, as the child protagonist

places value upon characteristics of the motherhood ideal, eventually resolving

her inner conflict with her mother because of this scene, then the ideal reads as

proper mothering. An argument from the previous chapter reemerges here since

Miranda's diverse mothering experience as a single mother becomes regulated by

the motherhood ideal.

Katie, in Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira* reaches individuation principally

through performing duties associated with the motherhood ideal. On the night of

her sister, Lynn's, death, Katie's parents fall into a lingering depression. Katie's

mother (Kiyoko) first exhibits this depression when she goes to bed while leaving

dirty dishes in the sink. Katie considers her mother's behavior uncharacteristic,

and, not knowing how to react, Katie cleans the kitchen without being instructed

or "nagged" (Kadohata 214). As the weeks progress, Katie's parents behave like

"zombies" (Kadohata 226). Rejecting her domestic duties, Kiyoko cooks only

SPAM and rice or sardines and rice. Finally, Katie decides to teach herself

cooking skills. She finds a used cookbook and practices cooking while remaining careful to clean up so as to not upset her mother. In the following weeks, Katie reaches a catharsis about her sister's death though cooking. Simultaneously, she provides the care for her brother and father that Kiyoko is neglecting.

Concerned for the physical state of her parents (she describes them as "thin"), Katie begins to enact the motherhood ideal by assuming the responsibility to care for her parents (Kadohata 227).[105] Unlike her initial decision to learn to cook, which originates from necessity, Katie chooses to nurture her parents and "fatten them up" (Kadohata 227). Enacting the motherhood ideal, she selflessly sets aside any lingering feelings about her sister's death by refusing to cry in front of her parents. This selfless choice contrasts with her mother's inability to stop crying or to care for the family. Katie's youth and the corresponding gravity and sorrow of her solitary mourning are expressed when Katie explains that she realizes: "A lot of people had been as sad as I was. Maybe a billion of them had been this sad. As soon as I realized this, I felt like I was no longer a little girl but had become a big girl. What being a big girl meant exactly, I wasn't sure" (Kadohata 200). Katie's use of the term "big girl" denotes both her age and reveals her innocence since, as she explains, she lacks the ability to define "big girl" due to her youth. Katie navigates the loss of her childhood alone as she

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[105] Certainly, children caring for adults is not uncommon in literature for children; indeed, I read a connection between the moral exemplar of sentimental literature to this resourceful character in juvenile literature.

copes with her sister's death, turning to domestic activities typified in the motherhood ideal to assist her in the process.

At the end of the novel, the family travels to the California beaches where Katie's parents give her Lynn's diary. They explain that they waited because they were afraid of Katie's reaction. Katie thinks: "It was odd to hear them say that, because I'd thought I was the one who had taken care of them after they died. But they seemed to think that *they* had taken care of me" (Kadohata 243). Rather than correct her parents, Katie enacts the motherhood ideal by remaining graceful. She acknowledges, *internally*, the separation between herself and her parents during the mourning period instead of selfishly lashing out at them and demanding an explanation. Katie refrains from claiming that her parents neglected her emotional needs. Furthermore, the reader understands that Katie's strength as she managed domestic duties and practiced the type of emotional stability common in the motherhood ideal led the family through the process of coping with Lynn's death. Katie practices mothering due to her own mother's emotional distance. In the final analysis, a restorative power of nurturing as practiced through the motherhood ideal heals the family. Katie's maturation as expressed through her decision to enact domesticity and cope with her sister's death in a solitary manner also lauds the motherhood ideal.

In Kate DiCamillo's *Flora & Ulysses*, the mother/daughter conflict results in an expanded consciousness for mother rather than daughter once she conforms

to the selflessness that characterizes the motherhood ideal. The mother, Phyllis, remains intractable in her expectations of her daughter, Flora. Phyllis disregards whether those expectations match Flora's individualism, and her attempts to control and manipulate Flora provide tension. Primarily concerned with whether Flora will experience social rejection because of her interests in comic books and acquisition of Ulysses, a flying squirrel who types, Phyllis attempts to force Flora into her view of "normal" behavior. Far from nurturer, Phyllis becomes a possessive, controlling adversary.

In the first sign that she objects to Flora's individual choices, Phyllis forces Flora to sign a contract stating that she will refrain from reading comic books because Phyllis considers comic books strange, and she thinks that Flora wastes her time reading them. In a further admonishment of Flora's personality, she often accuses Flora of being a "natural-born cynic" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 6). Flora reacts by treating her mother with relative disdain. In addition to ignoring her mother while she reads a comic book, she harbors negative thoughts about her mother. For instance, Flora labels the title of her mother's first book as "the stupidest title for a book" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 28). Likewise, Flora considers her mother's romance novel writing "sickly sweet nonsense" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 143). Indeed, Flora's resentment surpasses that of any other child in the Newbery winners examined for this study. Her intense feelings of resentment surpass a feeling of matrophobia; she *despises* her mother. She will eventually "denounce"

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her mother, claiming that she is "an arch-nemesis, a true villain," and considering Phyllis's constant criticism of Flora and attempts to organize the murder of Ulysses, Flora's characterization of her mother is rather accurate (DiCamillo, *Flora* 150). Furthermore, the text supports a reading of Phyllis's manipulative behavior as erroneous – consider that Phyllis, the character who writes about the emotional needs of fictional characters, fails to safeguard the emotional well-being of her own daughter. If Phyllis's behavior is not read as erroneous, it is at least thoughtless. Phyllis's dogmatic insistence on "normal" restricts Flora and situates Phyllis outside of the motherhood ideal.

A resolution for the mother/daughter conflict follows Phyllis's adoption of the selflessness found in the motherhood ideal. Once Phyllis's egocentrism shifts to a truly child-centric perspective, the relationship between mother and daughter improves. After Phyllis kidnaps Ulysses and threatens to kill him, Flora disappears, which causes Phyllis to panic and search for her. The commotion that follows once Phyllis returns to the apartment and finds that Flora has also returned causes a ceramic lamp to fall off a table and break. Phyllis adores this lamp, which she purchased with money from selling her first book; indeed, Flora believes that her mother loves the lamp more than she loves Flora. So, when Phyllis "step[s] over the pieces of the broken little shepherdess" to hug her daughter, Flora is surprised. Phyllis explains that, during her daughter's disappearance, she realized that her attempts to "make things normal," as well as

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her constant badgering of Flora caused a rift in their relationship (DiCamillo, *Flora* 227). Adopting a selfless, child-centric perspective typical of the motherhood ideal, Phyllis understands that she must guide Flora's individuality to ensure her happiness rather than impose her viewpoints onto Flora. She explains to Flora: "I don't care about normal. I just wanted you back" (DiCamillo, *Flora* 227). The rejection of "normal" represents Phyllis's shift of perspective to one that focuses on the child's needs over the mother's desires. (Previously, Phyllis wanted Flora to be viewed as "normal"). Selflessness, as typified in the motherhood ideal, mitigates the diverse mothering character of selfish mother, and the mother/daughter conflict resolves. No space remains to explore the cause or effects of this discord; rather it is blamed on the mother and resolved quickly once she adopts the requisite selflessness of the motherhood ideal.

5.2 Ideal Distress: Walk Two Moons and the Anguished Mother

The final text analyzed in this chapter is Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (1995 winner). Creech's novel provides the space to explore a motherhood experience situated outside of the ideal. While previous chapters consider only the protagonist's mother, this chapter analyzes two mothers because both make choices that separate them from motherhood ideal. The two mothers contrast each other as they attempt to overcome the internal strife perpetuated by a belief in the motherhood ideal that complicates their motherhood experience. Sugar associates an inability to be naturally thoughtful and nurturing with her physical problems

during pregnancy, and, consequently, motherhood. Mrs. Winterbottom strives for perfection in her mothering practices. The result of the stressors brought by unrealistic expectations is the mothers' departure from the home, something which affects both families negatively. *Walk Two Moons* dramatizes the messiness of mothering while criticizing the motherhood ideal.

Sugar, the protagonist's mother, disappears prior to the beginning of the novel. As such, much of the novel includes flashbacks to Salamanca's (Sal) time with her mother. Although technically absent from the present action in the text, Sugar's continued presence through flashbacks makes her a "present" mother. She is "involved" in Sal's life primarily through her lasting influence; so, she becomes difficult to label based on the categories used in previous chapters.[106] Sugar's disappearance relates to her feelings of inadequacy as a mother. *Walk Two Moons*, then, provides the only fictional representation of a mother's emotional distress— part of which, the text suggests, originates from her status as a mother. She does not despise being a mother, so she does not exhibit true maternal ambivalence. Still, her intense feelings of inadequacy affect her mothering experience negatively. Through *Walk Two Moons*, I find evidence of Rozsika Parker's statement that "our culture displays its ambivalence about maternal ambivalence by insisting on adherence to a maternal norm" (140). Creech does not address

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[106] The categories used in previous chapters include: selfish; developed, but marginal; and developed and present mothers. The following chapter examines: temporary; surrogate; adopted mothers; and communal mothers.

maternal ambivalence, but she dramatizes intense maternal anxieties that originate from displeasure with motherhood. As discussed in the previous chapter, deviations from the motherhood ideal are often regulated with some appearance of idealized traits in the mother character. So, the possibility of exploring maternal anxieties in the fictional space becomes limited. Of the forty-eight award-winning texts examined for this project, only Creech's tackles maternal anxieties. The exploration of Sugar's distress through Sal's voice is a much-needed motherhood experience in the scope of this study.

Briefly, Sugar left home and boarded a bus destined for Lewiston, Idaho approximately one year before the action of the novel. Sugar's reason for leaving is unknown, but the depression she suffered following a miscarriage likely contributed to the abandonment of her family. During the present events of the novel, Sal's Gram and Gramps take her on a trip to Lewiston so that she may recreate her mother's journey. Much of the novel traces Sal's feelings regarding her mother's death and the mysterious circumstances of her departure. Unbeknownst to Sal until the end of the novel, her mother died in a bus accident prior to reaching Lewiston. A significant subplot emerges when Sal's best friend (Phoebe Winterbottom) arrives home to find a note left by her mother stating that she left for a personal journey.

Sugar suffers from a lack of confidence in her worth, especially as a mother. She compares herself to her husband, stating that he is "*too* good" and

that her natural personality cannot compare to his giving, considerate nature; she lacks the nurturing characteristics indicative of the motherhood ideal (Creech 34). Sal relates her mother's deteriorating mental state through flashbacks. Immediately prior to her departure, Sugar becomes increasingly irrational and agitated. She cuts off her long hair, repeatedly asks Sal to walk with her in the rain, and yells at her husband because no one calls her by her real name of Chanhassen. Sal states of her mother: "She had not been well. She had had some terrible shocks, it's true, but I didn't understand why she could not get better with us" (109-110). Despite her feelings of abandonment, Sal does not blame her mother in these scenes; rather she remains sympathetic. "Adult" and "child" blur here as Sal assumes the role of an adult in attempting to understand her mother's inability to "get better with us," which is caused by anxieties produced through Sugar's domestic responsibilities.

Sugar's distress causes her to doubt her abilities to care for others, and she questions her own identity. This fictional experience parallels Susan Maushart's theory regarding a mask of motherhood that prevents mothers from admitting to anxieties or anger about mothering.[107] Fictional mothers (especially in the award-winning texts) appear capable and confident, even if they exhibit flaws. Sugar's fears and depression reveal her vulnerabilities and interfere with her ability to recreate the motherhood ideal; therefore, she removes her mask. For instance,

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[107] *The Mask of Motherhood* (Penguin Books).

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while miscarrying, Sugar she says to her husband: "I don't think I'm very good at this" (Creech 147). Obviously, the "this" is pregnancy, and, by extension, motherhood. Doubting her abilities not only places her outside the ideal, but also it offers a disparate motherhood experience. Even an arguably bad mother, like Phyllis in Kate DiCamillo's *Flora & Ulysses* does not question her mothering abilities. An individual who displays insecurities in his or her practice of mothering signifies an awareness of the effects mothering may have on a child; this practice of reflection challenges idealization.

Following the miscarriage, Sugar requires a hysterectomy; Sal does not explicitly connect Sugar's physical inability to become pregnant with her psychological condition. Yet, when her mother explains that she wonders whether Sal's father is "human" because he's so "good," which makes her "feel so rotten in comparison," it suggests she feels less capable and caring than him—especially since his ability to bring happiness to others and give them thoughtful gifts upsets Sugar (Creech 109). Sal connects this to a naturalness when she explains that the gift-giving and nurturing "nearly drove my mother crazy" because "it was not her natural gift like it was with my father" (Creech 108). In addition to being unable to produce additional children, Sugar's natural inclination to not practice outwardly nurturing behavior contributes to her depression. Indeed, in my reading, the entirety of her depression relates to mothering—she cannot meet the expectations typified in the motherhood ideal that she believes others have of her

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(even though they do not; Sal's father remains constantly supportive of Sugar).

Quite unlike previous mother characters examined in this study, Sugar's capacity

to mother receives scrutiny—even if that examination originates from herself.

Disconnected from a sense of self, Sugar explains prior to her departure

that she would like to visit her cousin because she will "tell me what I'm really

like . . . before I was a wife a mother . . . *underneath*, where I am Chanhassen"

(Creech 143). The idea of motherhood replacing the care-giver's identity appears

in motherhood studies and theories.[108] In *Redefining Motherhood*, Andrea

O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey argue that mothers cannot assist their daughters until

they locate a "prepatriarchal" self (80). In my reading of *Walk Two Moons*, I

present two interpretations from the fictional space; these interpretations align

with O'Reilly and Abbey's statements about lived mothers. Sugar's loss of her

identity follows the death of the infant; in fact, I read her mental distress as post-

partum depression. Also, Sugar feels indefinable following the loss of the baby

and her reproductive organs. Sugar's statement that she needs to recover her

identity "before" she became a mother to explore that which is "underneath"

recalls Adrienne Rich's statement that mothers "need selves of our own to return

to" (37). Sugar does not lose her identity as Sal's mother, but she becomes

incapable of being a mother to another child and feels a confounding loss of self.

Childrearing and domestic management supersede the identity she possessed prior

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[108] See Ann C. Hall and Mardia Bishop, *Mommy Angst*; Rozsika Parker, *Mother Love/Mother Hate*; and Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, for instance.

to becoming a wife and mother. Certainly, Sal's concern that she is "not enough" for Sugar becomes meaningful here since it suggests that she cannot identify as a mother, despite the presence of her living daughter (Creech 197). Sugar does not become neglectful of Sal, and she expresses love for her constantly, but the change in her personality following the aforementioned loss leads Sal to believe that her mother considers Sal (or the experience of mothering her) somehow inadequate.

The appropriateness of these complex issues in the genre of juvenile literature may be questionable to some; however, I insist that these so-called "adult" themes are not reserved for adults; nor is a child's experience separate from the challenges (internal or external) overcome by a parental figure. *Walk Two Moons* supports this belief; as Sal expresses that she cannot "blame her mother" because she is "a part of me," she thinks through her memories with Sugar to reach a point of closure (Creech 113). Sal's connection to Sugar does insist on the primacy of the child/mother relationship over that of the child/father and places a primacy on the birth-mother and naturalness.[109] Of course, even with the limitations on motherhood brought by naturalness, *Walk Two Moons* challenges the definition of mothering by dramatizing a depressed, dissatisfied mother. She desires to separate herself from the *identity* of mother, at least temporarily, while she searches for personal meaning and value.

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[109] Also, it limits the motherhood experience.

Sal's friend Phoebe Winterbottom also copes with the sudden departure of a mother. Mrs. Winterbottom leaves home to reconnect with her identity *as* a mother to the son she birthed prior to marrying Phoebe's father. Mrs. Winterbottom hid this son because she feared the social repercussions. Instead, she focused on inventing an identity close to the motherhood ideal as she raised Phoebe and her sister. Unlike Sugar, Mrs. Winterbottom believes that her connection to motherhood validates her identity, and she desires to complete that identity by reconnecting with her son.

Overly anxious for the safety of her domestic space, Mrs. Winterbottom directs Phoebe to check locked doors and possesses a fear of strangers approaching the house because "any day one of them will burst into the house with a gun and turn out to be an escaped lunatic" (42-43). This fictional representation corresponds with lived motherhood experiences identified by Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels.[110] The overly-anxious mother found in Douglas and Michaels's "new momism" enacts a heightened sense of anxiety for both domestic safety and perfection in motherhood. In Douglas and Michaels's theory (published ten years after Creech's novel), the perfect mother practices exclusive mothering and adheres to out-of-date mothering expectations; but, she finds herself disquieted because perfection is unachievable. Mrs. Winterbottom's anxiety does originate from a misguided goal of perfection. As such, Mrs.

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[110] *The Mommy Myth* (Free Press)

Winterbottom conceals a portion of her personality, her past, because of her motivation to be "respectable" (Creech 249). Sal explains that Mrs. Winterbottom expresses that she "tried very, very hard all these years to be perfect, but she had to admit she was quite unperfect" (Creech 247). This truth, this "unperfect" condition is, in my opinion, the exact disconnect between the fictional motherhood ideal and the lived experiences of motherhood. Its fictional representation appears through the imperfect mothers in a number of texts examined in this study.[111]

Walk Two Moons presents motherhood as a continually evolving identity. Mrs. Winterbottom may be the mother to her son even as she deserts him and cares for Phoebe and her brother just to leave Phoebe and her brother to reunite with her missing son. Her motherhood experience and identity change in a matter of weeks. This fluidity allows for a disparate motherhood experience—one that places mother outside of the ideal. Prior to her departure, Sal and Phoebe walk into the home after school to find Mrs. Winterbottom "sitting at the kitchen table" with a "pan of burned brownies" in front of her (Creech 102). At this point, she has been in contact with her son and is considering whether to reconcile with him. The obvious symbolism of the disheveled domestic space within the emblematic kitchen becomes even more significant when Mrs. Winterbottom states that she

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[111] Imperfect mothers appear mostly in Newbery texts (especially *When You Reach Me*, *Kira-Kira*, *The Giver*, and *Bud, Not Buddy*). In Caldecott texts, these mothers are mostly depicted as unaware of their children's actions.

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can no longer attempt to be perfect. Prior to leaving, Mrs. Winterbottom cooks

and freezes food for the family; she provides instructions for preparing the food.

In preparing food for the family prior to leaving, Mrs. Winterbottom contrasts

with Sugar. Still, Mrs. Winterbottom feels as constricted as Sugar. Mothering

consumes both mothers' identities, and their belief that they are neglectful of their

mothering duties disrupts their families.

Previous chapters in this study discuss the trend of mothers remaining

objects to their children. Through the process of accepting her mother's departure

and death, Sal realizes that Sugar's disappearance was unrelated to Sal; as she

explains: "We couldn't own our mothers" (Creech 176). Here, Sugar's identity as

a mother provides only one component of her personality, and the agency granted

her leads Sal towards accepting her mother's independence. Mother reads as a

developed person, not an object, to the child protagonist. Regardless of Sugar's

death, Sal remains connected to her, not only through their immediate

mother/daughter relationship, but also through the family's history. Their Native

American heritage allows them to "appreciate the gifts of nature," according to

Sal (Creech 56). In my reading, this connection to the land leads to Sal's

association of her mother with blackberries—an association borne of her memory

of picking blackberries with her mother in the Bybanks. The memory haunts Sal

so that she claims an allergy to blackberries following her mother's death, which

she internally admits relates only to her connection between her mother and

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blackberries. As Sal explains, her mother remains in her thoughts constantly, and Sal echoes her Native American heritage, stating that Sugar lives "in the trees" (Creech 276). She remains within Sal, physically, through their shared genetics; Sugar is, as Sal states a part of her. As in texts analyzed in the following chapter, even deceased mothers continue to influence children. Sugar's physical distance, and even her mental distress, does not affect the bond between mother and daughter—naturalness thwarts the act of mothering here. Regardless, the text most often treats mothering as an action, even offering a criticism of assigning expectations to mothers; so, the biological relationship between mother and daughter becomes a component of a motherhood experience rather than the *definition* of motherhood.

5.3 Concluding Thoughts

Through its prescriptiveness, the motherhood ideal limits a thorough examination of motherhood and mother/daughter relationships in these fictional spaces. While the fictional conflicts often dramatizes those of lived mothers and daughters, the general ease in conflict resolution once characteristics from the ideal are adopted sanctions the motherhood ideal and results in a superficial representation of diverse mothering experiences. In other words, if the solutions to conflict resolution depend upon the motherhood ideal, even in developed and selfish mother characters, then the value of the diverse mothering experiences is limited. The mother/daughter conflict *invites* a rhetorical consideration of

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maternal ambivalence; however, the quick resolutions provided by the ideal prevent that consideration. The only text to dramatize maternal distress, *Walk Two Moons* does complicate the typical daughter-centric viewpoint of the mother/daughter conflict in literature for children by presenting maternal anxieties.

Again, I interpret the ALA awards as trending towards traditionalism. Furthermore, since the motherhood ideal signifies traditional femininity, I argue that its inclusion in conflict resolution espouses gender role expectations by implying, in essence, that behaving "like a woman" when mothering will result in conflict resolution and support a child's growth. When this reductive advice aligns with the status quo, then it speaks to a lack of progressivism in the cultural expectations of motherhood. Moreover, it assumes that gender essentialism is a preferred value over egalitarianism. The nostalgia embedded in the motherhood ideal supersedes representation of diverse mothering experiences, even in these texts in which mother/daughter conflict serves as a plot device and/or inhibits the protagonist's growth prior to its resolution.

Chapter 6

Missing Mothers: Newbery Winners and Absent Mothers

"It's almost impossible to get control of your life when you're only ten. It's other people, adults, who have control of your life, because they can abandon you" *(*Patron 80).

Previous chapters consider the motherhood ideal in texts with a living birth-mother. The texts in this chapter consider the absence of the biological mother character; the loss of a parent, whether through abandonment or death, creates immediate conflict for the child protagonist and makes him or her sympathetic. Absence of the birth-mother invites fictional space for diverse mothers; however, I argue that the Newbery winners in which a mother replacement character is introduced most often characterize her with elements of the motherhood ideal.[112] Specifically, her selfishness and naturalness appears in these texts. Nevertheless, replacement mothers complicate the motherhood ideal by introducing alternative mothering practices through mothers and children with no genetic ties to one another. The replacement (and temporary) mothers accentuate an argument from previous chapters that "naturalness" in the motherhood ideal pertains to femaleness and not only birth-mother status. The replacement mothers assist the child protagonist in coping with the loss of the mother as they provide mothering; thereby resolving the child protagonist's main

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[112] rather than *model* it as the motherhood ideal exemplar characters. Also, these characters cannot embody the motherhood ideal totally because they are not birth-mothers to the child protagonists.

conflict. The mother replacement characters with elements of the motherhood ideal resolves conflict by reestablishing order and allowing the delineation between child and adult to become clear. Prior to the mother replacement's arrival, the child protagonist who is missing a mother must adopt adult responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, performing domestic management skills, and/or enacting survival skills. The appearance of the mother replacement with her elements of the motherhood ideal results in the child becoming liberated from adult responsibilities. As such, she allows space for the nostalgia typical of juvenile literature and invites a reassurance that the following generation will receive adequate care and advance cultural practices.[113] Finally, I argue that, through conflict resolution, the motherhood ideal myth is further normalized and that the emphasis on a gendered naturalness in mothering continues to limit the diversity of mothers in these texts through its requisite essentialism.

Throughout this project, diverse mothering practices have been sought. In this chapter, especially, Sara Ruddick's comments that a person becomes a mother "because and to the degree that they are committed to meeting the demands that define maternal work" prove useful (Ruddick 17). Within Ruddick's statement is the encompassing definition of motherhood advocated by many feminist scholars—the work of mothering defines a mother rather than the state of

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[113] For a longer discussion about nostalgia in juvenile literature, see Chapters 2-3.

being a mother.[114] "Mother" must include those who "perform maternal work,"

like care-giving and providing emotional support for children. In the fictional

space occupied by 1980-2014 Newbery winners, both "mother" and "maternal

work" most often denote gender, so that female characters primarily mother.

"Maternal work" appears as nurturing and care-giving practiced by female

characters. Fathers rarely nurture, and, when they do, they most often require the

guidance of a motherhood ideal character. Here, I am thinking about *Moon Over

Manifest* and *The Graveyard Book* in which males require the assistance of a

motherhood ideal character as they provide care for the child protagonist. This

pattern also emerges in *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*. Mother replacement occurs

within the Newbery texts, but not one text replaces a missing father; two texts

discussed in Chapter 3 with single mothers deliberately reject the idea.[115] I argue

that the association between mother and nurture *requires* her replacement in this

space because of the orderliness brought by the motherhood ideal. In this way, the

continued presence of the motherhood ideal, the "idealized figure of the Good

Mother" does continue to "cas[t] a long shadow" (Ruddick 31). Ruddick writes of

mothering in the lived space here, but the motherhood ideal "casts" the same

"long shadow" in the fictional space. In these texts, as in previous chapters, she

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[114] See Maushart, Douglas, Birns and Hay, and so on. A longer discussion about this appears in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.

[115] First, in Dear Mr. *Henshaw*, Leigh's mother states that she does not know if she will marry again. Second, in *When You Reach Me*, Miranda mentions that she does not even think about her father. So, her relationship with her mother's boyfriend, Richard, is based on friendship and their mutual concern for Miranda's mother rather than on Richard becoming her father.

provides a reactionary response to progressive mother characters and solves mother/daughter conflict. Practically, the character with elements of the motherhood ideal in texts with missing mothers provides some sense of the familiar to the child reader and signals which character will adopt the mother role.

I argue that the motherhood ideal ensures the distinction between "child" and "adult," thus contributing to the construction of childhood within juvenile literature theorized by scholars such as Jacqueline Rose and Karin Lesnik-Oberstein.[116] As Rose writes, "If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easy within its grasp" (2). Rose's oft-cited statement signals the necessity of a conceptual distinction between child and adult, which ensures the validity of the adult's status. In other words, "child" cannot exist without "adult" and vice versa. Perry Nodelman extends this idea by explaining that adults need to believe in the innocence of children, a concept that has appeared throughout this project (*Hidden* 167). This constructionist view of children's literature also suggests the colonizing of children, and while Marah Gubar disagrees with Rose's characterization of children as "voiceless victims," she writes that child narrators "set up a strict division between child and adult" and points to the "purity of their youthful speakers" (Gubar 41). I mention Gubar's rejection of Rose here to demonstrate that, regardless of whether one

[116] Theories about colonizing in juvenile literature are common and also appear in the works of Peter Hunt, Perry Nodelman, Jacqueline Rose, and Perry Nodelman, for instance.

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fully embraces the theorized colonialism in juvenile literature, the necessity of the genre to distinguish between "child' and "adult" appears throughout various academic theories. In this chapter, the differentiation between "child" and "adult" blurs partially because of the absent birth-mother; I argue that the appearance of traits found in the motherhood ideal restores that balance.

In this chapter, mothering is dramatized primarily through mother replacement and temporary motherhood. Within these diverse mothering characters, mothers may not appear traditionally feminine.[117] Also, their ages range as does the amount of time that they spend mothering—even children mother. Emphasis is placed on the *action* of mothering so that the focus is not on the genetic relationship between mother and child.

The **mother replacement** character appears in each of the four texts discussed in this chapter. While the attempt to replace mother is generally respectful of the missing mother character, the idea that a mother may be replaced makes mother a concept and/or an object of the child character. Furthermore, elements of the motherhood ideal characterize the mother replacement, which limits mothering. However, these mother characters do offer space to explore not only diverse motherhoods, but also unique mother characters—especially in *Sarah, Plain and Tall* where Sarah practices traditionally masculine activities, like carpentry. Although mother replacement privileges the action of mothering rather

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[117] Here, I am thinking about stereotypical, gender-defined ideas surrounding women that emphasize domesticity and passivity.

than the biological state of being, mother becomes needed for her natural nurturing tendencies and, at the same time, dispensable.

Temporary motherhood describes an experience in which a character provides care for a child protagonist for a limited amount of time. This informal motherhood leaves a lasting impression on either the mother character or the child protagonist and may result in some type of reward for the care-giver, whether tangible or psychological.

Although mother replacement and temporary motherhood occurs throughout the Newbery texts in this study, this chapter examines mother replacement and temporary motherhood in four texts.[118] In the first section, I analyze motherhood replacement in two texts in which the father remarries, *A Gathering of Days* and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Both *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *A Gathering of Days* dramatize the complete replacement of a mother character following her death and the father's subsequent remarriage. In these texts, mother replacement resolves conflict through the acceptance of the "new mother." I argue that once the women reclaim mothering duties from the child protagonists who were forced out of their adolescence, the child's ambiguous identity as not-child/not-adult resolves. In *A Gathering of Days*, the events following the

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[118] **Mother replacement** appears in *The One and Only Ivan*, *The Graveyard Book*, T*he Higher Power of Lucky*, *Bud, Not Buddy*, *Out of the Dust*, *The Midwife's Apprentice*, *The Giver*, *Missing May*, *Maniac Magee*, *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, and *Dicey's Song*. **Temporary motherhood** appears in *The One and Only Ivan*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, *Bud, Not Buddy*, *The Midwife's Apprentice*, *The Giver*, *Maniac Magee*, *Dicey's Song*, *Moon Over Manifest*, *Kira-Kira*, and *A Year Down Yonder*

acceptance of the new mother prompt a sense of hopefulness for the future

brought by the restored distinction between adult and child. The restored order in

Sarah, Plain and Tall creates nostalgia as the child protagonist returns to her

adolescence. Mother replacement denotes a sanguinity—all will be well once a

mother claims the child; but, as it values mothers, mother replacement also

devalues them by connoting replaceability and naturalness.

The children must accept the "new mother," and their agreement signifies

that mothering is an act, rather than a state of being. "Mother" cannot exist

without "child" in these texts due to the absence of a genetic connection between

the adult and child. I read the necessity of the child's acceptance as placing the

mother character in a position of being the child's object (some mother

replacements do become subjects, especially in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*). These

child characters must first examine the potential mother character as an

individual, but they continually examine her against the deceased mother and/or

in accordance with their own needs. I argue that, in the case of *A Gathering of*

Days, acceptance is limited to the new mother's ability to integrate with the

family; once she adjusts to farm life and shows nurturing characteristics, the child

protagonist accepts her. *Sarah, Plain and Tall* complicates the process of

acceptance because both "new mother" and children must agree to the

arrangement. Neither of these mother characters retains all of the elements of the

motherhood ideal; although, both possess domestic tendencies. For instance,

Sarah's carpentry skills and outspokenness contradict the typical mother

representation in these award-winning texts; but, she demonstrates naturalness in

mothering, which aligns her with the motherhood ideal. Finally, I argue that

egalitarianism appears in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, between the husband and wife

characters that questions the necessity of the dualism common in mother/father

relationships among the 1980-2014 Newbery Medal winners.

In the second section, I focus on an orphan's search for a new mother.

Bud, Not Buddy and *The Higher Power of Lucky* were chosen for this section

because they chronicle an orphan's search for a mother.[119] I argue that the primary

conflict in these texts is the search for a caregiver, and, in both texts, female

characters who enact the selflessness and naturalness endemic to the motherhood

ideal provide care for the orphans.[120] In so doing, they restore order by reinforcing

the separation between "adult" and "child." Elements of the motherhood ideal

become further implanted in the Newbery texts because they assist in conflict

resolution—much like their role in resolving mother/daughter conflict as

explained in Chapter 5. Within both texts is at least one mother-figure who

displays elements of the motherhood ideal. In the case of *Bud, Not Buddy*, that

character is Miss Thomas. Brigitte in *The Higher Power of Lucky* displays

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[119] Other texts with orphan characters that include a motherhood ideal are: *Maniac Magee*, *Missing May*, *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, and *The Graveyard Book*. Only *Maniac Magee* also searches for a mother, but I did not include the text because it performs much of the same work as the two texts included in this section.

[120] Only the selflessness and naturalness typified in the motherhood ideal are examined in this section.

characteristics of the motherhood ideal. In these texts, acceptance of the mother's

death and the psychological growth that follows is guided through the actions of

Miss Thomas and Brigitte, respectively.

<p style="text-align:center">6.1 Marrying Mom: Remarriages and Replacement Mothers</p>

One of the reasons that I chose to include Joan Blos's *A Gathering of Days*

in the analysis is that it received the Newbery award in 1980, so it appears at the

beginning of my study. Mother replacement does not disappear in subsequent

decades of Newbery Medal winners; in fact, a text discussed later in this chapter

that includes mother replacement was published in 2006.[121] The commonality of

the mother replacement deserves note because she survives throughout the

decades.

A Gathering of Days follows thirteen-year old Catherine's thoughts and

daily activities after her father's remarriage. Her mother died four years prior to

the beginning of the novel, which is a journal written by Catherine. In addition to

caring for her little sister, Catherine adopts domestic responsibilities typically

assumed by the character representing the motherhood ideal. Her young age

contradicts the motherhood ideal, and a sense of disorder exists as the

demarcation between childhood and adulthood disappears. Contextually,

Catherine's adolescence would be ending around thirteen years old because the

novel is set in 1860-1863. Remember, though, that Catherine began to assume

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[121] *The Higher Power of Lucky*.

domestic responsibilities at age nine, when still a child. No longer a child, Catherine feels prideful of the domestic duties she completes. So, when her father's new wife, Ann, arrives at the house, Catherine finds her attentiveness to cleaning the house offensive, stating: "You would not think that before she came *I* had cleaned it well!" (Blos 80). Part of Catherine's objection reflects her disinclination to accept Ann as a member of the household. She writes, on the day of their marriage: "I will not call her Mother" (Blos 75). Furthermore, in feeling insulted, Catherine aligns herself with adults. She refrains from, for instance, engaging in imaginative play once relieved of domestic duties, choosing to fight for her domain.

Similar to examples of mother/daughter conflict discussed in Chapter 5, Catherine objects to Ann silently. The mother/daughter conflict here has no association with a familial relationship; rather, Catherine feels protective of the domestic space. As the temporary mother, she maintained the domestic space and cared for the children; she associates her value to these duties. This association further essentializes mothering as her femaleness connects to her performance in the domestic space—she is expected to assume her mother's duties because she is a female. Intimating the superiority of Ann's domestic skills over Catherine's denotes the child's misplaced status and the disorder brought once she loses her childhood following her mother's death. Ann, already a mother to a boy named Daniel, performs many of the same domestic skills as Catherine (indeed, she

surpasses Catherine in cleaning because she has more experience due to her age).

The home transforms into a metaphorical battlefield to Catherine who simultaneously fights and judges Ann through her silent protest.

Catherine scrutinizes Ann's farming abilities as well. She describes Ann rather comically as wearing "open V's at throat and back" and "well-shaped bodices tightly tucked" while attempting to work in the fields (Blos 79). The image contributes to Catherine's assessment of Ann as a misfit who does not belong in their home or on the farm. The epistolary format silences the voice of other characters, and, as mentioned, Catherine maintains an internal dialogue about her objections to Ann's behavior in the home and on the fields. Denying Ann the opportunity to defend herself or to hear advice from Catherine silences "mother/daughter" discourse and reduces Ann to a fish-out-of-water. She must conform to be accepted, and she does. As she becomes more accustomed to living on the farm, her clothing changes so that she "pins up her hair like a farmer's wife and bares her arms to the elbow" (Blos 102). Viewing Ann as physically appropriate, through her clothing and improved farming skills allows Catherine to begin the process of acceptance. The reader, too, sees Ann reduced to an object who must "dress the part" in order to win Catherine's approval.

A rather undeveloped character, Ann conforms to the motherhood ideal. She is a practiced mother, and she begins to manage the domestic space immediately. Ann possesses a naturalness that leads her to comfort Catherine

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once she admits to giving one of her deceased mother's quilts to a homeless man without her father's approval. Although Catherine's father sits nearby, Ann comforts a crying Catherine, explaining that she will teach Catherine to quilt. Her nurturing words and act of reaching a hand out to Catherine cause Catherine to cry for the first time in months while Ann's "own eyes gliste[n]" (Blos 86). Ann's ability to bring Catherine to cathartic tears suggests an innate nurturing that Catherine's father lacks since he does not comfort his daughter. Through the promise to teach a domestic skill (quilting) and the ability to soothe, Ann becomes someone that Catherine *needs*, and she assigns value to Ann as an object.

As Catherine becomes more accepting of Ann, she begins to address her by the name "Mammann." Mother replacement is complete when Ann protects both Matty and Catherine by pulling them out of school due to a poorly behaved teacher, claiming she is protecting "her daughters," a statement that delights Catherine (Blos 133). Although Catherine cannot embrace her childhood once she accepts Ann because she is sent to care for aunt's baby, I contend that the motherhood ideal figure (Ann) reinstates order. Ann establishes herself in the home and family, thus Catherine may leave. While the textual resolution achieved through the mother replacement in the text discussed in the following section reestablishes the child, Catherine cannot return to her childhood since she turns fifteen by the novel's conclusion. Rather, her father and Ann send Catherine to care for her aunt's baby. This scene dramatizes Rozsika Parker's statement that a

"curious dialect of power and powerlessness determines maternity;" Catherine

powerlessly awaits her fate, but exerts "power" through her mothering skills

(202). Ann's presence and enactment of the motherhood ideal frees Catherine to

perform mothering in another setting, thus ensuring that a new child will receive

proper care. Catherine will leave home to care for her aunt's baby in much the

same way that she provided a temporary motherhood to her sister; she possesses

power since she influences future generations. On the last night before Catherine

leaves her family home, she sits awake expressing gratitude to her family and

conjectures that her sister "allows herself excursion into my half of the bed" (Blos

143). Stretching onto Catherine's side of the bed, Matty physically takes her

sister's place. Like Catherine, Matty will learn the necessary skills to mother, thus

ensuring a reproduction of motherhood and the continued nurturing of future

generations. Yet, this resolution would not be possible if not for the arrival of the

motherhood ideal, Ann.

The second text that enacts mother replacement shares features with *A

Gathering of Days*. In *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, a young female protagonist (Anna)

assumes mothering duties following the death of her mother. She learns to accept

a mother replacement (Sarah), who, like Ann from *A Gathering of Days*,

originates from an entirely different socio-cultural environment and appears

eccentric and awkward upon arriving in town. Sarah's domestic skills and

nurturing associate her with the motherhood ideal and assist Anna in accepting Sarah.

"'Well, Papa doesn't sing anymore,' Caleb said very softly" (MacLachlan 4). This seemingly simple statement serves as the outward sign of loss experienced by Papa due to the death of his wife in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. The 1986 winner, written by Patricia MacLachlan, follows Anna (the narrator), her younger brother Caleb, and their father Papa (Jacob) as they continue to cope with the death of Anna and Jacob's mother, who died after giving birth to Caleb. Eventually, Jacob remarries Sarah, a woman that he contacts through a mail-order bride service. In my reading, *Sarah, Plain and Tall* dramatizes alternative motherhoods; first, through Anna, who adopts many "mothering" duties as a temporary mother, and then through Sarah, who acts as a mother replacement to Anna and Caleb.

Following her mother's death, Anna assumes many of the domestic duties, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for her brother. In this sense, she is similar to Catherine from *A Gathering of Days*. However, where Catherine assumes care-giving duties immediately, Anna in *Sarah, Plain and Tall* hesitates. She admits to not loving Caleb for "three whole days" following her mother's passing because she associated Caleb with the death (MacLachlan 6). Since Caleb continually asks Anna to sing the songs their mother used to sing, he does serve as a constant reminder of her death; but, Anna chooses to engage in acts of

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mothering—from nurturing to comforting Caleb, rather than allow his presence to remind her of their mother. Through her temporary motherhood, Anna demonstrates maturity, and she is rewarded because of her care-giving. Temporary motherhood affects Anna positively by allowing her to cope with her mother's loss. The borders of motherhood are explored as well since Anna is relieved of mothering duties as Sarah becomes more important to the family. Anna relocates her childhood once Sarah begins to mother Anna and Caleb. So, order is reestablished through the demarcation between child and adult; a possibility achieved only with the presence of a mother replacement enacting the motherhood ideal.

Like Anna in *A Gathering of Days*, Sarah has no biological or social connection to the family prior to exchanging letters with Jacob. She explains, in one of her first letters to Jacob that she is "not mild mannered," and she proves that immediately upon her arrival when Jacob suggests that she place her cat in the barn (MacLachlan 9). Sarah's response to that is simply that the cat will "be good in the house," denoting her sometimes challenging, yet pleasant personality (MacLachlan 19). She identifies herself as "plain and tall," wears overalls (despite Jacob's protestations), builds bookshelves, and helps Jacob repair the roof (MacLachlan 15). Rejecting controlled femininity, Sarah seems much more suited for rural life than she does to act as the motherhood ideal. Still, competing dialogues surround Sarah's character, and despite her unfeminine traits, she

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performs elements of the motherhood ideal. Sarah (not a practiced mother)

displays an innate ability to connect to the children through the letters she writes,

and she brings gifts that appeal to them upon her arrival. She explains to Anna in

a letter that she bakes bread, makes stew, and sings—all rather domestic

activities. Anna responds positively to this news, herself situated within the

domestic space as temporary mother and female; therefore, this initial

correspondence codifies their femaleness and initiates a bond between the two. A

subsequent attachment forms while Sarah brushes Anna's hair:

> Sarah brushed my hair and tied it up in back with a rose velvet
> ribbon she had brought from Maine. She brushed hers long and
> free and tied it back, too, and we stood side by side looking in the
> mirror. I looked taller, like Sarah, and fair and thin. And with my
> hair pulled back I looked a little like her daughter. Sarah's
> daughter.

This intimate scene with its physical contact contains within it elements of the

motherhood ideal and foreshadows Sarah's replacement of Anna's mother.

Certainly, Anna's father did not share a similar scene with her daughter in the

time since his wife's death; so, the sense that Sarah is somehow naturally

engineered for this intimate moment situates motherhood within a gendered

space. Like Catherine from *A Gathering of Days*, Anna realizes that she *needs*

Sarah, whether to comb her hair or comfort her through song. Typically, this

objectification of the mother figure aligns with an underdeveloped character.[122]

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[122] See the discussion about *Jacob Have I Loved* and *Shiloh* in Chapter 3, for instance.

Sarah's nuanced characterization points to a complexity in child/parent and husband/wife relationships that is often avoided in Newbery texts, likely because these complexities invite conflict.[123] Indeed, Sarah's outspokenness and autonomy lead Anna to fear Sarah's departure throughout the text.

Sarah demands to learn how to drive the carriage so that she may gain some independence and travel to town alone, and Anna's concerns about Sarah's possible departure intensify. Although Sarah's desire for independence serves a practical purpose since it advances the plot—Sarah will purchase gifts for the family, signaling her desire to remain with them once she goes to town alone—it is significant that this desire for independence is not explored in the texts with a living mother. Living mothers make choices, but a mother's departure following the acquisition of a new skill appears only in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. I read a sense of egalitarianism in the segment because Jacob teaches Sarah to drive; certainly, the act is an exercise of trust, but man and woman reach equality here—albeit limited to the act of driving and its symbolic independence.

Sarah and Jacob share another striking moment of equality. In the most dramatic scene in the novel, Sarah assists Jacob in repairing the roof as a rainstorm approaches. To Jacob's initial protests, Sarah reminds him that she is a carpenter and that she is "fast" and "good" (MacLachlan 46). Rather than use dualism to describe Sarah and Jacob, MacLachlan writes that Sarah works with

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[123] Conflict between husband and wife does appear in *Dead End in Norvelt*. See Chapter 4.

"her mouth full of nails" while wearing Jacob's overalls (46). The two appear

equal in this scene, a collective force working to protect the family. Their similar

physical appearance supports their generally equal status within the family—both

Jacob and Sarah perform manual labor and enjoy the independence to leave the

domestic space. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, the division between mother and

father's roles and duties usually appears through dualism.[124] Most often, a

blending of duties typically divided by gender appears only in divorced or single

mothers. Earlier chapters align with scholarship that argues juvenile literature

enacts nostalgia.[125] This egalitarian partnership in *Sarah, Plain and Tall* explores

the boundaries of motherhood by allowing a character to step very distinctly

outside of the motherhood ideal and fulfill the mother role. The unconventional

Sarah's mothering practices maintain that nostalgia in juvenile literature does not

depend upon assigning gender roles. Texts that comfort child readers, encourage

imagination, and transmit cultural values do not *require* gender restrictions, nor

do they require the type of reductive dualism in mother/father relationships often

seen in the award winners from this study.[126] *Sarah, Plain and Tall* points to this

in one of the final scenes; Anna narrates:

> Papa said nothing. But he put his arm around her, and learned over
> to rest his chin in her hair. I closed my eyes, suddenly

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[124] See Section 4.4.

[125] Here, I am thinking about nostalgia an attempt by adults to recreate a past that may or may not
have existed

[126] Refer to Chapter 4 for a discussion on dualism.

remembering Mama and Papa standing that way. Mama smaller
than Sarah, her hair fine against Papa's shoulder. When I opened
my eyes again, it was Sarah standing there. Caleb looked at me and
smiled and smiled until he could smile no more (49).

Sarah physically and metaphorically replaces the children's mother. Arguably, the focus of the replacement here is her position as Jacob's wife and not as mother. The protective stance of Jacob with his arm "around" Sarah and "lean[ing] over to rest his chin in his hair" could diminutize Sarah, but Mama was "smaller than Sarah" with "fine hair" (MacLachlan 49). I read this dissimilarity as indicative of Sarah's distinction from Mama; not only is she not the children's' mother, but also she is stronger, taller, and more equal in the relationship with Jacob. The seemingly contradictory characterization of Sarah as both within and outside of the domestic space speaks to an expanded motherhood, albeit one still influence by the motherhood ideal. Selflessness and nurturing remain natural to a woman, even one clothed in overalls and repairing a roof in a rainstorm.

In regards to Sarah's strength, perhaps these mother replacements do need to read as possessing a different type of strength than the birth-mothers since *A Gathering of Days* and *Sarah, Plain and Tall* include fictional space to explore the origins of motherhood when genetics cannot be a factor. No assumed connection exists between the mother replacement and child; at first meeting, they are strangers without the benefit of being a part of each other for nine months.[127]

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[127] As mentioned throughout this project, the natural state of being a mother is depicted positively throughout the texts.

Simply marrying does not transform these women into mothers. These mother replacement characters earn their status, primarily by demonstrating their usefulness to the child protagonist. Mother replacement privileges the *act* of mothering rather than the state of *being* a mother.

6.2: Searching for a Mother: Orphans and Replacement Mothers

Orphan protagonists are featured in ten Newbery Medal winners from this study. Six of these texts contain some connection to the motherhood ideal.[128] Of the four that do not include the ideal, one is about animals, two focus on the child protagonist's resilience and survival skills, and one includes a grandmother figure who does not enact the motherhood ideal.[129] Certainly, orphans appear throughout the history of literature for children, with some of the more popular examples being *A Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, and the Harry Potter series. Orphan texts perform cultural work, often serving as moral exemplars to adults. In consideration of a variant type of literature, Valerie Walkerdine writes of the *Little Orphan Annie* comic strip that Annie is a "figure of immense transformative power" who "solv[es] huge social and political problems" and "improve[s] her own life in the process" (327). While the child protagonists in this section do not solve social and political problems, their presence affects adult characters

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[128] Texts with orphan protagonists include: *The One and Only Ivan*; *The Graveyard Book*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*; *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*; *A Single Shard*; *Bud, Not Buddy*; *Missing May*; *Maniac Magee*; *The Whipping Boy*; and *Dicey's Song.* Characters with characteristics of the motherhood ideal appear in: *The Graveyard Book*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*; *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*; *Bud, Not Buddy*; *Missing May*; and *Maniac Magee.*
[129] *The One and Only Ivan*; *The Whipping Boy*; *A Single Shard*; and *Dicey's Song*, respectively.

positively—In *Bud, Not Buddy*, Bud's grandfather learns to accept his daughter's death and love Bud while Brigitte in *The Higher Power of Lucky* alters her life to care for a child she loves. Still, I contend that elements of the motherhood ideal transform these children and solve conflict; order is restored through the motherhood ideal as "adult" and "child" become clear distinctions.

Christopher Paul Curtis's 2000 winner, *Bud, Not Buddy*, introduces the reader to young Bud, who, following his mother's death is sent to multiple foster homes. He decides to search for his father, finding his grandfather (Herman E. Calloway) instead. Through reuniting with his grandfather, Bud learns about his mother's past, finally reaching an acceptance of her death. He finds a new family with his grandfather, despite Calloway's initial rejection of Bud, through the guidance of Miss Thomas. *Bud, Not Buddy* focuses on the mistakes Bud's mother made as well as the ways in which she cared for Bud. Her exact cause of death remains unknown, but her chaotic behavior (Bud explains that everything "moved very, very fast when Momma was near, she was like a tornado" and her suggested unhappiness indicate a potential suicide (Curtis 41). In the retelling of Bud's mother's upbringing, a rhetorical examination of generational relationships and their effects occurs. In his conversations with Miss Thomas, Bud learns that his grandfather pressured his mother to succeed until she finally disappeared. This unique conversation broadens motherhood by providing a context. Mothers, even fictional ones, certainly have backgrounds, and as *Walk Two Moons* demonstrates,

those past experiences can affect their mothering practices.[130] In my reading, Bud's mother behaves in the way that she does because of the pressures she received from her father; but, she displays a naturalness in mothering.[131] Indeed, Bud's memories of his mother remain positive so that any missteps are overshadowed by the time she spent reading to him or caring for him in illness.

Certainly, her mistakes, when contrasted to the mother character in Bud's final foster home, the Amoses, read as less threatening to Bud. After Bud defends himself from Todd Amos, the son, who attacks him, Mrs. Amos, a temporary mother to Bud, forces him to sleep, alone in a dark shed outside until she can send him away. Mrs. Amos models a rather horrific maternal figure as she listens only to her son, disregards Bud, scolds him for not being appreciative, calls him "vermin," and states that she does "not know if I shall ever be able to help another child in need" because of her mischaracterization of Bud's behavior (Curtis 15). Basing one's decisions on a child's behavior denotes immaturity and contradicts the motherhood ideal. Bud feels unsafe with the Amos's while battling with Todd, listening to Mrs. Amos, and then sleeping in the shed where his imagination causes him to see a vampire that does not exist. Mrs. Amos appears hurtful, selfish, and possibly deserving of blame. Conversely, the text treats Bud's mother as someone who, due to her own upbringing, makes decisions that affect Bud

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[130] See Chapter 5 for a discussion about *Walk Two Moons*. Briefly, two mother characters abandon their families because of past experiences.

[131] I do not equate her probable suicide with the denial of a naturalness in mothering.

negatively, ultimately leaving him an orphan. Still, there is no sense that Bud's mother is at fault.

Miss Thomas, the mother replacement character with elements of the motherhood ideal, sings in Calloway's band and assists in conflict resolution through her nurturing behavior, which originates from naturalness and exudes selflessness. Upon meeting Bud, she notices his infected hand—something that the male members of the band overlooked when they found Bud. Bud describes her touch as "light as a feather" when she inspects the shiner under his eye (Curtis 164). This delicateness appears again when she softly rubs a napkin over his head. Her compassionate treatment of Bud comforts him and suggests lightness, even the femininity typical of the motherhood ideal. Bud's tone changes from one of survival to a sense of innocence; bouncing from home to home, he lost the ability to practice "childhood" and had little opportunity to enjoy gentle, kindhearted treatment. Although the text does not indicate she is a practiced mother, Miss Thomas possesses instinctive reactions in caring for Bud. She undresses him when he falls asleep, inspects the bites on his legs, wraps her arms around him, and bounces him on her knee. No other character in Calloway's band connects to Bud in this corporeal nature, and all of this physicality leads to a scene towards the end of the novel in which Miss Thomas "st[ands] up, grab[s] both [of Bud's] arms and look[s] right hard in [his] face, just like Momma used to" (Curtis 191). Much like her delicate treatment of his shiner at the beginning of the novel, Miss

Thomas's actions in this scene demonstrate that she may replace Bud's mother since has a "mother's touch." Indeed, her contact with Bud mimics that of his mother, and, here, Miss Thomas replaces Bud's mother through actions, much like Sarah and Mammann from *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *A Gathering of Days*, respectively.

Miss Thomas's replacement of Bud's mother occurs at the same time that Bud learns about his mother's past and, somewhat morbidly, sleeps in his deceased mother's room. Miss Thomas contributes to resolving the conflict between Calloway and his grandson by insisting that Calloway agree to allow Bud to stay at his home. While residing in his mother's room, Bud rifles through her childhood belongings. Investigating her childhood toys, Bud remembers moments he shared with his mother and realizes that he doesn't need to carry around a suitcase of memories or a picture of her when she was much younger. Rather, he carries "Momma inside" (Curtis 234). When he places the picture of his younger mother next to her childhood items, he states that he "finally put her somewhere she wanted to be," and this is followed by a seeming acceptance of both his mother's death and his new family with his grandfather's band. I argue that placing the picture of his mother as a child among her toys marks a separation between her role as child and mother. Bud's interest in his mother as a child wanes once he accepts her death; he carries within him not the young girl but the mother. The distinction between child and adult applies to Bud as well. Once he

chooses to remember his mother as an adult, he symbolically reenters his own adolescence. No longer required to care for himself because of Miss Thomas, Bud can return to his own childhood. Miss Thomas brings comfort and stability as she contributes to Bud's return to childhood through the gentle guidance epitomized in the motherhood ideal. Her calm and consistent manner, themselves typical of the ideal, help to nurture an environment in which order is restored as Calloway accepts his grandson and Bud accepts his mother's death so that he may reenter his childhood.

Susan Patron's *The Higher Power of Lucky* (2004) includes two mothering experiences worthy of discussion—the child protagonist's (Lucky) relationship with a young boy for whom she provides temporary motherhood (Miles) and Lucky's relationship with her guardian mother (Brigitte). Lucky and Miles's relationship signifies that order needs to be restored since Lucky, as a child, cannot provide proper care for Miles. Brigitte's relationship with Lucky dramatizes mother replacement as well as a silent mother/daughter conflict similar to those previously discussed.[132] Once Lucky frees Brigitte from her position as Lucky's object, both she and the reader must trust the adopted mother character to choose mothering.

Lucky, whose mother died by electrocution following a storm, serves as a temporary mother to five-year old Miles (his mother is in prison). Although

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[132] Refer to Chapter 5 for a discussion of mother/daughter conflict. Also, although Brigitte is Lucky's guardian, she performs as her mother throughout the text.

Miles's grandmother cares for him, he turns to Lucky for comfort and guidance, as shown through his requests that Lucky read *Are You My Mother?*, his favorite book, aloud. The frequency of his entreaties compels Lucky to refuse on occasion. The persistent presence of *Are You My Mother?* emphasizes the missing mothers; for these two fictional children, the question in the title is apropos to both children who navigate relationships with females who act as mothers to them (Lucky with Brigitte; Miles with both Lucky and his grandmother). In reading *Are You My Mother?* to Miles and retelling stories about parts of their lives, such as when Lucky moved to the town in which they live, Lucky performs a temporary motherhood. The ritual of reading and rereading a familiar text to pre-literature and literate children provides familiarity and predictability through the story and a comforting, shared moment between reader and listener.[133] In my reading, associating this moment with searching for a mother speaks to the expectation that mother brings stability and comfort. Asking the question "are you my mother?" in *The Higher Power of Lucky* introduces complexity in mothering. First, as a temporary mother, Lucky resides in an ambiguous state. Perhaps more than any other fictional mother type, the temporary mother introduces readers to the question: what is a mother? In comforting Miles during times of distress and teaching him to read, Lucky enacts mothering. However, "playing mom" to Miles causes Lucky a type of misery suffered from mothering that is usually ignored in

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[133] David Russell, *Literature for Children* (Pearson).

the texts from this study. Following one scene in which Lucky refuses to read the

book to Miles, the narrator explains:

> Lucky had a little place in her heart where there was a meanness
> gland. The meanness gland got active sometimes when Miles was
> around. She knew that he knew he had to do what Lucky wanted,
> because if he didn't, she would never be nice to him. Sometimes,
> with that meanness gland working, Lucky liked being mean to
> Miles (Patron 34)

Yet, in a subsequent scene in which Lucky relents, reads the text, and comforts

Miles, she admits to caring for him. Her "meanness gland" originates from her

own feelings of abandonment—first by her mother, then her father, and then

Brigitte, whom she (incorrectly) believes is planning to return to Paris. Lucky's

age, and her desire to receive attention contribute as well; but, the spoken

disinterest in caring for a child with whom one has been entrusted (even

informally) provides a tension not seen in other texts.[134] As a child, Lucky is

simply too young to care for Miles; when she enacts motherhood, the distinction

between "adult" and "child" disappears. Furthermore, Lucky's relationship with

Miles reveals that, while she cares for Miles, she is unable to provide the type of

selfless nurturing typical of the motherhood ideal because she is still a child

herself. Indeed, in the juvenile literature genre, she cannot experience either

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[134] There is a sense of maternal ambivalence here as Lucky enacts both loving and hateful feelings
for Miles. As she is a child, I think that her hateful feelings relate more to her adolescent mind
than to true maternal ambivalence.

innocence or enact nostalgia for the reader because responsibilities for Miles and the loss of her mother turned her into a not-child.

Later in the novel, Lucky will tell Miles that his mother is in jail, and with "her meanness gland pumping," she will say: "And I'm not your mother either! I'm not taking care of you! So go home!" (Patron 100-101). Lucky's outburst provides a contrast to the calm, consistent mothering performed by Brigitte in the novel; Brigitte aligns with the motherhood ideal exemplars here.[135] Lucky's impatience further dramatizes her loss of innocence brought by the stress of losing a mother, worrying that her guardian plans to leave, and mothering Miles. The absence of mothers forces Lucky (and Miles) to accelerate their development as they cope with the absence of mother. Lucky's impatience characterizes her, but it also points to the difficulty of children assuming mother roles. Enacting motherhood as a child upsets order and the construction of childhood because it blurs the lines between child and adult. Lucky's imperfect temporary motherhood experience condones the motherhood ideal. Through the ideal, mothering becomes clearly (albeit falsely) defined instead of existing in an uncertain and/or imperfect state.

Despite her diverse motherhood characterization, Brigitte enacts aspects of the motherhood ideal, which allows her to guide the restoration of order in the novel. As the first wife of Lucky's father, Brigitte has no biological or social

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[135] Specifically, I am referring to the emotional stability of the motherhood ideal characters, as discussed in Chapter 3.

connection to Lucky prior to agreeing to foster the child, temporarily. Brigitte

leaves her home in France to care for Lucky, and the implication is that the

departure was a sacrifice for Brigitte since she sometimes receives packages from

home that make her cry and communicates often with her mother on the

telephone. Her sacrifice intensifies once she agrees to become a permanent

guardian until an adopted family agrees to care for Lucky, and I situate her within

the motherhood ideal due to this extreme selflessness. Symbolically, Lucky and

Brigitte's lack of a biological connection appears through imagery; the narrator

explains: "If Brigitte were ever to have a child, that child's feet would not look at

all like Lucky's sturdy, wide feet with their short, stubby toes. That child would

also have very good posture, Lucky thought, squaring her hunched-in shoulders"

(Patron 9). Here, Lucky and Brigitte are contrasted physically, and Brigitte aligns

more with the feminine through the suggestion of a solid posture and tiny feet.

Their physical differences defined, the text continues to emphasize Lucky's

emotional attachment to Brigitte, signifying the *act* of mothering over *being* a

mother.

Although Lucky speaks of her love for Brigitte and fears that she may

abandon Lucky, their emotional attachment is symbolized through Brigitte's

physical contact. The moments of contact signify Brigitte's care-giving as well.

She grips Lucky's shoulder during the memorial service for her mother with "the

type of grip you would have if you were trying to keep a puppy from running

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away," she "hug[s] her strongly from behind and put[s] her cheek against Lucky's cheek, and she wraps Lucky in her arms (Patron 66, 81). In the examined texts, physical contact is almost always reserved for the mother/child relationship.[136] However, Brigitte's nurturing suggests a natural state of nurturing inherent in women, especially since Lucky's father chooses to not care for her. While Lucky wonders if Brigitte enjoys her role as care-giver, it is these moments of physical contact that convince Lucky she does: "At those times, she knew there were parts to the job of Guardian that Brigitte liked a lot, and hugging Lucky was one of them, and that made Lucky's heart fill up with molecules of hope and pump them all through her veins" (Patron 81). Just as Lucky's "heart fill[s] up with molecules of hope," so does the readers'. Through this hopefulness of a restored order brought by the motherhood ideal, nostalgia is enacted with the promise that Lucky's innocence may be restored.

These calm moments between "mother" and "daughter" do not protect Lucky and Brigitte from experiencing a type of mother/daughter conflict found in other Newbery Medal winners, as discussed in Chapter 5. When Brigitte begins gathering official documents and leaving to run errands, Lucky assumes that she plans to return to Paris. Rather than question her actions, Lucky begins a silent conflict against Brigitte. One night when Brigitte is unavailable to tuck Lucky

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[136] This idea received attention in the discussion about Caldecott texts in Chapter 2 as well. It appears in Chapters 3-5 and connects physical contact to interactions with mothers and children more than fathers and children. Touch almost always relates to nurturing.

into bed, she cries and thinks that she wishes Brigitte would walk in so that

Brigitte could "see what a sad and abandoned child she was, an orphan whose

Guardian was too busy for hugging" (Patron 84-85). Notice that, once again,

mothering connects with nurturing and physical contact here as "hugging." Later,

out of anger, she will express that Brigitte is "too French and too unmotherly"

(Patron 86). The emotionally charged, "unmotherly" appears in no other text in

this study (Sara Louise from *Jacob Have I Loved* monetarily labels herself

"motherless" out of anger to her mother). The dangerous mothers in DiCamillo's

texts even escape this judgment.[137] Lucky's use of the word situates Brigitte as

her object and indicates Lucky's fear of abandonment. The physical distance of

Brigitte as she completes mysterious errands sends Lucky into a tailspin of

emotions. She chooses, then, to abandon Brigitte so that she may understand

"how much she loved her ward" (Patron 103). Prior to running away, Lucky, in

another act of defiance, puts on Brigitte's silk dress and wears her sunscreen so

that she becomes "a Brigitte-type of person" (Patron 102). Choosing to run away

allows her to feel "full and in charge" while she looks "grown up" and "pretty"

(Patron 120). Far from matrophobia (if we accept Brigitte as Lucky's mother

here), Lucky attempts to *become* Brigitte. The phrase a "Brigitte type of person"

signifies the child's lack of identity, and playing dress up in clothes that are too

big reminds the reader of the inappropriateness of Lucky acting as an adult in this

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[137] See Chapter 4 for a discussion about mothers in DiCamillo's Newbery texts.

scene and in playing mother to Miles. Lucky tries to own Brigitte here—as if she

can steal her clothes, then she can prevent her from leaving. She relinquishes

Brigitte's object status almost immediately by deciding to not steal Brigitte's

passport to prevent her from leaving. Lucky's subsequent insistence that Brigitte

should choose to remain in Hard Pan "because she loved Lucky," displays a love

for Brigitte—rather than view Brigitte as her object, Lucky understands that she is

an individual with her own interests and motivations (Patron 120). This

distinction of the mother character as a subject instead of an object appears in

only a few of the Newbery texts in this study.[138] In this final scene, Lucky

relinquishes her search for a mother and hopes that a mother will choose her.

Liberating Brigitte from her object position also allows Lucky to release

her mother's ashes in a subsequent scene (she had refused to distribute them at her

mother's funeral). Brigitte finds Lucky in the desert leading a private memorial

for her mother; she approaches Lucky slowly. As Lucky speaks, remembering

"her mother's smooth shoulder," Brigitte "smile[s] up at her and clasp[s] her

under the chin, almost like praying;" here, the two mother characters merge into

one (Patron 129). This funeral scene in which Lucky, in Brigitte's dress, has

literally tried on Brigitte, resolves with Brigitte symbolically becoming Lucky's

mother as the child accepts her mother's death and Brigitte chooses mothering.

Notice that the replacement is solidified through the characters' physical contact.

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[138] See developed mothers in Chapter 4, for instance.

As *The Higher Power of Lucky* demonstrates, a mother character may be an

individual, not the possession of the child, and the text may still provide a sense

of hopefulness. Nevertheless, once the mother is released from object status, the

reader must wonder what the mother figure will do. This uncertainty creates an

anxiousness that belies the myth of a mother's constant accessibility and

reliability. Again, I argue that the prevalence of the motherhood ideal in these

texts serves to combat that uncertainty. Not only does the ambiguity of an

individuated mother upset the fictional child, but it translates anxieties about

mobility and independence in mothers in the lived space. Conversely, if she can

be defined, then certainly she can be relied upon to act appropriately so that

children receive proper care. "Mother" becomes the guardian of cultural

reproduction, the one capable of (re)birthing a civilization.

Almost as if Lucky cannot possess two mothers, as she releases one, she

claims full ownership of the other, as shown in one of the final scenes:

> She climbed onto Brigitte's lap, even though she was really much
> too big. But she still fit, and she leaned back while Brigitte
> wrapped her with her arms, like a present. Lucky felt sleepy and
> languid. Her knees were almost knobby enough to look like
> Brigitte's knees, though Lucky's were brown and scabby and
> scarred, and Brigitte's were beautiful and… Lucky searched for the
> word …womanly. (131)

At the resolution, then, the "too big" Lucky can "still fit" into the mythical

innocence of adolescence, and "wrapped" in her new mother's arms, she feels

comforted and "languid." The child becomes a "present," a gift; certainly, this is a

commonly repeated saying in the lived space. Juxtaposed with earlier descriptions of their disparate appearance, Lucky and Brigitte now share physical similarities with knees that "almost" look alike. Order is restored as Lucky returns to the role of child and Brigitte becomes an adopted mother to Lucky. Lucky views Brigitte as "womanly," (a rather squirrely word) and implied here is Brigitte's femininity and its relation to her mothering. As such, motherhood is further essentialized as the motherhood ideal reads as the acceptable motherhood. The text ends with the promise that a mother will guide the child into adulthood, thus ensuring the stability of "mother" and "child."

Through replacement mothers, the motherhood ideal resolves conflict and contributes to restoring order by reestablishing the demarcation between "child" and "adults" as well as enacting nostalgia in juvenile literature. These mother characters perform the cultural work that Susan Maushart assigns to the idealized mother by "organizing and domesticating the more rapacious aspects of the realities we confront" (2). A satisfactory resolution assures the reader that the child will receive the guidance of a mother through adolescence. The commonality of mother replacement and the absence of father replacement originates from the associations between mothering and nurture. Two of the texts in which mother is replaced require the mother-to-be's acculturation to her new

living conditions.[139] Emphasis is placed on the ways in which the mother-to-be does not fit into the setting. Once fully immersed, she is rewarded with her conformity by becoming "mother." The continued emphasis on the naturalness in the motherhood ideal proves disheartening as even characters with no prior mothering experience enact the motherhood ideal. Once again, naturalness in female mothering situates mothering in the gendered, female space.

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[139] *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *A Gathering of Days*

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Chapter 7

Challenging the Ideal: Potential Research Areas and

Conclusions

Founded in traditionalism and idealism, the motherhood ideal in the

Caldecott and Newbery Medal winners from 1980-2014 juvenile literature

supports a mythology that may create a sense of nostalgia, which privileges

comfort over conflict or change. The motherhood ideal also ensures a clear

demarcation between "adult' and "child" as it assists in conflict resolution.[140]

Apart from its generic implications, the motherhood ideal supports an out-of-date

passive femininity, situates the mother as the child protagonist's object,

characterizes mothers through the use of dualism, intimates naturalness in

mothering, and limits discursive mothering. Further, it participates in gender

essentialism and prevents an expression of anxieties in mothering.

The scope of this project, with an examination of forty-eight primary texts

and two major awards means that further research is possible in a diverse range of

topics within (and outside of) literary studies. As one of the goals of this project

was to identify trends, and especially those appearing after the onset of second-

wave feminism, I reviewed forty-eight texts and then included approximately half

in this analysis. I believe that the search for patterns warranted that choice and

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[140] "Nostalgia" primarily refers to a childhood which may or may not have existed for the adult
reader; it is an impression. For a longer discussion, see Chapter 1.

resulted in the opportunity to analyze conflict resolution and the motherhood ideal in detail. Still, I an expanded analysis of any text within Chapters 2-6 would yield useful theories.

Perhaps most obviously, analyses similar to those conducted in this study could be applied to the same texts through the lens of the fatherhood experience. As concepts of maleness receive more attention in literature studies, and as motherhood studies continue to expand, a space exists for an examination of fictional representations of fatherhood.[141] A number of the Caldecott and Newbery winners from 1980-2014 either do not include a father character or mention him only briefly; still, I see evidence of a fatherhood ideal within these texts. At minimum, trends pertaining to father characters (such as protectiveness and aloofness) exist within these texts. Similar questions to the ones asked in this study apply directly to an examination of fatherhood within these texts.

Further consideration of mother/daughter relationships may contribute to feminist and motherhood studies.[142] While much of the critical work regarding mothers and daughters is daughter-centric or considers only epistolary or confessional texts written by fictional and non-fictional mothers, a thorough consideration of the mother-daughter experience within juvenile literature would

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[141] Indeed, both Perry Nodelman and John Stephens have written about maleness in literature for children.
[142] Studies by Rich and Chodorow continue to be examined; Parker and Caplan have considered the mother/daughter relationship in recent texts.

benefit studies related to gender as well as enhance juvenile literature theory. [143]

Expanding this research to include non-award texts and/or award-winning texts in other countries could provide even more insight into cultural constructions of gender, parenthood, and childhood.

A troubling omission within the Caldecott and Newbery winners from 1980-2014 is characters with physical disabilities. Following the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, an increased awareness of disabled individuals and their needs has developed—something which could reasonably be expected to materialize in fiction. Excepting *one* award winner, no disabled character, whether parent or child, appears.[144] Are texts omitting disabled characters, or is it the award committees? After all, not even the popular Harry Potter series includes one disabled character. Undoubtedly, abled and disabled child readers as well as those with disabled parents would benefit from the treatment of disability in a fictional space that avoids stereotypes or treats the disability as a problem to overcome. In fairness, the Caldecott committees have recognized honor books from 1980-2014 that include disabled characters and have awarded the Caldecott Medal to books published prior to 1980 with disabled characters; however, none of these characters are mothers. Ableness as a component of the motherhood ideal aligns with disability studies.

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[143] Again, as the major premise of this study considers the fictional representation of motherhood and argues that it limits the representation of lived motherhood experiences, another component of the argument states that stereotyping mother limits the mother/daughter relationship.

[144] *The View from Saturday* includes a paraplegic teacher who influences the children greatly.

In deciding which texts to analyze, I chose those honored by the American Library Association primarily because I believed the comparison between picture books and novels would yield important results. I analyzed texts honored by awards through the ALA because I was seeking patterns within the texts and hypothesized that trends would appear in two awards sponsored by the same organization. However, as this study considers only Caldecott and Newbery awards, a similar analysis could be conducted on other awards for juvenile literature. A different study may, consider a shorter time period but consider more awards. Comparing representations of motherhood in texts honored by the National Book Award for Young People's Literature with the Newbery texts would reveal the prevalence of the motherhood ideal outside of the ALA, for instance. Considering the texts honored by the Coretta Scott King award (also ALA) and whether they also receive Caldecott and/or Newbery awards as well as further investigating the reasons for those decisions would provide further insight into the awards. I still contend that the most prominent American awards are the Caldecott and Newbery, and while I understand the reasons for awards or lists that honor niches, like the Coretta Scott King Award or the Amelia Bloomer List, perhaps the segmentation of these awards prevents books honored in a specific niche from receiving the more prominent awards. Aside from the ALA awards, a variety of awards are given to juvenile literature each year; so, a more robust examination of fictional motherhood representations in the texts that receive

awards outside of the ALA canon would contribute to the study of juvenile literature. As mentioned, comparing representations of motherhood in texts recognized with American awards to those given by other countries could provide insight into broad cultural differences related to both motherhood and the construction of childhood.

Certainly, once a text receives honors, it becomes far more marketable. One important question to consider, then, is: In what ways are award-winning texts marketed? Awarded books are more prominently displayed in libraries, and, as Chris Rashcka's *A Ball for Daisy* demonstrates, sometimes likely to have a sequel. In fact, a number of the award-winning texts are accompanied by a publisher-sponsored Internet presence. A book trailer exists for Rashcka's book, and a well-developed Web site with educational material is available for *The One and Only Ivan*. Comparatively, the honor books are less likely to receive such attention. Another important consideration is whether a text is more likely to be honored if it is written by an author who received an award previously. In the examined texts, Kate DiCamillo, Chris Rashcka, and Chris Van Allsburg have earned multiple awards. Likely, texts written by recognizable authors are more likely to sell. The marketability of a text in addition to the familiarity of its author could be examined in detail. This study suggests a link between marketability and comfort, or nostalgia; but, further analysis regarding buying trends and modes of marketing could prove worthwhile.

7.3 Concluding Thoughts: The Lasting Presence of the Motherhood Ideal

I analyzed texts published from 1980-2014 because their publication follows second-wave feminism, coincides with an increased number of mothers working outside of the home, overlaps an increase in the prevalence of single mothers, and occurs during a time in which alternative mother identities begin to appear more consistently because of science.[145] Although I found progression in the representation of mother characters in the award-winning texts, many mother characters continue to include stereotypical elements. The stereotyped motherhood ideal favors an imperceptible fragment of lived mothering experiences. Since the project is informed by feminist scholarship, one of my original hypotheses was the need for a robust examination of juvenile literature in feminism—something which occurs infrequently at present. After examining the texts, I advocate that the consistent evaluation of these texts is an imperative for scholars interested in gender construction and motherhood; they cannot be ignored simply because their intended audience is children.

Throughout the study, I suggest that the continued appearance of the motherhood ideal coincides with a comforting nostalgia often found in juvenile literature. Whether stories follow the home-away-home trope or simply resolve all conflict within a text to suggest an optimistic future, texts for children are often

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[145] Here, I am thinking of surrogate mothers and in vitro fertilization, for instance.

imbued with a sense of nostalgia, an attempt to recover that which was lost

(whether an idea of childhood, innocence, or tradition). A component of the myth

of "simpler" times and/or comforting innocence is the security of the domestic

space. The emphasis on the cozy, domestic space here parallels Jerry Griswold's

argument in *Feeling Like a Kid* that literature for children contains elements of

"snugness" (3). The ever-present, always-smiling, nurturing motherhood

stereotype from which the ideal emerges provides a feeling of snugness through

her devotion to the domestic space. So, the insistence within these award-winning

texts that the mother endure the responsibility of "organizing and domesticating

the more rapacious aspects of the realities we confront" seems to validate the

motherhood ideal (Maushart 2). Within the award-winning texts is the

marketability of a "safe," non-controversial text over one that attempts to

challenge ingrained ideals. As the texts are to represent "excellence," it is

arguable that "excellence" may be perceived to correlate to existing ideals within

a genre. As established, texts that receive the Caldecott or Newbery Medal sell far

more copies than texts without an award, or even honor texts. Therefore, it is not

unreasonable to postulate that marketability, in the form of reproduced ideals and

the reappearance of a previous winner, may affect which texts receive awards.

Also, award-winning texts enjoy the prospect of continued publication for

an indefinite amount of time. Perhaps committees select texts with the

motherhood ideal because these texts provide optimism through the prospect of

reproducing the familiar. In other words, a mother like Susan in *Jacob Have I Loved* seems far more likely to ensure the continued reproduction of family and culture than Sugar in *Walk Two Moons* who leaves behind a sorrowful, lost daughter forced to cope with her mother's death. Under mother's selfless, watchful guidance, then, a child grows into an individual with confidence. Rather than be forced into a quick maturation and suffer a truncated childhood, the child protagonist of the motherhood ideal enjoys youth. These texts celebrate the fantastical because comfort and play may be found within them. Certainly, the nostalgia appeals to a variety of readers—even the most enlightened. Caldecott and Newbery committees change annually, and they define their own criteria for "excellence;" so, speculating on motives seems less revealing than considering the affects of the ideal on the reading public. Though these texts celebrate fantasy, what, if any affect does the motherhood ideal have on readers?

As children develop their independent reading skills, the reassuring qualities of these texts are certainly appealing. However, the continued proliferation of the motherhood ideal proves problematic. As literature like *Black and White* and *Dead End in Norvelt* demonstrate, texts that depict egalitarian parenting relationships and grant the mother character motivation outside of the home may offer an enjoyable, comforting story to children. These texts develop mother characters beyond a stereotype; indeed, in *Black and White*, the mother's characterization is a bit ambiguous.

An interest in egalitarianism does not necessarily mean that a text must be a so-called "problem" text that advocates acceptance of diversity. These texts are especially seen in multi-cultural texts often written by outsides to the culture that dictate a preachy message along the lines of "we are all the same" while diminishing the richness of a cultural experience. Rather, a positive, progressive egalitarianism may depict non-stereotypical characters that represent diverse experiences (these texts exist within juvenile literature and are sometimes recognized by the committees). So, rather than present limiting gender roles through the motherhood ideal, juvenile literature may meet generic expectations of suggesting comfort and optimism while still creating a fictional space that honors characters' individuality.

Rozsika Parker writes that, the more complicated women's lives become, "the more ossified and stereotyped become the dominant representations of ideal motherhood" (21). In the case of the Newbery texts, especially, the most diversity in mothering and nuance in mother characters appears from 2004-2014 in which the mothers that I define in Chapter 4 as "diverse" dominate. On the surface, then, Parker's statement seems negated. However, a closer examination of the diversity in mothering reveals that even the diverse mothers (except for the selfish mother) practice elements of the motherhood ideal in their mothering; this adherence to the ideal often resolves conflict. The effect of presenting ethnically and culturally diverse mother characters and then requiring them to use the same techniques to

resolve conflict as the motherhood ideal limits the potential psychological and social effects of including a diverse mother character by arguing that all mothers must behave in the same manner.

Likewise, fathers assume care-giving roles in three of these texts (including a temporary motherhood practiced by a silverback gorilla in *The One and Only Ivan*). Yet, the father characters require assistance from a motherhood ideal; Gideon in *Moon Over Manifest* leaves his daughter in his hometown where people he has not seen in decades, including two motherhood ideal exemplars, care for Abilene. Silas in *The Graveyard Book* requires the assistance of a character with elements of the motherhood ideal (Mrs. Owens) in order to raise Bod. Increased inclusion of texts recognizing diverse mothering experiences separate from the motherhood ideal will create more space for a wide range of fictional motherhood experiences (whether single mothers, surrogate mothers, temporary mothers, or non-nurturing mothers). Perhaps the proliferation of the motherhood ideal in popular culture, through magazines and television, may also diminish as the definition of motherhood expands in a fictional space. Certainly, this expanded definition features in motherhood studies, epistolary accounts of motherhood, and even mommy blogs on the Internet where mothering anxieties are addressed and discourse supports non-prescriptive mothering practices; but, I argue that motherhood studies must include frequent analysis of juvenile literature and react to the continued presence of the motherhood ideal.

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Biographical Information

Dana McCullough Brewer earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from The University of Texas at Austin in 1998. She continued her studies at the University of North Texas and was awarded a Master of Arts in English in 2002. Brewer serves as an Assistant Professor at Weatherford College where she teaches English courses. She created the first course in Literature for Children at Weatherford College. Brewer's most recent conference presentation was at the Two-Year College English Association- Southwest conference. Her research interests include: juvenile literature, motherhood studies, feminist literary theory, and early American literature. She is a member of the Children's Literature Association and the Society for the Study of American Women Writers, among other organizations.