CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD FOUND IN AWARD-WINNING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by
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DEDICATION

To Miriam Pellegrino, sister reader, junior colleague, and daughter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS – Continued

TABLE OF CONTENTS – Continued

TABLE OF CONTENTS – Continued

TABLE OF CONTENTS – Continued

TABLE OF CONTENTS – Continued

ABSTRACT

This study explores the connections between childhood and children's literature. In this connection there is an inherent tension between writing and reading "real" childhood, as it is being lived by children now, and interacting with an adult-normative, adult-reconstructed childhood that may or may not have existed in the past. The purpose of this study was to address this tension by analyzing fifteen recently published award-winning children's novels, from the United States, The United Kingdom, and Australia, in order to ferret out how present-day childhood is constructed within this text set. Using a hybrid methodology called critical discourse analysis, buttressed by the frameworks of postmodern childhood studies and critical children's literature studies, the novels were analyzed in a hermeneutic, reader-response oriented approach in order to excavate themes that addressed childhood in the narratives. Findings are presented as a meta-plot, wherein the child protagonists leave a failed home, set out on a journey of knowledge and experience gaining a sense of agency, and, at the end of the novel, construct a new home replete with the child protagonists' personal meaning. This meta-plot includes instances of the child protagonist performing *parrhesiatic* acts (Foucault) as well as developing non-hierarchical relationships as conceptualized by an *I/You* relationship (Buber). Other findings include the construction of childhood as a time of "becoming" and a time of "is-ness," childhood as a time of resilience, and childhood as a time of difficult decisions. Conclusions of the analysis speak to the idea of the child serving as a Modern bringer of hope, who manages to create moral order from within an

adult-created postmodern milieu. Implications relate to the fields of literacy education, replications of the study with an interpretative community of children, and continuing to define the burgeoning methodology of critical content analysis.

INDEX WORDS: postmodern childhood studies, critical children's literature studies, critical content analysis, postmodern childhood, Buber, *parrhesia*, and meta-plot.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND POSTMODERN CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Over a decade ago I was at the Bennington College Early Childhood Center enjoying a read aloud. It was late afternoon and all the children and adults were gathered in a sleepy shadowy room listening to Rachel read a picture book in her melodious voice. Almost asleep I listened to the unfamiliar story, taking comfort in the words and rhythms and rhyme: mop, shop, dog, hog, sheep, heap, fun, broomstick…?

Fun and broomstick don't rhyme, I thought, and Rachel was such a careful reader. Curious, I picked up the now discarded book and saw that the word "gun" had been crossed out in pen and the word "broomstick" had been written below the censored word. When questioned, Rachel said that she had changed the word because guns weren't something she wanted brought into children's lives.

Nonplussed, I considered guns in children's lives in rural Vermont. I thought about the upcoming deer season and the many parents who participated in the hunt. I thought about the dramatic play I frequently saw on the playground and in classrooms in which various implements were used by children to represent weapons. I remembered many of the stories children dictated to me to accompany their pictures of battles. As far as I could tell, guns were a part of children's lives already.

Back in my office, which was also the library, I found other books that had been censored. Words like "hate" and "ugly" and "war" had been crossed out and replaced by more positive words. Censorship? I asked myself, here at clothing optional Bennington

College? It made no sense, but then it started to. The rules that I had inherited: vegan only snacks (non-gmo popcorn and rice milk), no clothing with name brands visible (Nike allowed only if the swoosh was small), blame the object not the child ("Johnny, that pencil of yours just doesn't want to stay in your hand."), etc., etc., etc. We were trying in our rather entitled, liberal, and well-educated way to create our own kind of childhood, a utopia for children.

I wish I could say I challenged the censorship, but ingloriously, I kept my mouth shut. I was uncomfortable, but surely, I reasoned, there was nothing nefarious about keeping the ills of the world outside an early childhood laboratory school. But I never felt comfortable with the censorship and I never forgot it.

Years later, in my PhD program I started to, once again, experience the tension of not saying the word "gun" in a country that prides itself on its Second Amendment rights. Although the words "hate" and "ugly" are negative, they are powerful and, more important, real. This tension led me to start to think about the relationship between children's books and childhood. What do the books we give our children say about childhood? Do they reflect childhood as we want to remember it or do they show a childhood that is being lived now? Whatever children's books say must be important as exemplified by the censorship in my anecdote and in the news, then and now. I wondered if the re-creation/re-construction of childhood we attempted at Bennington could be found in children's literature. This study is my attempt to start to answer these questions.

Background of the Study

Four years ago at the Tucson Teachers Applying Whole Language (TAWL) conference I picked up a slim volume from a free book box called *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* written by a man I had never heard of, Peter Hollindale (1997). This book changed how I thought about my two passions, children's literature and the education of young children. Hollindale gave me an anomaly, literally, fodder for new ideas, in the statement that "adults are obsolete in children's literature" (p. 29). While I still don't know if I agree with Hollindale's statement, it made me read on. Hollindale spoke of the relationship between power and children's literature. He maintained that children's books are riddled with adult ideology and serve the purpose of enforcing adult normativity. This reminded me of the issues I still had brewing from my days at Bennington College.

Reading Hollindale led me to read the authors he drew from, scholars such as Maria Tatar and Peter Hunt who introduced me to new ideas about the relationships between power and literature and to the emerging field known as postmodern childhood studies. As my interest in these dynamic and intersecting areas evolved and strengthened, I decided to contact Peter Hunt himself for direction, for ways to explore my developing yet still naïve questions and understandings. Hunt suggested that I attend a children's literature symposium that was to take place that year in England. It was there that I first encountered the true depth and breadth, the newness, of postmodern childhood studies, a critical and diverse discipline concerned with engaging children as individuals rather than as points on a developmental chart.

The conference was an epiphany. Although I did and do subscribe to certain developmental theories of childhood, in England and through subsequent reading I was introduced to scholars who convincingly augmented this more traditional type of work by including and taking seriously views of young people as a marginalized group. From this perspective the (possible) marginalization of children (a) must be studied and (b) can be meaningfully interpreted only within multiple contexts of power. That these critical insights influenced the trajectory of my work cannot be overstated. But, as useful as I found and continue to find this line of scholarship, I increasingly discerned what I took to be a glaring lack, that is the absence of any clear connection between studying childhood and studying children's literature. For although people like Henry A. Giroux and the late Joe Kincheloe were doing what I thought was important and groundbreaking work by examining kid culture according to phenomena such as Disneyworld, Barbie dolls, MacDonald's, and television, no one I read was writing about children's literature within a postmodern childhood studies framework.

An exhaustive search unearthed little scholarship on the intersection between childhood and children's literature, so I decided to answer my own question, to examine how childhood studies and the study of children's literature might be connected, by going back to my earlier question of what kind of childhood is constructed in children's literature.

Description of the Study

For this study I analyzed a text set comprised of fifteen award-winning children's books published between 2003 through 2007. The text subsets consisted of groups of five books representing each of following awards: The Carnegie Award from the United Kingdom, The Newbery Medal from the United States, and the Book of the Year Award from the Children's Book Council of Australia.

By employing both the methodology of critical content analysis and the various insights I constructed out of the theoretical conceptions offered by postmodern childhood studies and the critical study of children's literature, I attempted to answer the following research question: How is childhood constructed in children's literature? Through my analysis I found that the childhood depicted in twelve of the fifteen novels followed a clear and consistent meta-plot.

Theoretical Framework

In this section I discuss postmodern childhood studies, exploring specifically Foucault's (1983, 2001) ideas about *parrhesia* and Buber's (1923) conception of *I/You* as ways of interrogating the constructions of childhood presented in contemporary children's literature. I consider critical studies of children's literature, especially the works of authors such as Tatar, Hunt, and Hollindale, in the next chapter.

Postmodern Childhood Studies

Postmodern childhood studies is a cross-disciplinary perspective that contends that while younger people may represent or symbolize a better future, in the here and now they may be constituted as an oppressed group as they have been marked by some adults

as “other,” as a group of people who are not able or mature enough to create themselves (Kehily, 2004; Mills & Mills, 2000). In a dichotomous, hierarchical relationship with adults children can be seen as deficient. This deficiency has been, in part, “scientifically proven” by developmental psychology in that, according to stage theories, children must go from step to step in order to reach the final stage of adulthood. Constructing childhood in this way implies that children are missing something; they are adults-to-be who are lacking (Cannella, 2002).

These studies are called “postmodern” because they offer a reaction against “modern childhood studies” (e.g., human development and early childhood education studies) and their belief that science can and will “reveal the nature of the child and the best ways to meet the child’s needs” (Cannella, 2002, p. 8). These “modern” views are housed in a discourse of “truths” about children’s helplessness. Postmodern childhood studies challenges these views by “denaturalizing childhood, acknowledging the complexities of all our lives” (Cannella, 2002, p. 9).

In order to conceptualize childhood differently postmodern childhood scholars look at a distinctive set of problems and issues surrounding childhood and its interpretation:

1. The contexts of power, ideology, and history surrounding a specific childhood.
2. The material conditions of children.
3. The accepted beliefs of childhood in popular culture.

4. The struggle of children and adults to engage in a non-hierarchical connection. (adapted from Canella, 2002, pp 9-10)

It is their treatment of this problems and issues that differentiates the work of postmodern childhood scholars from their more classically scientific developmentally-oriented colleagues.

Postmodern childhood studies and the critique of developmental psychology. Some scholars have interpreted certain biological "facts" of human growth as the whole story, and thus conceive of children as a singular species rather than as individuals. An example of this is the growth chart pediatricians in our culture use to evaluate children's "normal" growth. This chart, based on normed weights and heights of northern European children, does not take into account individual differences that could be explained by culture or heredity. Children's data are placed on the chart and deemed normal or abnormal. Younger humans may be growing, but there is no universal child, for like all individual humans each child is unique and deserving of a subject position (Cannella, 2002).

Valerie Walkerdine (2004) writes of the tensions inherent in the worldviews of developmental psychology and postmodern childhood studies. In the former, childhood is understood in terms of a journey towards completeness, towards adulthood. In the latter, children are looked at in their present state, "blurring the line between childhood as an unfinished and adulthood as a finished state" (p.96).

Using Piaget as the best example of the developmental psychological approach to childhood, Walkerdine acknowledges his important contributions to our understanding of childhood cognitive growth. She is critical, however, of the perception that Piaget's

findings are seen as a kind of “truth,” rather than one truth among many, all of which could be valid to certain groups of children at certain times. The critique of developmental psychology is not of its findings, but of what it doesn’t find, that “childhood is always produced as an object in relation to power” (p. 101).

Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe (1997) question the biological “truth” of child psychology because of its static nature. Using Piaget as an example of this they write, “Piaget’s brilliance was constrained by his nonhistorical, socially decontextualized scientific approach. Whatever he observed as the genetic expression of child behavior in the early twentieth century he generalized to all cultures and historical eras—an error that holds serious consequences for those concerned with children” (p. 2).

Contentions within postmodern childhood studies.

> [M]any scholars remain concerned that younger human beings are the largest group of people who have been othered, marginalized, and colonized, and further, these oppressive practices continue. (Cannella, 2002, p. 9)

Postmodern childhood studies scholars see themselves as different from traditional early childhood scholars in that they believe childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon and that there is no such thing as a universal child/childhood (Hollindale, 1997). They also view individual children as competent social actors who are worthy of being studied (Kozol, 1995). While postmodern childhood studies scholars reject the idea of children being pigeonholed into a growth/development chart, they do believe that children share commonalities and that some of these are biological (Boobock & Scott, 2005). However, they believe that instead of concentrating on the similarities

among children, childhood is best understood within localized and diverse frameworks as it is too fractured to look at as a whole (James & James, 2001).

In order to make sense of childhood(s), childhood studies scholars James, Jenks, and Prout (1989) have come up with three models of childhood that can help frame research in this burgeoning field. In the first model, the “social actor” model, children are viewed as competent social actors, with much to contribute to the world around them. Children in this model are not seen as helpless but as competent citizens who can participate in most civic duties. The second model is the “childhood space” perspective, which examines how childhood is structured as a social space, specifically looking at where children are free from the adult gaze and where they are not. This model is concerned with the boundaries between childhood and adulthood and with how these boundaries blur. The final model is the “socially constructed childhood” in which childhood is given to children by adults who constitute it for them, and, in turn, children reconstruct what is given. This is the model employed in this study as it speaks most directly to the tensions inherent in children’s literature. What underlies all these models is the idea that children shape culture as much as culture shapes children. The quest of childhood studies scholars is to demonstrate the structures and processes (in this case the texts of childhood) that allow childhood to change while ensuring that certain aspects of childhood remain (James & James, 2001).

In her book, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution*, Gaile Cannella (2002), a postmodern childhood studies researcher, attempts to make sense of the second salient issue surrounding and muddying postmodern

childhood studies: the fact that children are developing and will someday be considered "grown up." Biology makes comparing children as an oppressed group to other historically oppressed groups such as African-Americans, Latino/as, and Women difficult. Unlike membership in these other groups that is, for the most part, stable, childhood is transitory. We are all children and we all grow up. While this is "true," the development of the child does not need to be the whole story, because while childhood is temporal the nature of childhood changes across time and space. Child development is real, but the way it is interpreted and socially organized is culturally constructed (Fass & Mason, 2000).

It is difficult to break from the story told to us in our required human development classes. As a former early childhood professional I was told time and again by "experts" that the National Association for The Education of Young Children's (1996) *Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Practice* was the source for all that was good for children. It is the "truth" and like all truths this belief rests on the power relationships between groups of people (here children and adults). And in the discourse of developmental appropriateness power resides with adults. The underlying premises of child development include children as deficient (discussed above), adult privilege, and social regulation (Cannella, 2002).

Adult privilege, like white privilege (McIntosh, 1988) is an invisible and unacknowledged force that prioritizes adult culture over child culture by accepting adult entitlement as normal. This privilege is rarely questioned because it is so much a part of what we (as adults) view as "normal." Examples of adult privilege exist along a

continuum ranging from the mundane, children automatically are given water in sealed cups regardless of the accuracy of their motor skills, to the important, children in our country have no recognized human rights as evidenced by the United States being only one of two countries that have yet to sign the United Nations Charter of Children's Human Rights (Burr, 2004).

Social regulation refers to the careful monitoring of children's physical movement and thoughts. Examples of regulating children's physical movement are curfews for younger drivers, stores that do not permit children to come inside without an adult, and toddlers being kept on a tether in crowded public places. Censorship of reading materials, rating systems for public media, and "character lessons" in school are some examples of the regulation of children's thoughts.

This is a limiting discourse, one that further cements the child's otherness and helplessness and gives adults the option, in fact the *only* logical option, to step in and guide/teach/indoctrinate the child. This guiding may include deciding who is "normal" and, more importantly, who is "abnormal." This kind of guiding of children, this careful monitoring for signs of abnormality can be seen in both the American medical and educational establishments.

Medical institutions begin this careful monitoring of children in-utero. Fetuses are examined by ultrasound machines to look for any abnormalities. At birth the newborn is immediately placed on the Apgar scale. Pediatrician appointments serve as spaces for a physician to ensure that a child is developing "normally." The educational establishment is rife with tests that can ostensibly predict at younger and younger ages children who are

“at risk” for reading problems. Standardized tests are given to students many times a year to monitor normal and abnormal achievement.

This discourse also makes the Foucauldian (1975/1979) notions of surveillance, social control, and examination necessary. Surveillance is present in the child’s day-to-day life. The child knows that there is an adult watching, or the possibility of an adult watching, her behavior. Because the child is not yet at a place where she can be trusted to act “rationally,” the adult, quite logically, assumes that this is the adult role vis-à-vis children. When the child is seen lacking in adult-sanctioned appropriate behaviors, social control is administered by adults toward children. This control may be called discipline, wherein the child is shown/told/taught the appropriate ways of being. The child in this system is, recursively, being examined as she is being watched.

This Foucauldian scenario makes sense as younger people in our present time and place require adults to make decisions for them. In this discourse adults see their role as socializing children, making them believe and behave in ways that adults see as proper. This, in turn, allows children to have no agency, or the space and “ability to imagine a world differently and then act differently” (Chappell, 2008, p. 282).

Postmodern childhood studies looks at the different ways childhood is theorized. These theories of childhood can be located in the discipline of sociology. In the functional model scholars look at social groups systematically. Here children are socialized and normed by the adults in order to assure cohesiveness. In the conflict perspective there is an uneven distribution of resources and power, which renders children powerless as they have less chance to get their piece of the pie. Lastly, within the

social constructivist worldview childhood is seen as variable and children have agency and not only construct their own lives, but shape the course of the lives around them. This stance, the one this study takes, demands that children and childhood deserve to and must be studied (Boocock & Scott, 2005).

A critique of postmodern childhood studies. The argument that children and childhood should and must be studied does not necessitate a singular approach, a "one-size-fits-all" form of appropriate scholarship. Undoubtedly some modes of postmodern childhood studies risk developing into the kinds of normative, totalizing narratives that postmodern scholars have long resisted and warned against. In this light, "Keepin' It Plural: Children's Studies in the Academy," by Karen Coats (2001), serves as a cautionary tale for researchers who, like me, advance a postmodern childhood studies framework.

Coats begins by problematizing what to call studies of children. She challenges the term "childhood studies" because it focuses upon theory rather than on real children. Coats also contests the term "child studies" because it works to remove the real child from theory. Instead, she advocates in favor of the more inclusive "children's studies" as a construction that embraces both theory and real children. As she states, "I think Children's Studies is the more inclusive term. After all, Women's Studies is never called 'Womanhood Studies' or 'Woman Studies' for precisely the same reason: womanhood is not an ideal, nor is woman a singular entity" (p. 140).

Coats calls for researchers to be open to studying real children as well as representations of children. "Social scientists must overcome their distrust in textual

representations as viable evidence" (p. 141). She also advises educationists to be less pragmatic and more theoretical, arguing that studies that do not include real children can be valued as research on childhood as much as can classroom research.

Coats takes exception to the idea of putting children squarely in the category of colonized peoples. Children, unlike other colonized peoples, are loved by those who are in control of them. There is no desire, she writes, "to exploit children's resources, culture, and energy on behalf of capital" (p. 143). Instead, what binds children and adults together is love.

In Coats's view, when looking at childhood the researcher must assume the obligation of making clear her ideology of childhood. Coats sees three possible ideologies of childhood and writes that most researchers tend to subscribe to more than one. The first is the Romantic in which "the child is born with enormous capacities for emotion, imagination, and perception" (p. 146). The second, the Modernist, sees children as "born with the capacity for growth and development" (p. 146). The last ideology, the Postmodern, views the child as socially isolated and at the mercy of too many "truths."

Coats believes that the majority of our society sees children through the Modernist lens, one in which expectations for children and childhood are standardized. Culturally, growing up is conceptualized as moving from point A to point B in a regulated manner. Point A is fanciful, silly, and emotional, while point B is rational, serious, and, in the end, grown up.

The most interesting caution Coats puts forth in her article is her concern that researchers of childhood, the child, or children, may fall into the traps of identification

and appropriation. These double dangers occur most often when the subjects of studies are colonized. Identification, the idea that the researcher can actually "know" the subject's experiences, and appropriation, the idea that the researcher can enter into the subject's space, are especially problematic in the study of children for the simple reason that we were all children at one time. "The temptation to perform this identification and appropriation is even greater with children than it is with ethnic 'others' because there is a sense that they 'belong' to us, either as parts of our own past or as creations of our own bodies" (p. 142).

What Coats is asking of children's studies researchers is to be aware of who we are writing for, what we hope to accomplish with this writing, and whose needs are being met by our research. Her entire article, by its critical nature, adds a new layer to childhood studies, albeit one that at times comes perhaps too close to depicting children as more fragile, vulnerable, and innocent than they are in reality and that do not, therefore, warrant the kind of serious study favored by postmodern childhood scholars.

Buber and Foucault and Postmodern Childhood Studies

Postmodern childhood studies is concerned with contextualizing childhood and children in the areas power, ideology, and history. These three concepts are seen in this study as working in concert. For example, history is influenced by power and ideology, ideology reflects power and history, and power can only be looked at in terms of ideology and history. I decided to use Buber and Foucault as theorists for this study based on an earlier study I did in which I defined power by historically tracing the development of concepts of power vis-à-vis well known Western philosophers.

Buber was chosen for his non-Western, non-Christian orientation that challenges the Western/Christian normativity inherent in much of academic life. He also is a beginning point for some newer scholarship in educational studies and feminist theory that includes the ethical issues of care and love in and out of the classroom (Goldstein, 1997, Noddings, 1984). The major idea I am using of Buber's (1923) is his work concerning the *I/You* relationship. This idea of connection among humans serves as a new way to read against adult sanctioned, power laden texts. Buber gives children and adults the tools to reposition themselves in terms of power from a place of objectivity to a place of subjectivity. While the tenor of this study is postmodern, meaning there is a recognition of multiple truths, it is also critical, in that it is an attempt to make transparent power inequities. Buber helps with this research by offering a way to correct hierarchies through rethinking human relationships from the other as an object, to the other as the precondition for one's own existence.

Foucault's ideas on *parrhesia* fit well with Buber's ideas on I/You relationships because both constructs challenge hierarchy from a personal place in everyday life. Both ideas also involve a great deal of risk on the part of the other. This risk is inherent in any important undertaking where normative ways of being are challenged.

Postmodern childhood studies is challenging the concept of childhood and children. This can also be a risky, personal, and local way of disrupting a power-laden discourse. I believe Buber and Foucault fit well with the mission of postmodern childhood studies and can offer this discipline critical lenses to see through and blueprints for action.

Buber's Philosophy of I/You

The central aim of childhood studies is for adult scholars to take children seriously in their research. Children can only be taken seriously when their lives are viewed as equally important as adult lives. This requires a repositioning of children in relation to adults, a leveling of the playing field where children are seen as connected to adults rather than as objects of adults' patronage. "Our ideas about childhood tend always, it seems, to express otherness and difference and separation and the need to bridge the gulf" (Nodelman, 2000, p. 3). Martin Buber's (1926) work, specifically his theory of *I/You* (previously translated as "I/Thou"), addresses this need to "bridge the gulf" by offering an alternative way of constructing power relationships. Buber's approach begins by acknowledging the status quo connection among people with different amounts of cultural capital in his concept of the "I-It" relationship. In this configuration, the "I," the adult, sees the child as an "It," as a commodity, a hindrance, as an "other." According to Buber, however, it is possible for people to reconfigure their connection in order to place others in an "I/You" relationship wherein the "I," the adult, sees the "You," the child, as a precondition for her own existence.

In order to make better sense of Buber's philosophy one must start with the fact that Buber wrote from a Jewish perspective. While one need not be Jewish, nor must one subscribe to Jewish theology, in order to comprehend Buber's thinking, the differences between a Jewish and a Christian worldview (at the risk of overgeneralization) is the starting point for any serious discussion of Buber.

Buber saw the major difference between Christianity and Judaism encapsulated in the distinction between Christianity's concern with the salvation of the individual soul and Judaism's emphasis on each person's soul as part of the whole. For Judaism, "no soul has its object in itself, in its own salvation" (Buber, 2006, p. 31). In other words, Judaism isn't concerned with people being good for some later reward, but being good in this life, right now is the "work which it is destined to perform upon the world" (Buber, 2006, p. 31). This Jewish worldview sees people as in charge of themselves and their actions in the here and now. This is illustrated by the following Hasidic story.

> 'Where is the dwelling of G-d?' [Most Jews are reluctant to write the name of the Divine, hence the dash in the word; this is the common convention among Jewish authors.]
>
> This is the question with which the Rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned men who happened to be visiting him.
>
> They laughed at him: 'What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of his glory?'
>
> Then he answered his own question:
>
> 'G-d dwells wherever man lets him in.' (Buber, 2006, p. 38)

This, according to Buber, is the meaning in, or of, life, to "only connect." This letting in is done by humans with no divine intervention but with the help of other humans. For the purposes of this study G-d may be defined as "love," "meaning," or, as Lucky would put it, "A Higher Power." This study is not concerned with these kinds of nuances; theological detail is well beyond the scope of this work. What must be stressed

is that Buber's philosophy can only be understood in the context of Judaism, much like Nietzsche's ideas can only be understood within the context of Christianity.

In Buber's philosophy of I/You, he is first acknowledging that all human beings have the divine within them but this "goodness" is trapped in the isolation of the human condition. It is only in community, in the connection of one human being with other human beings, that this impulse can be liberated because with others we are able to start to see the whole. This whole is where real transformation can take place.

Before a person can become transformed in the company of others, she must first gain self-understanding. "When a man [*sic*] has made peace within himself [*sic*], he [*sic*] will be able to make peace in the whole world" (Buber, 2006, p. 25). But a person begins with herself as a beginning point and only then can she move on to connecting with others.

The other worldview buttressing Buber's thinking is the school of thought called Existentialism. To explain this philosophy I draw upon Viktor Frankl (1959), whose commitment to Existentialism is a product of his Holocaust experiences. (Of course I realize that there are many other important Existential philosophers. I use Frankl here because of his specifically Jewish orientation). In *Man's Search for Meaning* Frankl (1959) attempts to uncover meaning in a world that can be a horribly cruel and inherently meaningless—absurd—place. He believes that a search for personal meaning is the primary motivator in life and an essential reason for people who have lost everything to go on living.

Frankl writes of post-Holocaust humanity having no moral order to guide people in their life choices. “No tradition tells him [man] what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do or he does what other people wish him to do” (Frankl, 1959, p. 106). The triumph of an individual person is to will herself to find her individual meaning. This is something that can’t be copied from other people, nor can another person tell an individual what it is, no matter how young or small that person may be.

This “meaning” for Buber is the connection among human beings, the recognition that “I” am not possible without “You.” This connection requires love, the love that Frankl (1959) refers to, “the only way to grasp another being” (p. 111). This love is necessary as “All actual life in encounter” (Buber, 1923, p. 62). For a philosopher, Buber is straightforward. His message is simple: “G-d is present when I confront You… [and] when I encounter You I encounter Him” (p. 28).

This philosophy is an especially appropriate one to use as a framework when examining childhood in children’s literature. Like all characters in books and all people in life, the child protagonist is seeking meaning, looking for connection. The child must make choices in a post-Holocaust world where adults have yet to regain their moral authority. And in the case of children, who are often othered and marginalized, they find themselves in the “It” position rather than the “You” position. In the I/It relationship, the child is an object of the “I.” This is not connection or a space for justice, but a place of injustice. Many of these stories have themes of children jockeying for a I/You

relationship with adults in their lives, relationships that are filled with the love that comes from the adult knowing that without the child the adult would no longer exist.

According to Buber, this way of living, the I/You relationship is not without risks. "Whoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself…. [I]f I do not serve it [the relationship] properly, it breaks, or it breaks me" (pp. 60-61). This kind of seeking can be especially risky for children who are at the will of other people's wishes (Frankl, 1959). This risk meshes well, I believe, with the final component of the theoretical framework from which I approach the analysis of childhood in children's books, namely Michel Foucault's conceptualization of *parrhesia*.

Foucault's **Parrhesia**

Foucault's (1983, 2001) framework deals with the idea of speaking truth to power and informs childhood studies as it deals with the idea of the less powerful speaking her truth to the more powerful, a necessary element of the child gaining agency, gaining a "you" position in the context of adult/child hierarchical relationships. The person who speaks, the *parrhesiastes*, believes what she is saying is the actual truth, and by speaking this believed-in truth, the teller takes a risk. Foucault (1983) acknowledges this risk need not be "a risk of life," but it should "demand courage in spite of some danger." The danger is not necessarily in the speech itself, but in the *act* of speaking. In this act, the weaker tells the truth to someone who has power over her or him. This criticism is where the risk lies. In the case of childhood, the child is always in the weaker position and any critical speech act aimed towards an adult incurs a modicum of risk, although in this study's analysis, the risk is usually of an emotional tenor.

For Foucault *parrhesia* is a mode of resistance—or the *foundation* of a mode of resistance—to the disciplinary effects of normalizing/normative power, in this case adult normative actions (Vinson, Wilson, & Ross, in progress). In Foucault's reading, *parrhesia* consists of five necessary and specific dimensions: "frankness" (speaking one's mind); "truth" (speaking what one "knows"); "danger" ("real" risk-taking as opposed to "mere" truth telling); "criticism" (speaking at or toward a person or group of/in power); and "duty" (the sense of such speech as an ethical or moral necessity). As Foucault (1983) summarized it:

> *Parrhesia* is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his [or her] own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself [or herself] or other people through criticism…and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his [or her] personal relationship to truth, and risks his [or her] life because he [or she] recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself [or herself]). In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his [or her] freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy. (n.p.)

This relates to the child in the object position. *Parrhesia* is a part of the discipline/disciplinarity concept, and it is regarded here and by Foucault as a *power* system (1) grounded in Panopticism; (2) constituted, supported, and maintained vis-à-vis

"surveillance," "normalization," and "the examination"; and (3) (re)productive of a "modern" relationship between power and knowledge/truth—"power/knowledge"—in which power and knowledge are inextricably linked via a circular and effective, *disciplinary* "regime of truth" (Vinson & Ross, 2003).

What is Childhood?

Any mode of childhood studies, including the postmodern, demands that the author define what is meant by the term "childhood." This, however, necessitates in turn defining the term "child." According to Gittins (2004) child "defines not just physiological immaturity but also connotes dependency, powerlessness, and inferiority" (p. 27). A Child can also be described as a younger person who is innocent, dependent, cute, and in need of adult intervention and guidance (Cannella, 2002).

These definitions inform the definition I am working from; a child is a person who meets and must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. Not able to exercise power as a citizen. For example, someone who is too young to vote or run for a public office.
2. A person who is not given the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. An example of this is that children, despite Second Amendment guarantees, are generally not able to purchase a firearm.
3. A person who must rely on other people for financial support. This reflects younger people who are considered too young to hold a job or college students whose parents pay for their tuition.

4. A person who is not deemed by authorities competent enough to make decisions affecting her own life. An example of this is that in order to obtain an abortion in most states the child must have parental consent.

Childhood, different from *child,* is a slippery term. In the realm of postmodern childhood studies it is a time that is tacitly conceptualized in terms of innocence, apprenticeship, and vulnerability (Mills, 2000). It is also a state that "suggests the existence of a distinct, separate, and fundamentally different social group or category" (Gittins, 2004, p. 27). Childhood only can be looked at in terms of its hierarchical and dichotomous relationship with adulthood. Childhood, therefore, is what adulthood is not; it is not wise, not tarnished, and not self-sufficient.

Childhood is also defined in postmodern childhood studies as a social, political, and historical construction. Throughout the history of Western Civilization, as demonstrated in the next section, childhood and attitudes toward it have changed in substantial, significant, and influential ways.

The History of Childhood in Western Culture

> Childhood, therefore, is arguably a construction, a fiction interwoven with personal memories: cultural representations that serve to disguise difference between children. It hides power relationships and inequality. In short, childhood has been historically constructed and needs to be understood in relation to ideas about what children should be and have meant to adults over time, and why such ideas and beliefs have changed. (Gittins, 2004, p. 27)

Like all other beliefs, those concerning modern childhood didn't just happen. The way we think about children is historically situated and deserves to be explored. It must be pointed out at the beginning of this section that the history being explored is limited to a Western/European point of view, one appropriate to understanding the childhood being explored in these books written primarily by and about Christian Europeans.

The early history of childhood is somewhat vague as children haven't always been deemed worthy of inclusion in books. The scholarly books that have been published deal with a Western point of view and usually begin with the Middle Ages in Europe. That said, it is also true that all societies in every age have had conceptions of childhood, conceptions that vary according to the length of time allotted childhood, the differences thought to exist between children and adults, and the importance of these differences (Heywood, 2001).

Cunningham (1995), unlike most other historians of childhood, starts to look at childhood in ancient Greece and Rome. Children at this time were grouped together with women and slaves, lacking any kind of agency. To understand this classical perspective, views of childhood must be examined in the light of child abandonment and infanticide. Infanticide, while practiced, is difficult for historians to pin down and is believed not to have been as widespread as once thought. Rather than being killed outright newborn babies frequently were abandoned, a practice apparently condoned even by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle (Cunningham, 1995). Cunningham (1995), for example, estimates that between 20 and 40 percent of all children born in the first three centuries CE were abandoned. Yet, there are data suggesting that a large number of these children

survived. They may have been sold into slavery, brought to brothels, or been “adopted” by childless families. While this practice may imply an indifference to children there is evidence in the form of ancient texts and artwork that children were loved and grieved for if they died.

This classical Greek and Roman infanticide was in direct opposition to Christianity, a religion that believes children have a soul and this soul must by cared for. In the 4th century CE, Roman law made infanticide punishable by death. Abandonment was not dealt with as harshly, possibly because it was harder to prove. Because Christ was revered as both an adult *and* as a child, children were given more status and the words of Jesus, from the Bible, were sometimes used as a “parenting guide,” which was interpreted as a call to supply children with more love and support.

Childhood in Europe during the Middle Ages seems to be the starting point for more robust investigation. The seminal work here was conducted by Aries (1965). Aries’ thesis was that in France at this time the “sentiment” of childhood didn’t exist. This is not to say children weren’t loved, there is evidence they were (e.g., in contemporaneous poems, artwork, etc.), but after the age of seven they blended in with the rest of society. Children were not seen as other, as special human beings, but as part of the fabric of society. They were on their own to find their place in society. But while they were not viewed as other, children’s places were dependent upon their ages and abilities.

The ages from seven to twelve or fourteen were a time for learning, for the gradual initiation into the world of adult work (Shahar, 1992). At twelve or fourteen people were responsible for their own actions. Although the Church acknowledged

younger children's "sins," their punishments were generally lighter than for adults. But at this age people were considered adults and punishments for sins were of the adult kind.

Until the 18th century children were viewed in terms of being a part of the family's worker pool. In 1776, one in five children in the United Sates was a slave (Fass & Mason, 2000). Free children were given heavy responsibilities and expected to do their share. Yet this allowed non-enslaved children freedoms of movement, and freedoms from being sheltered unknown to children in modern times. Because children were seen as economically necessary they were granted more rights than many of us, in our age, would be comfortable with (Aries, 1965).

The modern view of children began approximately in the 1700s and was influenced by the "discovery" of children by philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau. Their views of younger people were Romantic and replaced the idea of children being born into sin and needing strict guidance with that of children as empty slates, or *tabula rosas*, needing words of love, proper moral and civic guidance, and coddling. Rousseau, especially, changed the idea of childhood from children-as-less-than to childhood as a legitimate state unto itself.

The view of childhood was also changed by economics. By the mid 1800s in the United States production moved away from the home and, as a result, middle class women and children had their houses to themselves. Of course working class and poor women and children have always worked outside of the home and, during this period, child labor increasingly became a problematic issue. This is when, not surprisingly, sentimental ideals of mother and babe became popular. By the 20th century the idea of

adolescence had become part of our consciousness and the worth of a child was now measured in emotional terms (Fass & Mason, 2000; Heywood, 2001).

The lingering themes of childhood historically, then, are depravity/innocence, nature/nurture, and dependence/independence (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). The ideas of childhood are continually dichotomous, put into opposite, black and white categories that constrict any movement along a continuum, or any description that defines a full human experience.

Dissertation Overview

This chapter has provided an outline of this study, including its background, purposes, and orientations. One of the two major critical/theoretical perspectives that ground this study, namely postmodern childhood studies, was introduced and then contextualized within a brief overview of the history of Western childhood. Foucault's work on *parrhesia* and Buber's theory of *I/You* were appropriated as a way both to deepen and to focus the meaning and relevance of postmodern childhood studies for this work.

In chapter two the second major theoretical framework, namely critical children's literature studies, is presented. This perspective is buttressed with a brief overview of the history of United States' children's literature. I then flesh out critical children's literature studies by delimiting the concepts of power and ideology from several interpretive viewpoints. I conclude by reviewing the scholarly literature related to both Newbery award-winning books and the critical content analysis of children's literature.

In chapter three I first review my data collection procedures and the specific contexts of my research. Second, I provide a brief synopsis of each of the fifteen novels in the data set and a concise description of the respective children's literature awards of interest. Finally, I describe my methods data analysis methods, emphasizing critical discourse analysis as my research approach and (critical) content analysis as my research method. Following the standard steps for conducting content analysis, I explain in chapter three what I did for each step.

Chapter four begins with an in-depth description of each novel in the text set, one designed to answer the following questions: (1) who is telling the story?; (2) Who are the major adult characters?; (3) Who are the major child characters?; (4) What is the specific setting of the story? ; and (5) What is the class group the story inhabits? I then go on to probe the meta-plots the majority of the novels have in common. I interrogate this plot book by book and then scrutinize its meanings contextually as exemplar acts (or not) of *parrhesia* and *I/You* relationships.

In chapter five I more closely examine the themes that were excavated in chapter four pertaining to the childhood constructed in the text set. I look at the following categories: children with parents, children's roles, morality, secrets, and freedom. I then relate these themes to the meta-plots I examined in chapter four.

Chapter six begins with a short summary of the research. The findings are discussed more deeply in terms of categories and meta-plot. The chapter ends with an implications section. In this section the research is applied to the fields of teacher and child education, critical literature studies, and postmodern childhood studies. Ideas for

further study are outlined as a way to conceptualize this study as the beginning answer to many more questions concerning the intersections between childhood and children's literature.

CHAPTER TWO

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE STUDIES AND RECENT RESEARCH

In the previous chapter I explored one major component of the theoretical framework that grounds this study, namely that of postmodern childhood studies. I approached postmodern childhood scholarship via the lenses offered by Michel Foucault (especially *parrhesia*) and Martin Buber (especially his conceptualization of "I/You"). Overall, postmodern childhood studies insists both that children/childhood be taken seriously and that contemporary constructions of childhood be understood within a context of hierarchical relationships of power (adult to child) that can, even should, be resisted (for instance, reconstituted as I/You relationships rather than I/It relationships, perhaps through the techniques inherent within *parrhesia*).

In this chapter I pursue the second major theoretical component of my work, a perspective that I call critical children's literature studies. I define children's literature studies as "critical" when the *aim* of the study or theorist is to explore and discuss how children's books intersect with power, ideology, and history. Some issues these studies explore are censorship, gender, values, morals, and politics in and around children's books (Lehr, 1995). While many children's literature scholars look at the text as a way to do something else (teach content areas, teach reading, teach writing), critical scholars explore the texts themselves as ways to approach understandings about ourselves and our worlds.

Critical Children's Literature Studies

In this section I review the perspectives of several contemporary scholars of children's literature. Namely I explore the thinking of Maria Tatar, Peter Hunt, Peter Hollindale, Perry Nodelman, and Rebecca Lukens.

Maria Tatar

Tatar (1992) writes of modern children's authors attempting to conspire with children but missing the mark. It seems as if the power imbalance between the adult author and the implied child reader is too great to overcome. When adults try to write to children in children's language about today's issues, the outcome is a story that tries to help solve whatever problems the author brought up.

Using transactional reading theories (Rosenblatt, 1978/1995), Tatar sees two different and sometimes competing interpretive communities to which children's literature is speaking: a community of adults and a community of children. She contends that the needs of the more powerful adult group win out, causing books to take the side of the adult. Because of this hierarchy, children's books, she argues, will forever be the province of adult wishes and hoped-for-outcomes.

The hoped-for outcomes, Tatar (1992) says, are good children. Children's literature plays "a powerful role in constructing the child as a docile child" (p. xvi). But it does this sneakily, as the texts of childhood "[have] openly endorsed a productive discipline that condemns idleness and censures disobedience even as it hails acculturation and accommodation" (p. xvi). Again, this speaks to children's literature doing double

duty as an object of both the adult and the child, with the child losing out. While the books Tatar has examined offer children empathy, they offer more didacticism.

Tatar (1992) divides these didactic children's books into two camps—the *cautionary* tales, stories of children who are bad and get punished, and the *exemplary* tales, stories of children who are good and are rewarded. These categories further the idea that children, in the discourse of children's literature, are seen as good or bad. As these stories work to reinforce good behavior and punish bad behavior; they *control* children's behaviors.

Tatar (1992) writes that throughout the history of children's literature cautionary tales were reserved for girls. Many fairytales, she believes, were written to prepare girls to become married women and in these tales both girls and women "were positioned as targets of disciplinary intervention that would mould them for subservient roles" (p. 96). In these stories women are punished for their anti-Christian sins (vanity, sloth, desire, etc.) and forced to fit the role of child forever to do their master's/husband's bidding. Tatar, in essence, sees the hoped for outcomes of children's literature as "good" children and women, both oppressed by adult men.

Peter Hunt

In Hunt's (1994) book, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, he examines children's books in terms of power. He challenges how adults view this genre with the following inflammatory statement: "Yet, surely, however we view it, children's literature is *for children*, and cannot thus be worthy of, let alone sustain, the interest of the adult" (p. 2). Hunt goes on to unpack this by discussing that children's literature is worthy of

study and a powerful force in society specifically because “it is made available to children, by adults” (p. 3).

Because of the hierarchical relationship between adults and children in the realm of children’s literature, books are produced to teach children something. Like all stories, children’s plots have holes or places for reader interpretation. But unlike other stories, stories written for and marketed to adults, children’s books didactically connect all the dots for the child, leaving little room for individual interpretation. This is because, according to Hunt, adults assume children don’t know enough to fill in the blanks and, therefore, that adults must provide all the commentary necessary to “understand” the book while at the same time forcefully inculcating the “message” to the child.

Hunt writes that children’s literature is considered less important than adult literature because of “adultist” (p. 8) attitudes and because of sexism. Children’s literature is in the domain of women and thus not as important as other literature that has historically been under male domination. The struggle of children in literature mirrors the struggle of a feminist story. “Children’s books are invisible in the literary world, in much the same way as women writers have been—and still are—invisible in the eighteenth-century novel” (p. 7).

Hunt (2004) argues that children’s literature is a kind of disciplinary measure through which children are offered the narratives adults believe are correct. Hunt sees children’s literature as adults’ attempts to (re)construct an ideal childhood, one that may not and may never have existed. In his view children’s literature is problematic as it

offers children recycled and limited narratives in the guise of books written expressly for them and about their (supposed) experiences.

According to Hunt (1992) the perfect children's book is one that includes:

> [S]trong nostalgic/nature images; a sense of place or territory; egocentricity; testing and initiation; outsider/insider relationships; mutual respect between adults and children; closure; warmth/security—and food; and, perhaps most important, the relationship between reality and fantasy. (p. 184)

I use Hunt's perfect children's book criteria when looking at the books in my text set. His strong ideas about power and children's books are included in the analysis. A journey, for Hunt (1992), a topic that is an integral part of the meta-plot I found in my study, is a flight towards or away from the "conflicts between the nostalgic adult and the growing child" (p. 182). For Hunt, kid lit is where the conflict inherent in the power inequities between children and adults is magnified and best understood.

Peter Hollindale

Hollindale (1997) sees children's literature as problematic because writers for children are adults and cannot have meaningful conversations with their intended audiences of young people. He further muddies the waters by claiming that to write for children is always a political act because it involves not an exchange among equals but a "benevolent gift" from the oppressor to the oppressed. His definition of children's literature brings up useful points to get at what is meant by a "critical" stance. The more salient categories are:

1. Children's literature is informed by a corporate commercial design on the child market.
2. Children's literature does not mean a text but a reading event. When the transaction occurs between a children's book and a child it is children's literature. When the same book is transacted with by an adult it is simply literature. (cited in Hunt, 1997, pp. 27-28)

For Hollindale (1997) children's literature is defined by who reads the texts and who the intended commercial audience is. It is the targeted consumer who changes a book from just a book to a *children's* book, not the characters, the plot, or the other literary devices. Hollindale adds more to the field by proclaiming that "We are guests at the table of children's literature, even if we ourselves have written it. By definition we are obsolete" (p. 29).

What I believe Hollindale means is that children's texts are concerned with childhood. As adults, we are no longer privy to the world of children; we have been cast out of the garden and can no longer enter it. As adults we can study children's literature and enjoy kid lit but we cannot authentically interact with childhood any longer. It is this authenticity that seems to be important to Hollindale. I simply cannot read as a child, and for this reason I am no longer able to utilize texts of childhood to reconstruct my dead youth.

What Hollindale sees in children's literature, the signs of childness (the body of feelings and beliefs regarding childhood), is that childness is not fixed but rather is defined by the time and place the child is in. And that childness is a feature of cultures,

societies, and the individual. Hollindale claims that books written for adults can have signs of childness whether or not they include child characters.

Childness is the central preoccupation of children's literature and, Hollindale believes, the proper place to look for constructions of childhood. "We can ask ourselves, what images of childness does this book make available to the child?" (pp. 85-86). In order to address this question Hollindale suggests the following question the analyst might explore, "What literacy strategies does the writer employ to express childhood?" (p. 88).

Hollindale unpacks this question by asking the researcher/reader to ask some of the following questions (I am including those that I used in my analysis):

1. From whose perspective is the story told?
2. If the story is told in third person, what kind of voice does the narrator have?
3. What is the linguistic relationship between the narrative and the conversations in the text?
4. Is the child reader allowed to eavesdrop on adult conversations?
5. What is expected of the child in the text? (pp. 94-95)

My analysis is informed by Hollindale's definition of children's literature as well as his question and sub-questions as a way to ferret out the childness (the ideology of childhood) in my text set.

Perry Nodelman

Nodelman writes that children's literature is the product of an author's imagination as well as the world the author inhabits. These books include not only plot

and theme, but tacit theories of childhood or common sense ideas about what it means to be a younger person, which are historically situated.

> Children's literature, then, represents an effort by adults to colonize children: to make them believe they ought to be the way adults would like them to be, and to make them feel guilty about or downplay the significance of all aspects of their selves that don't fit the adult model. It might be one more (and very powerful) aspect of the tyranny of the norm. (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 97)

Like Tatar, Nodelman sees children's literature as having two implied readers, the child, who he sees as the "pseudo addressee" (p. 21), and the real reader, the adult. Because of this disconnect texts of childhood speak directly to adults and in mysterious ways to children, who don't yet possess the cultural and intellectual capital to make sense of "their" literature (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). Nodelman is saying that children's literature is really written for an adult audience.

This being stated, Nodelman writes about children's literature specifically from his point of view as an adult. Unlike other theorists, he doesn't try to figure out what sense children make out of children's texts, but instead he focuses on the sense that he himself, an adult, makes of them. Nodelman asks adults to "pay attention to the only thing they can know for sure: their own response, what happens to them as they read" (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 16).

When reading, adults are to attend to the ideology present in children's literature by reading against the text, by reading what is not said, as much as what is said. Children's literature is made up of two texts, the simple, that which is written, and the

shadow, that which is silent (Nodelman, 2009). The reader's job in the shadow text is to fill in the cracks of what is not there and it is in these cracks where the ideology of the text resides.

Some of these cracks are open to let in these ideologies in the form of assumptions about children. Nodelman (2003) believes that children's literature is a space to present adults' ideas of what children are and what they should read. While these ideas are not "truth," they operate as a kind of truth in the sense that they are accepted as obvious generalizations about children. These assumptions are interesting in that they are contradictory. Some of the assumptions he lists are that children both are innocent and wild and are both imaginative and conservative. He makes the claim that these very ideas about children influence the texts that are written for them and, in turn, children are influenced by these texts to fulfill their prophecies.

In his book, *The Hidden Adult*, Nodelman (2009) does what I would consider a similar study to mine, one in which he examines six different children's books as an adult reader making interpretations based on his own experiences. In this book he attempts to find the defining features of children's literature, to excavate what makes a children's book a children's book.

What he finds is a "typical plot" that most of the books in his text set share (Nodelman, 2009, p. 233). This plot is home/away/home. "Stories of children who leave home, have adventures, and return happily home at the end are found so frequently in children's literature that the pattern can usefully operate as a cognitive model" (p. 223). This "typical plot," Nodelman explains, has the adult normative effect of revealing to the

child, after the journey, what a great home she left. It is only by leaving that one can appreciate what/where one has left.

Nodelman (2009) also sees this journey as a way for the child to achieve power. “The progress of movement forward triumphs over and dissipates the rigid structures in place in the original home” (p. 65). This is the case whether the child is settling somewhere new or not, even when the child returns to the same home it “still means something different” (p. 66).

The other relevant discoveries that Nodelman (2009) makes are that

1. The books invite the reader to empathize with the child (or childlike animal) protagonist.
2. The narrator is an adult.
3. The reader is invited to explore what it is like to have a child’s lack of knowledge.
4. The books show children how to substitute adult behaviors for their own childish behaviors.
5. The texts encourage children to change in adult normed ways.
6. The texts are concerned with the tension of [or between] knowing and not knowing.
7. The texts celebrate and try to dissipate childhood innocence.
8. The texts are about a nostalgic childhood, rather than a modern complex one. (pp. 76-81)

Nodelman's study (2009), especially these discoveries or themes, informs and challenges many of the findings and analyses discussed in chapter four.

Rebecca Lukens

In her book, *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature, 8th Edition*, Lukens (2007) defines literature, for both children and adults, as something apart from other kinds of writing that can be read. She writes that the criteria for "literature" are, among others, that the book must provide pleasure, the book must supply the reader with some insight into the human condition, the book needs to unmask human motives, and, important for this study, the book must reveal to the intended child reader the institutions of society. "Literature clarifies our reactions to institutions by showing appropriate circumstances where people give in or struggle against them" (p. 7). This is an interesting definition of literature relative to the award-winning examples in my data set.

I am including Lukens in this framework because of her careful attention to literary elements in children's literature that I analyze in the context of my analysis. When I give the genre of the books in my text set I am using Lukens' definitions. For example, the book in my text set called *Dragon Keeper* is categorized as "high fiction" because its characters are "realistically portrayed," its plot and theme indicate "good versus evil," its setting is "a special world," and its tone is "serious" (Lukens, 1999, p. 32).

I also use her chapter on plot to inform my own discussion of the meta-plots I found in my text sets. Plot is, according to Lukens, the "sequence of events showing

characters in action" (p. 103). In children's literature, the standard plots are progressive and episodic. A progressive plot is the traditional way of telling a story, one that has suspense, climax, and denouement. A well known example of a progressive plot is Cinderella. The reader is in suspense, wondering if Cinderella will make it to the ball and meet the prince. The climax of the story is when she drops her glass slipper while running away from the prince at the stroke of midnight. The rest of the story is the denouement or "the tying up of loose ends" (p. 118). The prince finds Cinderella, the shoe fits, and they live happily ever after.

An episodic plot is one "in which one incident or short episode is linked to another, by common characters or a unified theme" (p. 121). A well known example of this type of plot is found in Mem Fox and Julia Vivas's (1986) picture book *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*, in which a little boy with a very long name wants to figure out what a memory is. He does this by asking a number of adults in his life. Each mini-conversation he has is connected by the theme of memory.

Lukens writes that special issues surrounding plot in children's books are the over usage of coincidence, a reliance on sentimentality, and a lack of conflict. I would add to this list a too quick and neat denouement, where the loose ends are tied up and packaged before the reader has a chance to savor the climax. An example of this can be found in the novel *When My Name Was Keoko* (Park, 2004). Here, the climax of the book happens and then the story is over. Park has to pack the denouement within one chapter. Many of the students I have had read this book have had the same criticism, albeit sometimes put differently: "It ends too soon." Another flaw that is especially present in children's

literature is the child protagonist rendered unbelievable by the combination of extreme intelligence and more extreme naiveté. An excellent example of this special issue is the worldwide bestselling novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Boyne, 2007). In this novel an otherwise precocious child, whose father is in charge of Auschwitz, goes through the entire story not knowing what is going on next door, despite befriending a Jewish prisoner.

Throughout this paper I refer to Lukens for all things literary. Because although I am doing a critical content analysis and not a literary analysis, I still must depend on literary elements in order to gain and give insights into how childhood is constructed in children's literature.

Summary

Critical children's literature studies approach children's literature as a site where the power struggle between children and adults can be clearly seen. Scholars here emphasize the fact that children's literature is written for children by adults and that by this act these books are an extension of adult normativity. Adult normativity in this case refers to the disciplinary forces that shape children into what adults believe they should be. An example of this is when Tatar writes of cautionary and exemplary tales. The former's normalizing process is to show children how not to be, that if you break the rules you are punished. Exemplary tales, on the other hand, discipline children by showing that children who do what adults believe is correct are rewarded.

What follows is a brief history of children's literature in the United States. Admittedly, though appropriate given the books included in my text set, this history

emphasizes a Christian European/White American standpoint within which to contextualize the issues that are raised by contemporary scholars of children's literature. By looking at this subject historically, I am able to show how children's literature has changed over time. Like childhood, children's literature is not static but changes as tacit theories about what children (and adults) "need" changes. In effect, that is, children's literature both creates and is created out of a society's dominant though evolving and contested notions of the "nature" of child/childhood. It is this situated connection between children's literature and understandings of childhood had makes studying both so significant.

The History of US Children's Literature: An Overview

This history of Western childhood is reflected in the history of Western children's literature. Originally, in the post-Reformation West, the purpose for reading was to be able to read the Protestant Bible. John Newbery, whom the award is named after, was one of the first adults to produce a book, *The Pretty Little Pocketbook*, that's purpose was to both instruct and entertain. As society became more influenced by Rousseau and Locke's Romantic view of childhood, picture books started to be published as Locke had written that with respect to literacy and literature children need pictures and entertainment. In general, however, prior to the Civil War in America, children's books were to instruct children in morals and the three Rs. In the United States the Puritans believed that children's interactions with stories could be dangerous morally as children were viewed as being born in sin and in great need of being saved from their "natural" impulses towards evil (Marcus, 2008).

The beginning of children's literature as we know it started with the Romantic ideal of the child. According to Thacker and Webb (2002) children's literature has never strayed far away from the province of Romanticism. The ideal child and childhood, innocent and joyful, is at the heart of most debates surrounding children's literature. This can be seen in discourses of "appropriateness" and in the friction between what children are told to read and what they want to read. At the heart of this debate is what literature for children ought to "say" to children. The question remains how to give children books they want to read while, at the same time, not giving them more information than they are "ready" for (Thacker & Webb, 2002).

The 19th century in Britain and the United States was rife with texts that "frequently use[d] children as characters to signify the loss of innocence, and the possibilities of retrieving a childlike vision" (Thacker & Webb, 2002, p. 41). While many classics from this era (*Little Women*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Tom Sawyer*) are viewed as younger people's fiction today, at the time they were read by both children and adults. As children and childhood became more "apart" from adults and adulthood, due in part to schooling, the reading of books became more divided along age lines.

The Civil War was a turning point in the history of children's literature in America. As adults became less sure of their own authority and morality, books for children became less "preachy." Older people wondered whether children given a bit more freedom they would be less likely to rebel (alluding to the Confederacy). This is the beginning of modern children's adventure stories (Marcus, 2008). At this time adults also began to see children as an economic future. Unlike in the past, younger people weren't

contributing to the workplace (barring poor children), but the *potential* of children in the future to help amass wealth and secure democracy and capitalism propelled the publishing industry to get more books into children's hands, the kind that preached not morality, but the greatness of the free market future (Thacker & Webb, 2002).

This thinking also changed the attitudes of what children were supposed to read. Gone were the days of reading simple cautionary and reward novels and the theme of the day was fairytale with nothing frightening. Children were to be entertained and shown that anything is possible. *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900) is a good example of this kind of book and this kind of thinking. Set against political allegory, Dorothy has a great adventure and wakes to her family after she realizes there is no place like home. She dreams of the great land of Oz and returns with this knowledge to be used in dull, safe Kansas.

Throughout the 20th century children's books became more profitable and, as a result, many more were published. The Newbery award was established in 1918, seemingly cementing the importance of this genre of literature. The one thing that has never changed is the fact that authors write books, not by themselves, but with the times in which they live (Hunt, 1992). During the Depression children's books harkened back to the golden age of American expansion, with titles like the *Little House* series (Ingalls Wilder) wildly popular (Marcus, 2008). WW II, with its rationing of paper, brought the Golden Books, cheap at 25 cents a book and small, thus using less paper. They also were approved by an "expert" in children's literature, satisfying adults' growing preoccupation with how to use books to educate their children (Marcus, 2008).

The baby boom following WW II helped ensure the publication of a steady stream of children's books. As soldiers came back from the war, mothers and children were back together in the home. Mothers, especially middle class mothers who didn't work, became the audience for books that were on one hand enjoyable to read and on the other hand "high quality" literature. This is also a time of more reliance on child "experts" (e.g., Benjamin Spock); childhood was changing from a natural state to something that needed to be managed.

The 1960s and 1970s brought more realism to children's literature and introduced the genre of young adult fiction. Judy Blume is a good example of this time period. She wrote about "real life" matters like getting one's period, having a wet dream, or trying to make sense of racism. Adults became less certain about what could be told to children as their worlds were being shaken up by feminism, civil rights, the Vietnam War, and so forth. As Marcus (2008) sums up this period in children's literature:

> "Is it for children?" Richard Johnson wrote in *The Horn Book*, "is perhaps the decade's [1960s] commonest, knottiest question. No child ever asks it, however. 'Too violent,' too abstract,' 'too suggestive' are perhaps the commonest criticisms—but who besides adults is critical of books for such reasons? Children find other reasons for liking or not liking books. And publishers can only guess at those reasons, for we are less certain than we were ten years ago about what being young or growing up means." (p. 248)

Today we seem to know less and less about what being young or growing up means (if we ever did). Children's literature, according to Thacker and Webb (2002), has

entered the realm of postmodernism, which reflects this non-understanding by allowing for multiple ways of looking at childhood and children's literature. Some literature today challenges the roles of adults and children and offers children narratives of freedom. It is interesting to note that Thacker and Webb (2002) only see this freedom in picture books and young adult fiction; middle readers, the books this study is most concerned with, have not jumped on this postmodern bandwagon. The exception to this rule is the *Harry Potter* (Rowling) series, which has not only challenged what is appropriate to tell children but has also worked to erase some of the dichotomous relationships between children and adults in that the series is read by people of many ages. Perhaps soon even more books will be written and published for children that challenge the voices of authority that wittingly or unwittingly to use language to control children.

Ideology and Power

Ideology and power are concepts that used throughout this paper and as such they need to be carefully defined. They are not easy words to pinpoint and deserve a special section and discussion.

Ideology

Ideology can be defined as a body of ideas that control how members of society see the world and their place in the world (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003) or as meaning in the service of power (Fairclough, 2003). One way to start to look at ideology and children's literature is to explore the ways in which meaning maintains relationships of domination.

Ideology is ubiquitous in children's literature, in writing of all kinds. "All writing is ideological since all writing either assumes values even when not overtly espousing them, or is produced and also read within a social and cultural framework which is itself suffused with values, this is to say, suffused with ideology" (Sarland, 1999, p. 41). Just like authors co-write with their time and place, they also co-write with the ideologies that surround and infiltrate their culture and society.

Ideology in children's literature resides in the actual structure of the text. In order to write a readable book the author relies on a framework that is itself imbued with ideology, enabling the reader to make meaning in the service of power. "Ideology gives those embedded in it a picture of the social world and the place of various characters of people in it" (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 152). Without this "picture" the reader would be lost as any meaning making must be done in the domain of the reader's own life, which is also replete with ideologies.

Gee (1996) applies ideology to language and posits that texts reflect social theories that, in turn, reflect generalizations about how goods are distributed in society. These goods are not necessarily material but can include status, power, wealth, and so on. Social theories, then, are the conglomerations of tacit beliefs parts of society hold in common. Because these theories are tacit, they are accepted as "truth" or common sense without any thought or discussion.

An example of this is the rating system for public schools. For instance, the image of a good school that adults hold—what a good school is, what schools are good schools—is not always based on actual experiences of particular schools (save for those

people who work in schools). The “idea” of a good school can be read in newspaper and magazine articles as well as in conversations with other adults. The criteria for school goodness, at this time in this place, are primarily scores on high-stakes standardized tests (Vinson & Ross, 2003). If the test scores are high, then the school is good. The tacit theories beneath this belief are the beliefs that test scores are valid, high test scores mean good teaching, high test scores mean success in life, and so forth. Both outside and inside scholarly circles, in everyday life, this particular ideology is at work, shaping what we do and think.

This can be accomplished through legitimization, or the representations of domination as legitimate, natural, and right. Domination can also be hidden or denied, which can be called dissimulation. Another way ideology works in narrative is through showing diverse groups working towards one goal by standardizing context, or what is called unification. Fragmentation is when narratives promote differences between groups, and reification is a creation of an enemy within or without (Knowles & Malmkjear, 1996). These categories help inform this study especially when looking at covert ideologies.

Hollindale (1988) writes of finding ideology present in children’s literature in different layers. He sees the top layer as the “intended surface ideology,” overt narratives that have the job of establishing and sustaining clearly stated relationships of power. Beneath this surface there is a second layer, where covert narratives reside. These are specific examples of power relationships. His final layer concerns how texts use language

to reinforce meanings conveyed by dominant forces. This study is most concerned with the first two layers, overt and covert ideology.

Since I am defining the term ideology, as meaning in the service of power (Fairclough, 2003), I now must define what is meant by the term "power." Each of these definitions informs the other.

Power

For this study the ur-definition of power is influenced by Foucault's (1975/1979) work. The beginnings of power are the punishment of the body. Long ago, many watched the few being tortured for supposed crimes and this "spectacle" served as an exercise of "deterrent" power (Vinson & Ross, 2003). Later public torture became private. While the body was still the site of discipline, this discipline was a covert kind, one that relied on the many being watched by the few, or "surveillance." The body became docile, or the body as the object and target of power. Docility is ensured by the gaze or a possibility of a gaze. The idea that someone may be watching you is enough to create, maintain, and reproduce a docile body that is economically useful. This, for Foucault, is modern power.

Docile bodies keep hierarchies in place. You are an object of power and an object of knowledge. You are spoken of and written about, yet you are not included in the conversation. This is an especially poignant point when exploring children's literature.

This also relates to ideologies as the people in charge get to decide what the truth is for everyone. They use power to get us to believe, to accept their knowledge as real. This power, today, takes the form of words as representations of thoughts and knowledge. Language controls or defines who is normal or who belongs in the program set out before

them. For both Foucault and this work, power is the ability to control people through authority and influence and the threat of punishment; these controls all take the form of words.

Iris M. Young's (1995) work on power supplements Foucault's. Though influenced by Foucault's ideas, Young branches off in the direction of critiquing power in terms of social justice. She contextualizes power in terms of oppression, which she defines as societal injustices. Young defines the word "oppression" uniquely in order to critique seemingly politically liberal discourses. Oppression used to mean the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group, but for Young it can refer to the injustices some people encounter in our well-intentioned liberal society just by virtue of being. By examining these "tacit" injustices we can make sense of our social experiences. This thinking is especially salient for this study as it allows exploration of the oppression being done to children by well-meaning adults who certainly have no nefarious agendas.

Young writes about oppression as structural phenomena that immobilize or reduce a group of people. Everyone, she believes, is a member of some group or groups. Not all groups are oppressed (think adults in relation to children). But some groups (think children) are oppressed through everyday practices such as attitudes, assumptions, behaviors, and institutional rules. The reason to look at oppression, in this case in the form of children's literature, is in order to enact social justice, or in order to reproduce the differences among people without oppressing anyone.

Young's work is helpful when examining children's texts for the following "faces" of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. This is another set of ideas used to frame this study's findings.

Power is a tricky concept to pin down as it can have negative connotations (see Young), neutral connotations, or positive associations. In order to have a balanced look at power and children's texts, Buber (1970), who falls (mostly) within the power as positive realm, is included.

For Buber, who is influenced by existential and Jewish philosophy, freedom is inherent in human beings. G-d gives people freedom. And this freedom must be exercised in the here and now as he accepts the Jewish view of no afterlife in the near future. This means that the present is what is sacred and it is a person's free will to do with that freedom as she wishes.

Inherent in this worldview is the idea that what you do in the here and now "counts." The ideal of humans is to be human and this can only be accomplished in an absence of power where one believes that one's own existence is only possible because of the other's being. A life lived this way is connected and related and communal. Power, for Buber, rests in the spaces in the sacred relationship between the "I" (yourself) and the "You" (the other).

This kind of power can also be examined in children's literature and could be realized in portrayals of children and adults as needing each other and viewing each other as necessary for their own and the other's existences. Overall, using Buber, Young, and

Foucault in an organic, complementary way gives a flexible enough framework to make sense of power in different contexts and in different implementations.

Review of Related Literature

In this review I start with examples of literature that speak directly to the Newbery Award and Newbery Medal winning books. Then I discuss articles that include content analyses, critical or otherwise, that inform my analysis. I end this section by introducing recent literature that examines the connections between postmodern childhood studies and children's literature.

Newbery Awards

In an exhaustive search of the literature pertaining to the three awards of interest, I was only able to find articles dealing with the Newbery Award. While I know that these articles don't speak directly to the other awards, I believe from my analyses that the awards and the books awarded them are similar enough to use this literature to make some preliminary generalizations.

Newbery Award winning texts are worth looking at because they are "among the most widely read titles in and out of school" (Friedman & Catalo, 2002, p. 102). Friedman and Cataldo found in their study of the past eleven years of Newbery winning texts the commonality that young protagonists are put in situations where they have to make very difficult decisions that reflect judgment beyond their experiences. The child protagonists' decisions also display a reflective judgment that demonstrates that "good

decisions evolve from a process of inquiry where the decision maker recognizes and questions personal biases" (p. 102).

These authors recognize these texts as being effective models for the child reader to transact with. "These are characters that young readers can admire and emulate" (p. 111). By reading these texts, the authors conclude that the transactions children engage in better prepare them to make measured decisions in their own lives.

Strauss's article (2008) in the *Washington Post* refutes Friedman and Cataldo's contention that Newbery award winning books are actually read by children and help them make good decisions. Because recent winners deal with "tough social issues" that, according to Anita Silvey, a noted expert in children's literature, may not appeal to children, children may react to them indifferently. Lucy Calkins is quoted as saying, "I can't help but believe that thousands, even millions, more children would grow up reading if the Newberry committee aimed to spotlight books that are deep and meaningful and irresistible to kids." Silvey worries that the 2008 wining book *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* (Schlitz, 2008) would be too difficult for children to read without adult intervention.

The other "experts" quoted in the article echo Calkin's sentiment that Newbery books do not reflect what children want to read because they are too serious, too difficult, and sometimes "developmentally inappropriate." This article, in a popular newspaper, represents the question critical children's literature scholars bring up: Who are these books written for? This article also is an example of adult's disciplinary concern with what is, according to adults, appropriate for children to know.

What children should know is the basis of Timothy Cook's (1985) article in which he examines political learning through children's literature. Choosing to concentrate on Newbery winners, he does a qualitative content analysis of forty years worth of winners. He chose Newbery books as his data source because they are the books that are (1) deemed worthy, (2) sold and read, and (3) represent adults' most concerted effort to choose for children what they are to read.

Cook finds that winning texts have a lot in common. In almost all of the novels the protagonist is a middle class child who lives in a rural setting. The child is cast in a role where she must work autonomously in order to overcome an obstacle and thrive. While he found that Newbery books do not overtly attempt to educate children about politics, he writes that "Actually, while most of these stories are manifestly apolitical, the definitions of the individual's place in society are very frequently a central concern in these books in surprisingly similar ways across the years examined" (Cook, 1985, p. 429).

He concludes from his study that children's books have the role of imparting to children society's dominant values. Cook finds in forty years of Newbery winners that the great majority of the texts impart the value of individual self-reliance. This self reliance mimics the rhetoric of the mythical American, who with no help pulls himself up by his bootstraps and makes good. Cook believes that as children encounter this value over and over again it becomes "truth" and helps cement a particular worldview. Cook concludes that this "truth" is what keeps the oppressed oppressed as it underscores the

value of the individual over the value of cooperative striving in concert to change American politics for the good of the people.

The idea of the Newbery replicating the same story is discussed by Parravano (1999). Her methodology is another quantitative content analysis of past winners of the Newbery Award. She sees more similarities than differences among the oeuvre. Arguing that there is an "ur-Newbery" book, Parravano makes the case that there are better books that don't fit the mold and are overlooked by the committees. The ur-Newbery is fiction, has an "older (twelvish) protagonist who is nevertheless not an adolescent (not preoccupied with adolescent concerns)" (p. 436), and the protagonist is usually a boy who must face some adversity alone. This is a very similar reading to Cook's. In both cases the authors discuss the idea of the protagonist working solo to overcome and succeed. I see this as evidence of the power of children's literature to socialize children into the values of the status quo without offering them other viable options. I certainly look for this "solo achievement" in the more recent works I analyze.

In his article "Prizing Children's Literature: The Case for Newbery Gold," Kenneth Kidd (2007) looks at the prestige of the medal. The Newbery medal is prestigious because it makes the author and publisher money. "Although the medal carries no cash prize, it can more than double the sales of a book, as well as increase sales of the author's other books" (p. 168). Kidd also compares the Newbery to the Nobel Prize in literature for children's books, a prize that excludes children's literature as a category.

But, he contends, "the value of the Newbery gold isn't what it used to be" (p. 181). This award is now competing with many other children's literature awards and

hasn't kept up with changes in our society. Winning texts don't represent the America of today (if they ever represented the ones of yesteryears), as most of the books are about white, Protestant, middle class children. This does not reflect the pluralistic nature of our country.

This is the case for the books I looked at from the UK and Australia as well. All the books in my text set, save for two, featured white child protagonists. Although there was some variety regarding SES, the characters were all heterosexual and Christian. I base these claims on the fact that these categories weren't marked, and the unmarked categories in our society, the norms, are white, straight, and Christian.

One of my research goals was to look at the ways in which children's literature can offer emancipatory themes which can be used to give younger people some agency. McDowell (2002), in her article on the book *Roll of Thunder: Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976), writes that although most of children's literature denies children (both inside and outside the story) subjectivity and agency there are some exceptions. McDowell examines *Roll of Thunder* using a combination of textual analysis and critical discourse analysis. She finds that *Roll of Thunder* is an exception in the Newbery oeuvre as it "focuses on a trajectory of child agency" (p. 214). Children in this novel are given agency as a way to resist the racism present in the plot.

This is accomplished by giving the children in the story their own history from their elders. This knowledge enables them to see opportunities to form new ways of seeing themselves and their possible futures. The history the children hear is complete

and full. There is no mythologizing the past to spare the children's sense of well being. It is this "true" history that makes way for understandings of racist power structures.

These structures are brought to light throughout the story by the adults in the family. "There is no effort to shield them from any unpleasantness, no accommodation for their youth" (McDowell, 2002, p. 218). By making the power structures the family is living within visible, the adults are giving children the knowledge they need to resist this power. The article is riddled with examples of places where the adults give the children the information they need, however unsavory, to make decisions that affect their lives in the here and now. This models a respect for children as being capable in the present, not always ascribing any capability to the future. Further, the adults discuss with the children the impact of the decisions they make as more proof that they do have agency in their own lives.

McDowell argues that this book is different from most children's literature because of the immediacy of the problems facing children of color. She writes that the subject forces this kind of subject position on all participants. While I am sure she is correct, I believe McDowell is missing the point that *all* children to a greater or lesser extent are objects of "othering," of someone else's power. Her analysis, however, provides some idea of what to look for when seeking examples of child agency in texts.

I now turn my attention to an article that speaks directly to my study. Agee (1993) does a textual analysis of mother and daughter socialization in two Newbery award books, *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 1936) and *Jacob Have I Loved* (Paterson, 1981). Agee's research questions the "kinds of beliefs, images, and models…stories offer to

young readers" (p.165). She is analyzing the two novels in the context of gender oppression. What she finds is the reproduction of covert gender roles in both of these novels. While both main characters are allowed to taste freedom in their youth, they are reigned in as soon as they become adolescents. Agee sees this as problematic because the written word possesses powerful messages. If the characters in books must assume traditional roles as they creep towards adulthood, then the reader may see this as the correct message and the cycle may be reproduced (for good or bad).

(Critical) Content Analysis

Latham (2008), in his textual analysis of three David Almond novels, sees these texts as empowering for children based on the intertextuality found in Almond's stories. Latham defines intertextuality as cases in which part of the meaning found in stories is based on relations such stories have to other stories. Almond's books, Latham writes, have rich and varied overt and covert relations to other texts. This, he contends, shows Almond's respect for the intelligence of his readers in that he expects them to seek out the sources of related texts. This intertextuality is a way to empower readers to make their own meanings out of Almond's (and others') works as well as to see the connections and complexities between and among not only books but people and institutions as well.

Latham's article served as a good model for my own analysis as he tackles three complex novels at once. By using intertextuality as the theme, he easily makes connections among the novels. Rather than relying on verbatim excerpts, he uses examples from the stories within the contexts of the points he tries to make. He doesn't deconstruct passages, but instead fits words into the themes he's created.

Latham (2004) does similar kinds of analysis in his article on *The Giver* (Lowry, 2002). Instead of looking at intertextuality, he uses Foucault's ideas of discipline, punishment, resistance, and rupture as his categories of analysis. I was especially interested in this article as it speaks to the ideas of power and ideology and includes Foucault's thinking as a theoretical framework. Latham's conclusion is that *The Giver* serves as a model for rebellion against power-laden social structures.

Foucault's work serves as a model for Latham to uncover hidden power structures both in the book and in society. Latham also contextualizes his analysis by looking at *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932) and *1984* (Orwell, 1949). In turn, this article served as a model for me as a way to use Foucault to examine notions of power in children's literature. It also shows another example of a way to read and interpret a children's book as emancipatory.

Latham contends that Jonas (the main character) refuses to be a "docile body" as he breaks with the norm and risks his own well being in the pursuit of his own truth. By not allowing himself to be docile, Jonas assumes agency by giving himself a subject position. What is fascinating about this piece is that while Latham is lauding the story for encouraging readers to fight oppression, he also acknowledges the book's shortcomings. He does a careful and balanced job of looking at a very well known book in a new way.

I also strived to present a balanced view, which, I found, is sometimes hard to do. A good example of this failure is an article by Koehnecke (2001) that textually analyzes the books *Smoky Night* (Bunting, 1994) and *This is the House Crack Built* (Taylor, 1992). She examines the dichotomous issues critics have with the books as being either too

didactic or too radical and concludes that they are didactic. This didacticism, she writes, is good, as it sets the "proper" moral tone when dealing with controversial subjects. This also enables adults to use these books to teach moral lessons.

I see Koehnecke's analysis as too one-sided. She freely admits that she uses these books in her undergraduate children's literature classes and that students, while skeptical at the beginning at such difficult subjects as race riots and illegal drugs, leave her courses knowing these books are a good way to "teach" children. Obviously, Koehnecke has a bias (which is fine), but her bias leaves no room for considering other possible readings of the books or the idea that literature can be important as art, and is not just a utilitarian teaching tool.

This seems to be a trend in some of the other articles I read. Books that deal with difficult subjects are "forgiven" by the researcher if the stories teach important values. Cairns (2007), through her use of textual analysis excuses *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Patterson, 1999) for its "unwholesome values" (p. 10) in light of its good points, namely highlighting "the virtues of compassion, honesty, integrity and responsibility" (p. 10). Creech is also forgiven by Roberts's (2008) textual analysis of *Walk Two Moons* (1996). While he acknowledges the book is dark and "realistic" it is saved by its hopeful and optimistic ending. These articles are examples of what I am trying to fight against, the idea that children need to be taught values (as if there is a consensus on what values are appropriate), that they need a unrealistic hopeful ending, and that these inclusions are necessary to cancel out any realism that creeps into the narrative. But I needed to read

these kinds of articles in order to give my own work balance, in order to situate it into what is being written and published and influencing other scholars in the field.

Liu (2005) examines the reproduction of power-laden values through his critical discourse analysis of Chinese language textbooks. He contends that the textbooks given to schoolchildren in China “introduce the child reader to the cultural values and beliefs constructed by the government and cultural elites” (p. 16). Through his careful analysis, Liu discovers that cultural values are transmitted through the stories found in the textbooks. These stories contain values of positioning hard work over self discovery and respecting authority, values that are based in Confucius thought. What Liu found is that older stories are introduced to young people as new. This newness is accomplished by changing key words, using synonyms in important passages. The discourses remain the same and work to further cement the authority of the powerful.

Smith (2006) does a word-level critical discourse analysis of the Paddington Bear series (Bond) and finds subtle xenophobic and racist discourses. These discourses, she believes, fall in the hegemonic realm of writing from a point of view that didn’t challenge the existing paradigms of the 1960s in Britain. Smith contends that it is impossible for writers to write away from the times and discourses and regimes of truth in which they exist.

What is clear from all the scholarship discussed is that discourses found in children’s literature shape the ways we have of knowing and what counts as truth. Stories are inherently political because they give voice to a certain truth over other truths.

Novinger and Compton-Lilly (2005), teacher-researchers, found in their classrooms by analyzing children's and family's stories that these tacit understandings get questioned only when there is a disconnect between the official discourse and what is happening in people's lived experiences. They found that with their students, offering alternative discourses gives hope and possibility to both children and teachers.

Themes and Issues

In this section I discuss recent research that deals with themes and issues of children's literature that informed how I dealt with similar themes issues in my own work.

Clark's (2001) article on the myths of childhood found in the book *Homecoming* (Voigt, 2003) brings into relief the idea that patriarchal families don't work and that there is no safety afforded to children by traditional family structures. Instead, children use their otherness to create their own family structures and give themselves the safety they crave.

In *Homecoming* Clark finds the typical home/journey/home meta-plot, but with a twist. Before the child can return home the child must first learn the truth and then create a counter-truth and it is only with this counter-truth in place that the child has enough agency to create a new home. The obstacles the child faces during her journey are adults and the privileged world they represent.

In his article, Chappell (2008) is also concerned with adult structures holding children back. He examines *Harry Potter* (Rowling) books for evidence of resistance and agency and the idea of the postmodern child. What Chappell finds is that prior to the

Potter series whatever happened in children's literature adult structures remained firmly in place. These books were the stuff of the modern child or a child who was a docile body being disciplined by adult normativity.

Harry Potter is a postmodern child, Chappell argues, one who fights adult discipline with magic and resists adult control by sidestepping ideological traps laid out by powerful adults. He writes that the postmodern child has the responsibility to sort out the complexities and ambiguities of the adult-made world. Potter represents all postmodern children who, Chappell writes, don't have a developmental endpoint, but are always in the process of becoming.

Agreeing with Clark and Chappell, Bullen and Parson (2007) look at the novel, *Skellig* (Almond, 2000) and report similar findings. They write that children need more than traditions to cope with a postmodern, nuanced world. Children in the novel *Skellig* create their own counter truths, through their intelligence and resilience, and with no adults' help, start to make sense of a confusing world.

Cairns' (2008) in her article entitled, "Power, Language, and Literacy in *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Patterson, 1987), also tackles the idea of child protagonists gaining agency. She examines Gilly's use of language as a way to manipulate adults and to create and maintain a personage. Ringrose (2006) discusses child characters' use of language, in this case lying, as a way to manipulate adults and claim agency.

Childhood Studies and Children's Literature Studies

While there is scant literature on the intersection of or between children's literature studies and childhood studies, I was able to find at least some. The exemplar

that seems most appropriate to begin with is Mary Galbraith's (2001) article entitled "Hear My Cry: A Manifesto for an Emancipatory Childhood Studies Approach to Children's Literature." Galbraith writes that the point of emancipatory childhood studies is "not to change children but to change adults, especially adults as parents, teachers, and therapists" (p. 188). Adults change in this model by revisiting their own childhood experiences as well as participating in "a larger project to be with, support, and negotiate conflict with children without oppressing them" (p. 189). Galbraith writes that these projects are occurring outside of academia and should be included in the realm of children's literature studies. Children's books, she argues, are where children's selves are revealed and this offers adults an excellent place to begin rethinking their own childhoods and thinking about childhood as it is happening now. She calls for this to begin immediately. This study is my attempt to heed her call.

Latham (2002), in his article "Childhood Under Siege: Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*, explores notions of childhood by doing a content analysis of the two novels. He situates his study in the history of childhood and makes the claim that Lowry both "invokes and critiques the Romantic, sentimental view of childhood in the above novels" (p. 3). He sees in the novels a blurring of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

In *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1998) this blurring is the result of the child protagonist having to assume grown up roles due to the setting of the novel, Copenhagen during WW II. In *The Giver* (Lowry, 2002) the main character becomes an adult again

due to the setting of the novel; this time it is a utopian/dystopian community where all citizens, children and adults, live in a Romantic haze of innocence.

"Lowry invokes the Romantic notion of the innocent child in need of adult protection in order to expose it as a limiting, simplistic, and, in the final analysis, inaccurate view of childhood" (Latham, 2002, p. 12). In other words, the child protagonists begin the book, according to Latham, typically sheltered children, but due to the circumstances Lowry places them in, they are allowed to flourish and assume adult responsibilities while remaining children.

Travisano (2000) sees children's literature not as place of child/adult conflict, but as a space for children and adults to move back and forth between their own borders. He contends that when children read children's books they are provided with "an anticipatory intuition of the way an adult perceives and thinks" (p. 26). For adults, the reading of children's books offers, as Galbraith says, an excellent view of childhood as it is happening for children now.

Christensen (2004) looks at the history of Danish children's books in order to discover "the ways in which children and adults are positioned through text" (p. 237). She finds that the idea of childhood, as portrayed in Danish children's books, has changed over a short time.

Christensen also found that Danish picture books have become more geared towards adults. But rather than being critical of this, as Tatar is, she sees this as "an explication of what has been implicit for many years, namely that picture books are most often read by adults, and the communication between books and children does not, in the

first place, occur without the mediator" (p. 238). One could view this statement as uncritical or as pragmatic. She is correct. Picture books are mostly read by adults and one could assume that the more an adult enjoys the story, the more the book will be read. On the other hand, what does this "adultification" of picture books say about the power imbalances between children and adults in Denmark? This is not a question that Christensen is interested in answering.

She does call on children's literature researchers to use the framework of childhood studies in their researches as a way to "reflect on the relationship[s] between ideal and real childhood…" (p. 238). I am not sure how to interpret this quote. Does her insistence on no quotation marks refer to a belief that there is an ideal and real childhood? And in that case, is there only one possibility of a childhood? This article leaves me with more questions than answers, but it is referenced quite often and therefore must be having an impact on upcoming research in this field.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: CONTENT ANALYSIS, CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, AND CRITICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS

My research methodology is a hybrid called critical content analysis. The approach to this research design is twofold as it employs a combination of content analysis and critical discourse analysis. Content analysis is the actual method that takes the researcher from theory to observation and back to theory. Critical discourse analysis is as an approach to research or a research stance. The combination of these methods/stances is flexible enough to allow for true inquiry, which involves dealing with anomalies and following different strands of inquiry than originally planned for. This combination also allows for bias and personal interpretation. Reading, in this study, is defined as a transactional experience, in which the researcher is able to include her own Rosenblattian poems (Rosenblatt, 1978). Lastly, both methods in the hybrid are "critical" in that they expect the researcher to "read between the lines" as a way to ferret out unacknowledged, even oppressive, power relationships (Krippendorff, 2004; Rogers, 2004).

Critical content analysis is heterological, as it examines inequalities between different groups, in this case children and adults. It is also hermeneutic, as the study engaged in the activity of interpreting texts in parts related to the whole (Nikolajeva, 2005). In the case of this study fifteen individual books were analyzed in relation to the

text set of the fifteen novels as a whole. In this methodology, the individual novels can only be understood against the background of the text set as a whole.

In order to understand critical content analysis the methods that inform it, content analysis and critical discourse analysis, must be explained as separate entities prior to looking at the hybridity. In the next section I trace the history of each method, define each method, and then give examples of studies that use each method.

Content Analysis Versus Literary Analysis

Before discussing what content analysis is, it is important to distinguish it from what it isn't, literary analysis. The two major strands of research on children's literature as text across education have been literary analysis and content analysis. While the purposes of content analysis are similar to those of literary analysis, the methods have different goals, as literary analysis "describes what authors do and content analysis examines what text is about" (Beach, Enciso, Harste, Jenkins, Raina, Rogers, Short, Sung, Wilson, & Yenika-Agbaw, 2009, p. 2). Literary analysis involves examining the actions of the authors within the texts, while content analysis is a conceptual approach to understanding what a text is about (Beach, et al, 2009).

What can be confusing is that both approaches look at similar parts of the text. Intertextuality, narrative development, illustration, and character development are used as objects of scrutiny in both methods. The difference is that in a literary analysis the focus on intertextuality may provide a better picture as to what the author was trying to do or say; the object of the study is the book itself. In content analysis intertextuality is

examined for the meaning it lends to the theoretical stance of the research. The book is an object of something else.

An example of this can be found in chapter two where I discuss Latham's (2008) content analysis of three David Almond novels. In this article Latham focuses not on the texts or the author, but on what the texts do. In this case, he makes the argument that the heavy intertextuality found in the three David Almond books he examines make the books empowering for the child reader. This, he contends, shows Almond's respect for the intelligence of his readers to seek out the sources of related texts. This intertextuality is a way to empower readers to make their own meanings of the works as well as to see the connections and complexities between not only books, but people and institutions. Again, unlike literary analysis, the objective for looking at intertextuality is not to describe the literary trope, but to apply it to something else, in this case childhood studies.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of society (White & Marsh, 2006). The content of text data are interpreted through a process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. According to Krippendorff (2003), content analysis can and should be a qualitative method as reading text(s) is a qualitative process. "Reading" in this case refers to decoding what is on the page as well as reading between the lines. Reading texts also involves making one's own individual, subjective interpretation that is grounded in both the text and the contexts surrounding particular books. The researcher's job is to draw

meaning from what is written and then take that meaning and reinterpret it in context. Texts do not speak for themselves (Rosenblatt, 1978).

This way of reading texts as a conceptual approach to understanding what they are about fits well with Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional reading theory. One reads for oneself while transacting with text and from this exchange a "poem" is formed. This poem can be called interpretation. To add to this idea, the poem is then placed within another context, re-transacted with, and a new poem is formed. Content analysis acknowledges that each poem is a possibility, but that there are many poems that could be created, and one of the researcher's goals is to acknowledge other possible interpretations (Krippendorff, 2003).

Content analysis can be useful in a variety of ways. It can "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. Existing theory can help focus the research question. "Content analysis can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among the variables" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281).

A strategy in content analysis is to start with predetermined codes and see what fits, what doesn't, and what new categories need to be created. The data is then reanalyzed and recoded until the researcher feels certain she has found the correct categories and described the important data. The findings are then used as a confirmation or dismissal of a theory. Theory guides the discussion and findings. (Note that while my description here positions content analysis as a qualitative methodology, historically it has been, and still is in many cases, treated as a quantitative approach.)

Content Analysis: A History

Content analysis has its beginnings in rhetorical analysis over 4,000 years ago. Aristotle, in his studies of rhetoric was concerned with the content of argument when he "put the message content and form at the center of the argument—that we use communication to control our environment, including the actions of others" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 31). Neuendorf (2002) traces the genesis of content analysis to another source, decryption. The Rosetta Stone discovery prompted Thomas Young to "translate between the three scripts through a process of quantifying occurrences of signs on the stone and other ancient sources" (p. 31).

Krippendorff (2004) starts his search for the beginnings of content analysis somewhat later. He traces this methodology's start to the 1600s when theological scholars used content analysis in their dissertations. These scholars, at the Catholic Church's behest, analyzed printed materials for heretical content. The next historical instances of content analysis developed in Sweden during the 18th century when scholars systematically analyzed a new book of hymns for anti-Christian ideas (Krippendorff, 2004; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Content analysis became more recognized in the early 20th century when it was used in journalism schools to examine newspapers for "demoralizing, unwholesome, and trivial matters as opposed to worthwhile news items" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 5). Both Krippendorff (2004) and Neuendorf (2003) see content analysis's major growth spurt in the United States and Western Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Krippendorff writes about

sociologists' extensive use of poling in the 1930s and mass communications scholars using the methodology to analyze Nazi propaganda in the 1940s. Neuendorf (2003) concentrates her historical research on the Payne Fund Studies.

The Payne Fund Studies was an enormous multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional effort "to study movies' effects on children's learning and attitudes" (Neuendorf, 2003, p. 33). This work, commissioned by the head of the Motion Picture Research Council in the 1920s, was in response to public concern in the United States that children's morals were being corrupted by the new media of motion pictures. The researchers classified the different themes of movies in order to see what children were being exposed to. Coders were sent into theaters to do on-sight collections of "social values" being shown in the various films. The conclusion of the studies was that movies did have an educational effect on children and were one of many factors that influenced children's lives.

After World War II "the use of content analysis spread to numerous disciplines" (Krippendorff, 2005). While it was used in the fields of psychology, anthropology, and history, it came to rest primarily in the field of communications, where it is used to analyze mass media. With the advent of better computers and software much of the "analyzing" is now done on the computer, "with text data coded into explicit categories and then described using statistics" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

The Doing of Qualitative Content Analysis

"Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The goal of this analysis is to provide

"knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 1278). In other words, content analysis is the method of making inferences from texts and making sense of these interpretations in a context surrounding the text.

For example, a researcher could be interested in understanding the way teenagers recognize non-verbally which high school group other teenagers belong to. The researcher could "read" teenagers' outfits and classify large amounts of data into a manageable number of categories that represent similar meanings. Researchers may infer that black clothes and black makeup signals identifying with the "Goth" category, while tight jeans and asymmetrical haircuts signal "Emo" category identification. These categories represent inferred meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This interpretation only makes sense within the context of these particular teenagers within this particular culture and the time of the study. Outside of the context the descriptions of outfits would just be descriptions of outfits.

White and Marsh (2006) discuss how the researcher uses "rules of inference, to move from the text to the answers to the research questions" (p. 27). The rules of inference in this methodology are of the abductive kind. "Abductive inferences proceed across logically distinct domains, from particulars of one kind, to particulars of another kind" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 36). Some examples of abductive inferences are inferring what SES a person belongs to based on the television shows she watches or using body language to infer if someone is sexually interested in you.

In order to do a content analysis on texts, the features of texts must be discussed. The following features are adapted from Krippendorff (2004):

(1) Texts have no qualities without a reader. The meaning of the text is found in the reading event between the analyst and the text;

(2) Texts contain multiple meanings. The meanings found are dependent on the reader's intentions and the context of the study;

(3) Meanings found in texts do not need to be shared. It is legitimate if one scholar's reading and interpretation of the same text does not jibe with another scholar's reading and interpretation;

(4) The meanings found in texts pertain to other contexts. The analyst uses the meanings from the text to make sense of something outside of the text. Again, the text itself is not the object of study. The object of reading the text is to inform another context;

(5) Texts have meanings that speak to particular context. The purpose for the reading influences the meanings found; and

(6) Content analysts read to draw inferences from texts to be applied to the context of the study. The texts do not speak for themselves in this process but rather speak to or for something else. (pp. 22-25)

White and Marsh (2006) outline in their article the procedures to do content analysis quantitatively. In this model the researcher starts the study with a hypothesis and then identifies appropriate data that informs the hypothesis. After determining the sampling methods and sampling units, the researcher draws samples and establishes data collection units and units of analysis. A coding scheme is developed and data is then coded and analyzed.

Content analysis is a flexible method as it can also be used to do qualitative studies. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) there are three different approaches to qualitative content analysis. The first, which they call conventional content analysis, starts with observation of the phenomenon to be studied. Codes, which come from the data, are established during the data analysis and "relevant theories are addressed in the discussion section of the study" (p. 1279). The second approach, directed content analysis, starts with theory. The codes are derived from theory and relevant findings and are defined before and during the analysis. The third approach, summative content analysis, begins with the key words or concepts the researcher is focusing on. These keywords are identified before and during the data analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Relevant Examples of Content Analysis

Devereaux Poling and Julie Hupp's (2008) article, "Death Sentences: A Content Analysis of Children's Death Literature," is an excellent example of doing a directed content analysis in a quantitative way (Hsieh& Shannon, 2005; White & Marsh, 2006). I say "quantitative way" because Poling and Hupp follow all of the steps outlined by White and Marsh for a quantitative study. The authors also follow the directed content analysis protocol, which is qualitative in nature, as they start with theory and relevant findings by other authors to come up with their categories prior to and during their analysis.

In this study the authors' (Poling & Hupp, 2008) purpose was to "examine the presentation of death-related information in children's death-themed literature, including biological facts regarding death, sociocultural practices and beliefs, and emotional responses to death" (p. 166). They hypothesized that "information regarding biological

facts might be less prevalent in these death-themed books" (p. 167). They also hypothesized that books that are meant to be read with adults would be more informative than books that children are likely read alone.

Poling and Hupp looked at a text set of forty death-themed books and coded them for "biological facts about death," "cultural practices surrounding death," and "emotional reactions to death" (p. 167). They found that "biological facts about death were less likely to be present" (p. 171) and that when these biological facts were found they were more likely to be present in picture books. Their analysis included statistics such as how many times evidence of their categories appeared in the text set. Poling and Hupp also looked qualitatively at certain examples of coded text as a way to deepen their understanding of the numbers they found.

Timothy Cook (1985) did a content analysis that is discussed in his article "The Newbery Award as Political Education: Children's Literature and Cultural Reproduction." His research examined the "process by which basic political values are reconstituted" (p.423) by analyzing the political messages located in sixty years worth of Newbery Award winning children's books. Cook starts with the assumption that these books will share literary merits as well as "similar ways of depicting the world" (p. 428).

Cook begins his study by examining the texts for the importance of the child protagonist working within social structures versus the importance of the child working independently. He also looks at problems the characters face, who causes them and who solves them. Cook's final focus is on the books' portrayals of authority figures. For each of these questions, Cook starts with loosely defined categories and tightens them up as he

does his data analysis. His data are actual passages from the text set's books that speak to his categories. Cook discusses his findings within the arenas of the history of children's literature and political science.

In this study Cook examines the texts not as object themselves but as objects of his context. He is using abductive inference when he proceeds across logically distinct domains, from particulars of Newbery Award winning novels "to particulars of another kind, in this case political reproduction" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 36).

In the next section I discuss the theories of critical discourse analysis, which is the second ingredient in my critical content analysis. The "critical" in critical content analysis is informed by this research stance.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one research stance that informs the connections between power and language. It is a "critical" stance as its goal is to make transparent the connections between things. In other words it is used to bring covert discourses to the surface as well as the related ideology lodged in the language of the texts (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

CDA starts with the assumption that power, ideology, and history work in concert to enable power-laden discourses to continue. By examining these three strands it is possible to resist. This very examination is an act of creativity that may allow a break in stable discursive processes (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Another tenet of CDA is the researcher's role in the research itself. This stance demands the analyzer takes a stand and believes that research can never be free of bias

nor should it be (Rogers & Christian, 2007). This allows a researcher to read for herself and to come up with interpretations that are based on her beliefs, goals, and prior knowledge and experiences as well as what is written on the page.

One of the goals of critical discourse analysis is to break a discourse. In order for this to happen one must articulate and develop a class consciousness, remember a past, as well as struggle for emancipation. This is not seen as a wholly “academic” enterprise, but rather as an academic/activist endeavor. The end result of a study should be a call to action and information that can be used to buttress the project effectively.

First and foremost critical discourse analysis is concerned with power, power as differences between people and expressed by language (Foucault, 1975/1979). The researcher’s first job is to recognize the power imbalances inherent in the phenomena under investigation. This is the object to be investigated. This object, or oppression, must be investigated through a discourse, or agents of knowledge that exercise power (Rogers, 2004).

According to Fairclough (1992), there are three dimensions to critical discourse analysis. The first is discourse-as-text. This is an analysis of the linguistic features and organization of a text. The second strand is discourse-as-discursive practice. This involves looking at the specific texts that are published, read, and written about (etc.). The third dimension Fairclough speaks of is discourse-as-social-practice. This is the analysis of the ideology and hegemonic processes found in texts.

CDA is influenced by, and has influenced, the following studies in literature: ideology, inequality and power, and social theory (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Ideology, in this case, refers to the relationships of power and language not only in the texts to be analyzed but in the researcher's work as well. This means that the analyst must focus on what she reads as well as what she writes and analyze all texts in a similar fashion. In essence, the researcher's work becomes part of the data set. What is meant by inequality and power in this framework is "the positioning of individuals and groups in contemporary social and political hierarchies" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p.458). This is looked at by analyzing speech for what is said, what is unsaid, and by whom. The last category in this framework is social theory, or the study of what language tells a researcher about society and people's place within society.

Rogers (2004) looks specifically at using critical CDA for educational research, a discipline where this method is still fairly new. She writes that it is a useful tool to make sense of language and educational issues, a conglomeration to which children's literature also belongs. As the function of language is inextricably linked to the form it takes, rather than using a chicken or an egg approach, CDA attempts to look at both cases.

> Within a CDA framework, analysts of discourse start with the assumption that language use is always social and that analysis of language occur above the unit of the sentence or the clause. In this view, discourse both reflects and constructs the social world and is referred to as constitutive, dialectical, and dialogic. Discourse is never just a product, but a set of consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive processes that is in relation to the social world. (Rogers, 2004, p. 5)

A History of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA emerged from the fields of "classical rhetoric, text linguistics, and pragmatics" (Wodak, 2001). It is also an outgrowth of critical linguistics and systemic functional linguistics (Rogers, 2004). The field itself, according to Ruth Wodak (2001), began with the "formation of a scientific peer group" (p. 4) in Amsterdam in 1991. At this meeting were Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunter Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, and Ruth Wodak. The following quote by Ruth Wodak is worth quoting at some length as it, I believe, explains what happened at this meeting by someone who was there and shows the arbitrary nature of what CDA is then and now.

> The meeting made it possible for everyone to confront each other with the very distinct and different approaches, which still mark the different approaches today. In this process of group formation, differences and sameness were exposed; differences towards other theories and methodologies in discourse analysis and sameness in a programmatic way which could frame the differing theoretical approaches of the various biographies and schools of the respective scholars. (Wodak, 2001, p. 4)

It is ironic that a methodology that is so committed to historical contextualization is so vague about its own history. Rebecca Rogers (2004), in her book *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education*, discusses CDA ahistorically (other than the brief mention of its antecedents which I included above). I think the way to start a discussion about CDA is to look at the "samenesses" Wodak was alluding to in her quote.

A “sameness” that Rogers (2005) makes clear is that CDA is concerned with the ideas of “critical,” “discourse,” and “analysis.” Critical can be defined as a preoccupation with power relations, which “is rooted in the Frankfurt school of critical theory” (Rogers, 2005, p. 3). Wodak (2001) houses “critical” in literary criticism and Marxian studies as well. She defines “critical” in CDA as “to be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research” (p. 9). Rogers (2005) states the critical job this way: “the analyst’s intention is to uncover power relationships and demonstrate inequities embedded in society” (p. 3).

“Discourse” in CDA “is a set of consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive processes that is in relation to the social world” (Rogers, 2005, p. 5). Language is and can only be understood in the context of social situations. “A discourse is…statements which are enacted within a social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (Mills, 1997, p. 10).

The third “same” term, “analysis,” is the task of looking at “all of the possible configurations between texts, ways of representing, and ways of being, and to look for and discover the relationships between texts and ways of being and why certain people take up certain positions vis-à-vis situated uses of language” (Rogers, 2005, p. 7). Fairclough (2003) discusses levels of textual analysis. He divides the levels into two groups, external and internal. External levels are concerned with how the text relates to “social practices and social structures” (p. 36). Internal levels look at relations within the text itself, semantic, grammatical, lexical, and phonological.

With a better idea of what CDA is about and a little knowledge of its short history, I now explore how one "does" CDA. Norman Fairclough's (2001) chapter entitled "CDA as a Method in Social Scientific Research" does a good job of explaining a complex topic.

The Doing of Critical Discourse Analysis

Meyer (2001) sees CDA not as a method but as an approach to research. Regardless of what CDA is called there are certain steps that can be taken to do the analysis. Fairclough (2001) outlines these as follows:

1. "Focus on a social problem which has a semiotic aspect." In other words choose a research question that speaks to inequalities and which can be looked at through text;
2. "Identify obstacles to it being tackled." This involves looking at the problem in context. Seeing what is surrounding the problem that allows the inequalities to continue;
3. "Consider whether the social order in a sense "needs" the problem." This is where the researcher excavates the ideologies sustaining the problem;
4. "Identify possible ways past the obstacles." This is the place where the researcher looks for possibilities to break the discourses that are holding the problem in place; and
5. "Reflect critically on the analysis." The researcher at this point looks at her work and sees if it opened up possibilities to solving the original problem. (p. 125)

The best way to show the doing of CDA may be to give examples of studies that purport to use this stance/method/philosophy.

Relevant Examples of Critical Discourse Analysis

Angela Smith (2006), in her article "Paddington Bear: A Case Study of Immigration and Otherness," focuses on the social problems of immigration and otherness with the semiotic aspect of the Paddington Bear (Bond) series books (Fairclough, 2001). She identifies the objects to be tackled as "cultural misunderstanding, ethnic conflict, prejudice, xenophobia…[issues] that characterize the relations between groups that are somehow different from each other" (p.35). She excavates the ideologies holding "otherness" in the children's literature of Britain that embodies inferential racism. Smith "identities possible ways past the obstacles (Fairclough, 2001, p.125) in her word level analysis of the first chapter of the first Paddington book in which she finds a "positive immigrant character" in the bear. At the end of her article Smith reflects on her work: "Bond's Paddington stories are subtle in their articulation of racist and xenophobic discourses, which I hope to have shown, present the case for toleration and understanding towards immigrants in general… (p. 48).

Another example of CDA in action is Yongbing Liu's (2005) work on Chinese language textbooks. The social problem he focuses on is the hegemonic social control of children as evidenced in the discourse of Chinese language textbooks. The objects he tackles are the moral codes and cultural beliefs that serve the power elite in China. Liu excavates the ideologies present by doing a textual analysis of "easy readers" that are used in the teaching of reading. He finds the ideologically loaded categories of diligence,

respect for authority, modesty and tolerance, collective spirit, and honesty in these books as new ways of presenting old control. For example "respect for authority is the Confusion ideal of "submission to authority." The way past the obstacle is to read against these ideological messages. Liu reflects on his work in the third person, "The analysis also suggests that the selective versions of cultural values and beliefs are motivated by the ideological and political interests of the government to address the 'ideological crisis,' but argues that they are constructed contrary to the free market social order" (p. 29).

While CDA can be confusing as it is so complex and far-reaching in scope it can serve as an addition to another method to include the critical component. This study makes extensive use of qualitative directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as the way to bring abductive inferences from one particular domain, in this case children's literature, to another particular domain, childhood studies and critical children's literature studies (Krippendorff, 2004). Because I am interested in issues of power, ideology, and history, my study is influenced by CDA. The combination of methods and interests combine to form a new methodology called critical content analysis.

Critical Content Analysis

Critical content analysis is a "close reading of small amounts of text that are interpreted by the analyst and then contextualized in new narratives; a definition that is a hermeneutic, reader response oriented research stance that can be critical as well. What makes the study 'critical' is not the methodology but the framework used to think within, through, and beyond the text" (Beach, et al, 2009, pp. 2-3). I am doing critical content

analysis when I look closely at fifteen novels and contextualize my findings in childhood studies. My research is "critical" because it is informed by CDA and uses the critical frameworks of postmodern childhood studies and critical children's literature studies.

What my colleagues and I found when starting to use this methodology was that the analysts who seemed to use this process did not include the "how" of what they did in their research articles. The methodology sections are often missing or incomplete (examples of this can be found in the articles listed in my reference list; see Bullen & Parson, 2007; Chappell, 2008; Jones, 2008). Kathy Short, in the role of our advisor, put together an NRC symposium that asked scholars to explain how they approached critical content analysis. In the next section I discuss what these scholars did, referencing the article that will appear in the NRC yearbook (Beach, et al, 2009) based on this presentation.

Relevant Examples of Critical Content Analysis

Each of the following analysts employs critical content analysis to analyze the same picture book, *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* written by Florence Heide and Judith Heide and illustrated by Ted Lewin (1990). What makes the analyses different are the different theoretical frameworks used by the analysts. The first analysis by Vivian Yenika-Agbaw employs postcolonial theory. She writes that when she comes upon a book that takes place in a foreign culture, "I wonder why the author chose to set the story in a particular region of a country and how much the author knows about that culture" (p. 4). She uses the lens of postcolonial theory because the story takes place in Cairo, Egypt, a place that is, in the Western mind, associated with the mythical "orient."

Yenika-Agbaw sees through this lens “stereotypes of exoticism” (p. 4). To counterbalance this reading she looks for a counter discourse, in this case the child protagonist’s sense of agency. By looking at the child character, language use, and the plot, she creates three analytical categories.

The first category is Ahmed’s ownership of space, the second is his ownership of work, and the third is his ownership of personal and cultural identity. Within these categories Yenika-Agbaw places excerpts from the text that fit. In her discussion she posits that despite the cultural stereotypes embedded in the text, her postcolonial reading, her counter discourse, allows her to understand the power dynamics that actually position Ahmed in a role of agency.

Christine Jenkins (2009) does the same study using the Great Books Method. She focuses on the “elusive interpretive questions” (p. 9) found in this method. She explains that she attended to parts of the book “where I paused” (p. 10). It is in this pause that Jenkins found anomalies to examine that took the form of questions. She argues that reading this way “is not simply the province of adult scholars, but can and should inform young people’s reading experiences” (p. 12). Jenkins sees her focus of doing this critical content analysis as a jumping off point for her to “provide readers with multiple opportunities to become critical readers on their own terms” (p. 12).

Rebecca Rogers (2009) uses critical discourse theories for her critical content analysis. She decides on this frame because the child protagonist is not in school but works as a butane gas delivery boy. Rogers starts her analysis by investigating butane gas in Cairo at the time the book was published. She finds that butane gas is a major fuel

source in Egypt and it is a dangerous job to lug it around crowded city streets. Rogers sees Ahmed as “literally situated in the economic market, a market that was experiencing severe restructuring” (p. 13).

Rogers analyzes the story in terms of “the political-economic backdrop of Egypt during the early 1990s” (p. 13). Through this lens she is concerned that the IMF-engineered policies regarding butane gas hurts poor people like Ahmed. This positioning of the story in global economic terms led Rogers to ask how “Ahmed is positioned to both recognize and naturalize his rightful place in the world” (p. 14).

Using textual and visual analyses Rogers examined the “genre, discourse and style of the book” (p. 14) to look at what choices the writer and illustrator privileged and marginalized. “Unpacking dominant worldviews—in this book, neoliberalism—is an important task in making sure that reading global children’s literature offers mulit-perspectival learning spaces” (p. 18).

As seen in the three very different critical content analyses of the same book, the methodology was the same. Each analyst did a “close reading of small amounts of text” from a hermeneutic, reader response oriented research stance. Each scholar made abductive inferences, took the particulars from one domain, *The day of Ahmed’s Secret*, and applied them to another domain, in these cases, postcolonialism, reader response with children, and neoliberalism.

Through these inferences the researchers illustrated Krippendorff’s (2004) qualitative content analysis text features: the same text was given different meanings through different reading events. The one text contained multiple meanings that were

dependent upon the reader's individual intentions and the contexts of the study. The meanings found by the different scholars were all valid; it was/is all right that different scholars found/find different meanings. The meanings found in *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* pertained to particular contexts. The object of reading the text was to inform the other contexts. These content analysts read to draw inferences from texts to be applied to the context of their particular studies. This all speaks to this method being close to content analysis as it seems to satisfy the requirements for qualitative content analysis.

These studies were also informed by critical discourse analysis. All three researchers had a social problem to solve through a text. In the case of Yenika-Agbaw, her concern rested with the social issue of the imbalance of power between the West and its colonized subjects. Jenkins' social problem is the limited opportunities students have to read critically and for themselves. Rogers' issues are with the IMF and the neo-liberalization of the third world. The studies all addressed the ideologies surrounding and perpetuating various social problems by attending to power relationships and hierarchies. The three scholars all saw their job as excavating the covert discourses behind the story in order to disrupt the status quo.

This blending of the two research strands, content analysis and CDA, and using the resulting hybrid flexibly and thoughtfully to (1) read "what a book is about" and (2) apply this knowledge to the larger context of the book, is the pursuit of this kind of work. It is this content analysis/CDA hybrid that formed the methodology and the orientation of this current study.

Doing Critical Content Analysis: My study

Using critical content analysis I sought to answer my research questions. The first asks how childhood is constructed in children's literature. The second question focuses on the extent to which childhood is represented differently across the three text sets, representing, respectively, the UK, the US, and Australia. I dropped this second question because of a lack of differences.

Methods for Data Collection

My research context for this study was award-winning children's books from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. I choose to look at texts from three countries in order to explore whether childhood is constructed differently in different places. I chose these three countries because English is the only language I can read fluently. Yet despite this limitation, I was able to represent three continents in my text set.

I was also interested in looking at current intersections between conceptions of childhood and children's literature. Keeping this in mind I chose to look at the most recent texts that were available when I started my study. I was able to procure award winners from the three countries through 2007. I limited my text sets to five per country. These are novel length books, and I preferred to do an in-depth study rather than a wider one. Consequently, fifteen novels gave me the depth I was seeking with a reasonable amount of breadth.

I chose to limit myself to award-winning books because these are the books that adult "experts" deem as high quality, as deserving of a prize, and of deserving to be read (Cook, 1985). This decision represents the hierarchical relationship between younger and

older people. This is an example of adults deciding for children what is worth their time to read (Hunt, 2004). These awards also help adults enforce their ideas of what is or is not appropriate for children to read. As only books specifically marketed for youth are included this leaves a lot for space for adults' ideas of childhood and what that means for literature (Nodelman & Reim2003). What is especially salient about these awards is that they do not ask the implied readers, younger people, to help in the decision making process (see award websites). What ends up happening is that the very books that are deemed good for children have rarely been looked at by a child's eye.

The Awards

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Carnegie Medal (UK). **"**This medal is awarded annually to the writer of an outstanding book for children. The winner receives 500 pounds worth of books to donate to the library of her choice" (CILIP Website, 2008). The first medal was given in 1936. To be eligible for this prize the books must be written in English, be published for young people, and the book must be published originally in the United Kingdom, however, the author needn't be a citizen of the UK (e.g., Rosoff and Creech). Books are judged by the following criteria: plot, characterization, and style.

The Carnegie Medal website lists last year's judges who may give an idea as to the kinds of people who choose these books. There are twelve members on the 2008 committee, one is the chair, and the other eleven represent different geographical regions of the United Kingdom. Judging from the pictures displayed on the website all twelve judges are white women who appear to be in their middle to late adulthood. Ten of the

women are working librarians and two are professors (all information obtained from the official website listed above).

The Newbery Award (USA). The first award in the world given to children's literature, the Newbery, is the province of the American Library Association (ALA). This medal has been awarded since 1922 to the "most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" (American Library Association Website, 2008). Books must be written in English by citizens or residents of the United States. Unlike the Carnegie Medal, the Newbery committee defines children as persons under the age of fourteen-years-old.

The criteria for judging the nominated books are (the following is from the ALA website): interpretation of theme or concept, presentation of information, plot development, character delineation, setting delineation, and appropriateness of style.

The ALA website gives the names, titles, and addresses of the newest committee (2009). There are fourteen members including a chair. As there are no photographs I will have to assume data based on names alone. Eleven of the members have traditionally feminine names and three have traditionally male names. Ten members are currently working as librarians, three are professors, and one is a school principal.

The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). Established in 1946, the CBCA awards this honor to children's books in three categories (barring picture books): older readers, younger readers, and early childhood (The Children's Book Council of Australia Website, 2008). I have chosen to look at the category "younger readers" as these books

correspond most closely to the implied readers of the Carnegie Medal and the Newbery Award winners.

In order to be eligible for this award the books must be available for general purchase in Australia and written in English, or if the book is bilingual one of the languages must be English. The authors of the books must have Australian citizenship or be legal residents. Books are chosen on the merits of their cohesiveness in significant literary elements, language that is appropriate to the theme, and originality. It is interesting to note that this is the only award of the three that keeps appeal to the implied audience in mind.

There are eight judges on the committee. Each judge must have an interest in and knowledge of children's literature and have no financial interest in the selections. Judges are selected by region. The list of judges for 2008 available on the website only lists names and territories. Judging from the names all eight people are women as they have traditionally female first names.

These awards have many attributes in common and the biggest differences I found is that the Carnegie Medal includes a prize of books to be donated by the author, while for the other awards, the award itself is the prize. It is only in Australia that a bilingual book may be considered as long as one of the languages is English. While all three countries have a separate award for picture books, only the Australians have the separate categories for pictureless books. The Carnegie medal is the only prize that does not consider the country of origin of the author.

Of course the similarities abound. The committees in all countries are comprised almost entirely of women. In the case of the UK and US awards the majority of the judges are librarians (difficult to tell in Australia as the judges' vocations aren't listed). The voting in all three cases is done by secret ballot. All awards are given for literary merit (nebulous at best), not for the books' popularity with children themselves. In all cases the books are nominated by the books' publishers.

The Books

In order to familiarize readers with my data I provide in this section a brief plot description of the fifteen novels in my text set. These are organized by country, first the United Kingdom, then the United States, and finally Australia. The books are also organized chronologically, newest to oldest.

Just In Case *by Meg Rosoff (2007: UK)*

Just in Case is the story of David Case, a fifteen-year-old boy in suburban London whose life changes in a split second when he saves his baby brother from jumping out of a second floor window. David is suddenly aware of Fate and the uncertainty of life. In order to outwit Fate, David changes his name, his look, his residence, and as much of his life as he possibly can. He becomes very depressed and in many ways stops living as much as possible. In the end, as Fate would have it, David contracts meningitis and finds himself wanting to live despite the unpredictable nature of existence.

Tamar *by Mal Peet (2006: UK)*

Tamar is two stories in one novel. The first story is about two Dutch spies, code-named Dart and Tamar, working for England during the "Hunger Winter" in Holland in 1944. While Dart transmits secret messages and Tamar tries to unite the fragmented Dutch resistance forces, the two become very close. All this changes when Dart, who is in love with a local woman called Marijke, discovers the secret relationship she is in with Tamar. Hurt and not thinking straight because of an addiction to amphetamines, Dart plans Tamar's demise, and after his death, runs away to England with the pregnant Marijke who believes Dart is a hero.

The other story in the novel takes place in London in 1995 and is the story of Tamar, a fifteen-year-old girl, who is Marijke's granddaughter. When Dart, now called William, commits suicide brought on by his despair of keeping his betrayal in the war a secret, he leaves Tamar a box. This box precipitates a journey that brings Tamar to the truth of her family's dark secret.

Millions *by Frank Cottrell Boyce (2005: UK)*

Millions is the story of Damien, who believes a bag with a large amount of money (significantly in pounds) has fallen from the sky as a reward from G-d for his goodness. The premise of the story is that England is switching to Euros and all pounds must be converted in seventeen days. Damian and his brother, Anthony, without telling their father, attempt to spend as much money as they can before the deadline.

Of course the money didn't fall from the sky, but from a train that was carrying stolen goods and the bad guys want their money back. Damien, with the help of various Catholic Saints, manages to save the money and help other people in the process.

A Gathering Light *by Jennifer Donnelly (2004: UK)*

This historical fiction young adult novel that is based on real events tells the story of sixteen-year-old Mattie's bid to shake off the promise that she made to her dying mother to stay in their small upstate New York farming village to care for her family. Mattie is a gifted writer who, with a teacher's help, gets accepted to Barnard College on a full scholarship. Her father forbids it and, instead, Mattie becomes engaged to a neighbor boy and goes to work at a local hotel to make money for the farm.

While there Mattie is entrusted with a bunch of letters the writer, Grace, asks her to burn. When Grace turns up drowned and her fiancée is missing, Mattie reads the letters and learns from Grace's narrative what not to do. In the end, Mattie leaves her family behind to make a life in New York City and gives the letters to the police to ensure that Grace's story is told.

Ruby Holler *by Sharon Creech (2003: UK)*

Ruby Holler is the story of Twins, Dallas and Florida, who have suffered abuse and neglect at the hands of various foster families and at their group home. Their luck changes when an older couple, Sairy and Tiller, invite the Twins to come to *Ruby Holler* to accompany them on separate trips.

At the holler, Dallas and Florida learn what it is to be cared for. Things go well until each duo, Dallas and Sairy and Florida and Tiller, decide to do a trial run of their

respective trips. Dallas and Sairy get lost hiking and Florida almost drowns saving Tiller who suffers a heart attack. At the end of the story the Twins test Sairy and Tiller by running away; they are rewarded by being followed and the reader is left thinking that the Twins may stay permanently in the holler.

The Higher Power of Lucky *by Susan Patron (2007: US)*

Lucky, a ten-year-old motherless girl is searching in her small desert California town for her Higher Power, a concept she learns from spying on 12-step meetings. After Lucky's mother dies, her father asks his first wife, Brigitte, to come from France to serve as Lucky's interim guardian until a formal foster family can be found.

Lucky worries a great deal about Brigitte deserting her and, carrying her survival backpack around, she looks for her higher power. She doesn't find it until the end of the book when she has run away from home after discovering Brigitte's suitcase and passport on the bed and mistakenly believing Brigitte is leaving her. In the end Brigitte stays to formally adopt Lucky.

Criss Cross *by Lynne Rae Perkins (2006: US)*

This novel is a collection of loosely connected vignettes starring teenagers in a small town during one summer. The theme of the novel is how people narrowly miss each other in their search for friendship, love, and acceptance. What binds the vignettes together is a necklace that serves as a connection and disconnection for the children as they find and lose the jewelry.

Kira-Kira *by Cynthia Kadohata (2005: US)*

This historical fiction novel, which takes place in the 1950s in rural Georgia, is the story of Katie's experiences growing up in the shadow of her revered sister, Lynne. Her Japanese-American family struggles with racism and trying to fulfill the American dream, while Katie observes her sister, first as the great hope of the family and then as a child dying of lymphoma.

The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread *by Kate DiCamillo (2004: US)*

The Tale of Despereaux (this is what I will call the book from now on for brevity's sake) is a fairytale about a unique mouse, Despereaux, who, breaking all mouse codes, falls in love with story and a Princess. For talking to the human Princess he is banished to the dungeon where he befriends the jailer by telling him stories, a process that keeps him alive.

In the meantime, a rat named Roscuro, who has a debt to settle with the Princess and a lot of cunning, manages to trap the Princess in the dungeon where she is saved by Despereaux. They manage to live happily ever after, but just as friends.

Crispin: Cross of Lead *by Avi (2003: US)*

It is the Middle Ages in England and Crispin is recently orphaned and declared a "wolf's head" or non-person for a crime he didn't commit. He must set out on a journey to escape being killed. Crispin meets a man called Bear who first captures him and then eventually becomes a surrogate father, teaching Crispin music and how to laugh.

They journey together towards Wexley, where Bear has a meeting of rebels against feudalism to attend. The duo is chased by lackeys of Crispin's village's head man, a person called John Ayecliff. Crispin, as it is written on the cross of lead he carries, the only memento he is able to save of his mother's, is the late Lord Furnival's illegitimate son and Ayecliff, Lady Furnival's brother, who is bent on killing Crispin lest he claim his title.

Through bravery and cunning Crispin is able to save himself and Bear from the authorities, and gives up all claims to his knighthood in exchange for being able to lead a peaceful, free life with Bear.

Beeing Bee *by Catherine Bateson (2007: Australia)*

Bee's world is turned upside down when her widowed father becomes seriously involved with a woman called Jazzi. While her father ignores her in his quest for love, Bee must turn to her guinea pigs for comfort and, mysteriously, for communication as they start writing her letters. As Bee gets to know Jazzi better, she discovers they have more in common than she thought and with the help of the letters (which she may or may not discover are written by Jazzi) Bee learns to let Jazzi into her life and, eventually, her heart.

Helicopter Man *by Elizabeth Fensham (2006: Australia)*

Told in the form of journal entries, *Helicopter Man* is the story of Pete and his journeys with his mentally ill father. After squatting in a garden shed, Pete and his father are picked up by the authorities who place Pete in a foster home and his father in a mental hospital. Finally sedentary, Pete unravels the mystery of what really happened to his dead

mother and why she never said goodbye. At the end of the story, Pete and his father are to reunite soon.

The Silver Donkey *by Sonya Hartnett (2005: Australia)*

This historical fiction novel takes place during World War I on the coast of Brittany in France. Marcelle and Coco, two young French girls, find a blind and suffering English soldier in the woods, and after promising to keep him a secret from everyone, nurse him back to health.

The solider tells them he left the war to return home to his dying brother. In exchange for their trust, the soldier tells them stories of Donkeys. Finally the girls help the soldier to escape by including their older brother and his crippled friend in the secret.

Dragon Keeper *by Carole Wilkinson (2004: Australia)*

In this high fantasy book set in ancient China, a slave girl Ping must flee her master's, the imperial dragon keeper's, home after she is accused of a crime she didn't commit. Ping finds herself flying on the last surviving dragon, Danzi's, back, where he convinces Ping to go with him to the ocean to deposit the "dragon stone," the only object they are able to save.

Through their journey to the sea, Ping slowly learns that she is special, a dragon keeper. With wits, luck, and some magic, she saves Danzi time and again from a dragon hunter. Still Danzi tests her and finds her wanting, leaving without her. Ping sets out to save him for the last time and ends up knowing she is, indeed, a true dragon keeper. They finally make it to the ocean where the dragon stone hatches and Ping is left to care for the new born dragon.

Rain May and Captain Daniel *by Catherine Bateson (2003: Australia)*

Rain and her newly divorced mother move to rural Australia, according to her mother Maggie, to start a new life. Rain lives in a fantasy world wherein her parents will be reunited but as time goes on and Rain's father and his new girlfriend continue to disappoint her, she comes to grips with her new family situation.

Rain's next-door neighbor Daniel tells his story in this book through a "log" that he writes to emulate the captain's log from Star Trek, his favorite television show. Daniel is a lonely outcast who feels distant from his own parents. Rain brings sunshine into his life, which almost ends when his congenital heart defect, requires an operation.

Data Analysis

My research question addresses how childhood is constructed in children's literature. I attempted to answer my question through drawing abductive inferences from the texts that also concerned the contexts of my study—childhood studies, as well as critical children's literature studies (Krippendorff, 2003). My data were the three countries' text sets of award winning novels.

Sampling

My samples came from the texts. On first read, I looked for specific instances that spoke of childhood. My sample units were passages that made sense out of context as well as passages that made sense within contexts. I entered these excerpts under the heading of each book. At this point I was looking for passages that spoke somehow to the concept of childhood. For example, in the novel *Tamar*, I chose excerpts that were in the

sections that featured the young girl's story and I only read the other story, the one about grown-up spies, insofar as it contextualized the earlier story. The excerpts themselves were chosen for advancing my understanding about the role of the child in the book, how the child interacted with adults in the book, and what the child herself did to advance both the plot and the theme.

Thus I chose not to look closely at conversations among children, conversations between adults that had nothing to do with children, and subplots that did not speak to childhood. For example in *The Higher Power of Lucky*, there is some interaction between Lucky and her friend, Lincoln. These interactions mostly concerned Lincoln's knot tying trials and tribulations and didn't seem to add to my idea of how childhood was conceptualized in the novel. There were also monologues with adults telling 12-step audiences about how they found their Higher Power. Again, these particular passages did not contribute to my understanding of *childhood.* I only included Lucky's thoughts and feelings about these recounts, not the recounts themselves. There was a subplot in *Lucky* that was ignored as it had to do with Brigitte learning to accept the harsh conditions of California. Again, while interesting, this did not tie in directly with childhood. Every novel had portions that were beyond the scope of my study, and these were read in order to gain the context I needed in order to understand the portions I chose to put in my data collection charts.

I also entered anomalies that I encountered while reading. By anomaly I mean an idea that hadn't occurred to me, one that is an aberration from common sense. An example of an anomaly was while I was reading *Just in Case* I realized that the child

protagonist's parents were rarely mentioned. I also caught this anomaly in the novel *The Silver Donkey*. Another anomaly I found in my reading was in the book *Millions*. The protagonist meets Catholic Saints who behave and speak in distinctly un-saint like ways. In this same novel, which is preoccupied with good and bad, the father acts in an amoral fashion, which was unexpected and gave me pause. Anytime something struck me as odd, unexpected, or unusual I included it in the first readings list under the title of the novel (Beach, 2009).

Categories

My next step was to look at what I had pulled from each book and find categories that seemed to encompass both what I had found and what could apply to childhood constructions. This was a time to weed out excerpts that seemed to speak to childhood but really spoke to adult concerns. An example of this was from the novel *Kira-Kira*. I faithfully recorded the child protagonist's mother's transformation from anti union to a union supporter. Originally I thought this transformation was analogous to a transformation as a mother. But after considering it, I realized it was an interesting subplot that spoke to social justice issues of adult workers. I ended up only mentioning the mother's work issues that affected Katie's, the child protagonist's, life and perceptions of where mothering and work fit together. I also used this time to delete redundancies and to make sure the excerpts I picked would make sense to me and to the reader.

My first categories were morality, children and adults, lies, freedom, agency, and hope. I then went through each excerpt and coded them for each category (m=morality,

c/a= children and adults, etc.). I organized the examples two ways. The first way was I put in categories and examples under the title of each book. This was a way to look at each book individually. The second way I organized my data was to put examples from all the novels under each of the category headings. By doing this, I had a broader perspective of how the novels fit together.

Analysis

Next, I reread every novel, this time to make sure I had accurate examples for each of the categories and that I hadn't missed any salient categories. As I was reading this time I soon discovered that I had missed a salient meta-category, that the majority of the books had a meta-plot in common, one that strayed from the "typical plots" I had read about in scholarly books by Nodelman (2009) and Hunt (1992). This plot did not follow the child protagonist's expected trajectory of home-journey-home. Instead, the majority of these books had a different journey, one that began in a failed home and ended in a new home, which was constructed by the child.

Reanalysis Using Meta-Plot

I decided to follow this thread and proceeded to analyze all the novels for this meta-plot. After I analyzed the novels for the character's trajectory, the categories changed as different ideas proved important through this analysis. I conflated the categories of agency and freedom, since freedom is dependent upon the concept of agency. I also included hope in this category as hope is what the characters experience as they seize freedom. I decided to keep morality as it spoke to the postmodern/modern tension in the state of childhood as well as to the roles children play in these novels

(Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). The category children and adults was renamed “children with parents” to reflect the importance parents play (or don’t play) in children’s lives. I divided this category into fathers and mothers. The fathers I found were almost all failed parents, while the mothers who were alive were slightly better parents (according to the child protagonist). The biggest surprise was how many of the novels had a dead mother and how much power she continued to wield from the grave. Instead of having a category called “lies” I choose, instead, to concentrate on the bigger category of “keeping secrets” that encapsulates lies as well as the important dichotomy of childhood, innocence versus knowledge. I added the category of children’s roles as this spoke most closely to my research question and tied together all of the other categories.

Recursive Re-Analysis

Once I had firmly established my final categories I read the novels closely once again, this time to check my inferences deductively (if this is true, then what else needs to be true) then inductively (test out to see if the deduction makes sense). This was a recursive process as some inferences panned out for some books, while others didn’t (Krippendorff, 2003). For example, when reading for the category “children and parents” I made sure that the dead mother as powerful character motif was present in every book in the text set that had a dead mother. I then looked at the “power” of the deceased mothers in the stories to see if her being dead really mattered or if it was just a question of maternal authority. This is an example of an inference that proved to make sense both deductively and inductively.

An example of a failed inference I made is when I interpreted the idea of freedom as resting upon the child physically leaving home. While this is true in many of the books, it isn't true for the novel *Beeing Bee* where Bee never leaves home. I had to rethink this idea and see what was important about "leaving" in seizing freedom. I reread the novels and saw that the precursor for freedom wasn't physically leaving a home, but the child protagonist changing her relationships within the home.

Reanalysis Within the Frameworks of Foucault and Buber

Next I re-analyzed my data by using Foucault's (1983) concept of *parrhesia* and Buber's (1923) *I/You* relationship. I saw that the journey ever present in the meta-plot was not just aimless wandering for the child protagonist. It was a prelude to the child gaining agency by speaking truth to power. I analyzed each book that had a meta-plot for the *parrhesiatic* act. In the denouement of the novels with meta-plots I saw that the child needed to change her I/It relationship she inhabited to an I/You connection in order to construct her own life.

Making Sense of the Categories in the Framework of the Meta-Plot

After I had analyzed the text set for a meta-plot and I had analyzed it for salient categories that spoke to the construction of childhood. I combined these two strands by placing the findings from my categories into the three parts of the meta-plot, the failed home, the journey, and the construction of a new home. This brought the analysis to a conclusion and allowed me to discuss what my findings said about how childhood as constructed in this text set and how this construction fits into the fields of postmodern childhood studies and critical children's literature studies.

One Example of Doing Critical Content Analysis from this Study

While I have discussed generally what I did in my analysis, I want to take a small piece of analysis and explain to the reader my steps as well as my thinking during the analysis. This is important to do as I have mentioned earlier, it is rare to find an actual description in the professional literature for how the individual researcher made inferences from the text. I will describe this in the form of a reflective piece of writing (what I am thinking will be italicized).

As I was reading through *Dragon Keeper* I came across the following passage:

Ping had lifted the dragon no more than a couple of inches, but it gave her heart. If she could move him two inches, she could move him two more. (p. 173)

This seems to speak to the anomaly I have been finding of the child taking care of the grown up at the expense of her own needs. Ping is really small and she is killing herself trying to move this enormous creature. I think I will jot down these sentences and keep reading to see how this scene ends.

Next I recorded:

The warmth from the fire made the rat steam. Ping laughed out loud. Danzi made the sound like jingling bells. Her arms ached, her gown was damp, but at that moment Ping had everything she wanted. (pp. 175-176)

I will jot down the ending. The parts between page 173 and page 175 are details of the suffering Ping must endure to save Danzi. This reminds me of the suffering Pete in Helicopter Man endures while helping his father. Ping is like Crispin as well, she is homeless and on the run, it behooves her to care for the one creature in the world who

she can interact with. I will put this passage in the category child-as-savior. It seems to fit as Ping is literally saving Danzi's life. She is also ensuring her own safety by saving his life. This also fits in the meta-plot as part of Ping's journey. She must learn how to care for the dragon to prepare for her role as dragon keeper. This passage serves as a test of Ping's emotional and physical strength.

I reread this book and this passage and it still made sense in terms of the story and in terms of the text set as a whole. I decided to keep the passage in the category child-as-savior, to use to make a case for this category's importance and as a passage example to include in this paper. I considered two ways of reading the passage. The first interpretation was reading Ping as totally self-sacrificing and the second was reading Ping as pragmatic. She needs Danzi to survive for her own survival.

The Outliers in the Analysis

In my analysis I discovered that three of the novels did not fit this meta-plot, but the other twelve did and this seemed significant enough to go ahead. The three novels that I will call the outliers, *Criss Cross*, *Kira-Kira*, and *The Silver Donkey*, don't fit with the other books for three disparate reasons. In the case of *Criss Cross*, I found the novel's episodic plot and unique style too disjointed to analyze for this category. Each chapter in the book is an individual vignette that is loosely tied to the story as a whole by a necklace that appears and disappears throughout the story. There are two main characters, in that these children appear in the novel the most amount of times. But the reader never learns

enough to follow the two on any coherent journey. The novel is also fragmented stylistically, with poetry, song lyrics, drawings, and interviews that make it so unlike all the other novels in the text set that it is hard to use this novel to form any coherent findings and theories.

Kira-Kira is an outlier as it ends where the other novels begin; it isn't until the last part of the book when the older sister, Lynne, dies that the family starts to fail. In all of the other novels the story starts with a failed family. *The Silver Donkey* is an outlier for almost the same reason, except in this case the novel begins and ends with a successful family.

Conclusions

At the end of my analysis I feel as if I have made some valid observations about what childhood is like for these specific characters in these specific books as well as the beginnings of further study in the area of meta-plot, meta-morality, and freedom.

Some categories, meta-plot, children and parents, and freedom required a methodical look at each book on its own before looking at the text set of the whole. The other categories, because of the considerable work I had already done with the aforementioned categories, required larger swaths of theory with examples from various novels included. By describing my analysis both ways, the reader is able to understand the depth and breadth of all the information about childhood these novels have to contribute.

Through my analysis I found that the childhood depicted in twelve of the fifteen novels followed a meta-plot. This plot starts with the child leaving a failed home to go on

a journey where she discovers the knowledge that she needs to be able to construct a new home. This process involves the child protagonist practicing *parrhesia*, or speaking truth to power at some personal risk (Foucault, 1983) as well as the child positioning herself or himself in a "You" position in the Buberian I/You relationship (1923). What the child is left with at the end of the story is an acquired freedom, or the ability to make measured decisions (Dewey, 1938). These choices involve leaving the past behind, losing everything, in order to create something new.

What I didn't find in my research was a significant national difference among the text sets. This answered my second research question of whether there were different childhoods constructed in each of the three text sets Whether the book was awarded a medal in the United Kingdom, the United States, or Australia, the themes were consistent throughout the text set as a whole. The outliers, *Criss Cross*, *Kira-Kira*, and *The Silver Donkey* are not so much representative of country differences, I believe, than of the capricious nature of the award givers. The first two books mentioned are American while the last is Australian. It is the story line and organization that makes these books stand out, not the way childhood is represented in a culturally diverse way. This may be a good place to point out that no matter where the books took place, all of the characters (less two) were white, presumably Christian, and not of any discernible subcultures.

Critical content analysis served this study well. It gave me the flexibility to change categories and foci of analysis as I was confronted with anomalies that emerged from new reading events as I read more and more carefully. My research was directed by the theoretical frameworks I began with (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I started the study

looking for instances of adult normativity and social control that is discussed in postmodern childhood studies, and my research stance was the social problem of adult control of children as evidenced in award-winning children's literature (Fairclough, 2001).

But as I transacted with the texts I was able to make interpretations that challenged the biases I approached this study with. I found that while children are objects of adult normativity at the beginning, these novels gave them opportunities to claim agency and construct their own futures. By analyzing and reanalyzing I had the opportunity to change categories, to analyze using theoretical frameworks (Foucault and Buber) that helped to deepen my findings. While I realize there can be no "ending" in research, I have the beginnings necessary to continue on.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT SET: DEMOGRAPHICS AND META-PLOTS

Alison Lurie (1990) writes in her book, *Don't tell the grownups: The subversive power of children's literature*, "As we had suspected, the fairy tales had been right all along—the world was full of hostile, stupid giants and perilous castles and people who abandon their children in the nearest forest" (p. 18). This rather bleak and hopeless quote embodies a tension inherent in children's literature. The children's literature in my text set, while not technically from the fairy tale genre (barring *Despereaux*), fits Lurie's above description. Metaphorically, the books are rife with stupid giants, perilous castles, and people who abandon their children in the nearest forest. The child protagonists I deal with, in large part, have a rather difficult existence, one that is anything but "a happy childhood."

Compare the reality of these books with what the general population sees as kid lit. Many times in the past six months people outside of the university have taken the plunge and asked me what my dissertation is about. "Children's literature", I answer. The response goes something like this, "How fun. I remember reading (fill in the blank). It was such a happy book." I think about the books I analyzed and realize "happy" is probably the last adjective I would use to describe any of them.

The stories I have looked at don't seem to match people's childhood memories of their favorite books. In my own case the books I remember best from middle childhood are Sydney Taylor's *All of a Kind Family* series. The family was poor and Jewish living

in a New York City tenement. Despite these hardships these are joyful stories about having fun with little in the way of material possessions and the importance of sticking together as a family. Karen Spring, in her article in “Newsweek” (July 21, 2008), echoes this idea with her lead in to her article, “Unhappily ever after.” “Remember when children’s books frolicked through tales of ponies and princes? The latest kid-lit craze is stories about living through the apocalypse—now” (p. 58).

This text set’s concerns also don’t match currently popular kid culture as evidenced by television shows marketed to the same middle reader population. “Hannah Montana” is fun. What could be more fun than being a regular teenage girl by day and an international pop star by night? “The Suite Life on Deck” is happy. The Twins have silly adventures but everything always works itself out at the end of the half an hour. Even when the mother gets angry with her sons’ shenanigans she is quickly over it. The episode often ends with a big family hug. But are these shows and our collective memories of our childhood favorite books describing childhood as it is being lived here and now?

I agree with Lurie, fairy tales, the non-Disneyfied sort, offered children tools to deal with a world where “happily ever after” comes with the price of doing superhuman things to get out of inhumane conditions. But are these stories any more helpful or accurate in trying to ferret out how childhood looks now? The question remains, what is childhood? In Springen’s (2008) article, the answer can be found in children’s literature. “…children’s fiction has always reflected the reality it came from, and today’s children live in a dark place” (p. 58).

In order to answer the question of how childhood is constructed now, and if indeed it is a dark place, I looked at children's books written in the past five years. I begin this chapter with a critical content analysis of the books in my text set. I accomplish this by examining literary elements, such as plot, character, and setting that speak to the construction of childhood. I then look at the meta-plots of each of the books. This meta-plot that I found consists of the child protagonist leaving a failed home and going on a journey where the end result is a home the child constructed. I deepen the analysis of the journey by excavating the *parrhesian* (Foucault, 1983) acts on the part of the child protagonists that must occur in order for the child to leave the past behind and be in a position to begin anew. I end the chapter by looking at *I/You* versus *I/It* relationships between the adult and child that change and allow the child the ability to construct a new home (Buber, 1923). The next chapter continues with the analysis related to the question of how childhood is constructed in children's literature, by focusing on the themes uncovered through the analysis shared in this chapter.

Examination of the Books

In order to begin to answer my research question about how childhood is constructed in children's literature I start by examining the books in my text set for the following information: 1). Who is telling the story?; 2). Who are the major adult characters?; 3). Who is the child protagonist?; 4). What is the specific setting of the story?; and 5). What is the class group the story inhabits?

My data are drawn from the following texts, organized chronologically, newest to oldest and by country of award. The following is a description of the fifteen novels, my

text set, I analyzed for this study. These descriptions will include bibliographic information, plot summary, and information that is pertinent to looking at the construction of childhood. This information answers the following questions:

1. Who is telling the story?

This is important as it plays into what is told, what is left out, and what biases vis-à-vis ages are present. How the literature is narrated is the discourse of the book (Nikolajeva, 2005). A story told from a child's point of view will be different from a story told by a now grown child or an omniscient narrator. When Tamar, in the novel *Tamar* tells her story ten years after the fact, the distance of time and space may enable her to be fairer when presenting her father and mother, two people who, for all intents and purposes, abandoned her emotionally and physically. Her removedness removes some of the emotions that could cloud the detailed description of her journey. On the other hand, *Beeing Bee* is narrated by Bee as a young child and includes the kinds of details that only one writing close to the action can remember. This makes for a more intimate telling, and one that leaves out other possible perspectives. In the book *Despereaux* the narrator not only tells the story but also tells the reader what to do, like look up a word in a dictionary. The narrator in this novel also tells the reader what to think, for example she declares that "love is ridiculous." Being aware of the narrator helps the reader to read what is missing as well as what is there (Nodelman, 2009, Lukens, 2007).

There are three types of narration present in these novels (Lukens, 2007). The first is called the first-person point of view. In this narration the readers lives through the

book along with the narrator. First-person narration by a child protagonist is the child's story and the reader has a chance to think, feel, and sense along with the character. These narratives can be told in what I call, real time. This means the reader experiences what is happening in the book at the same time the child protagonist does. An example of real time first-person narrative in this text set is the novel, *A Gathering Light*. The other kind of first-person narration is written in past tense. I call this category memoir first person narrative because the fictional story reads like a memoir, or a person telling a story from her past in the present. An example of first-person memoir is *Millions*.

The second kind of narration is the omniscient point of view. This is a god-like narrator who knows everything that is happening all at once. The reader is able to experience the story from different points of view and understand the major characters. An example of this kind of narration is seen in the novel, *The Silver Donkey*. In the case of novels that are omnisciently narrated, time isn't as much of a concern as the narrator doesn't change with time.

The third kind of narration is what is known as limited omniscient point of view. In this case the narrator focuses on the thought, feelings, and senses of one or two major characters. This gives the reader the opportunity to, as an outsider experience the story from a more limited point of view. A good example of this narrative style is *The Higher Power of Lucky*.

2. Who are the major adult characters?

A major character in this study is one who is integral to the child's development. This can and often does include people who are no longer living and may not include parents and siblings whom the child sees every day. By adult, I refer to characters the child or narrator lets us know is an adult, in other words, has some power over the child. This power may be positive, negative, or neutral. This is more complicated than one might assume. In the *Silver Donkey*, I count Lieutenant Shepard as an adult in that the child protagonists see him and speak of him as a grown up. He could also be viewed as a child, a person who is at the mercy of the children who care for him. When animals are characters in the story I put them in the anthropomorphized categories of adult and child as that is how they are portrayed in the books. In *Dragon Keeper*, the Dragon is an adult and in *Despereaux*, the rat Roscuro is an adult as well.

3. Who is the major child protagonist?

Child is defined in this study as a person who is viewed by characters in the novel as a child and is privy to adult normativity, in other words is an object of adult indirect or direct control (Mills, 2000). This may seem obvious, but it can be complex. Traditionally childhood is defined by age or by dependence. This doesn't work for this data set. For example, in *A Gathering Light*, Mattie is 16-years-old, a teenager in our day, but this book takes place in the early 20th century where she is old enough to get married and start a family like one of her best friends does. But Mattie is also positioned a child as she must ask her father for permission to work and must come to terms with the promises she made her now dead mother in order to leave to go to college. The adults around Mattie see this dichotomy as "normal." She

is old enough to get married but still a child. Many of the child characters in these novels are children but in fact are quite independent. They have lives totally out of the scope of the adults in their worlds. In *The Silver Donkey*, Coco and Marcelle manage to save an AWOL English soldier without their parents ever catching wind of it. On the other hand, in order to do this saving, they must lie to their parents who have a considerable amount of control over their movements.

4. What is the specific setting; time and place of the story?

This question speaks to childhood as being a cultural construction (James & Prout, 1997). If it is that, then the way childhood is conceptualized must change over time and space. In *Crispin: Cross of Lead*, which takes place in the Middle Ages of England, it is normal to see young children working the fields and Crispin at 13-years-old is already a seasoned laborer who has never been to school. Compare this to *Just In Case*, a story that takes place in modern day England where Justin, the 15-year-old main character, has never worked a day in his life but is free in the text to have sex with a much older woman. Context matters. What also must be acknowledged here is that whatever time period these books are about they were all written in the past decade. The construction of childhood in these narratives will be influenced by the setting of the story and the setting of the writing (Hunt, 2004).

5. What is the class group the story inhabits?

This will address the question of how childhood is constructed differently along class lines. The norm for award winning children's literature is that the stories take place in a middle class milieu (Thew, 2000). But in this text set several stories

involve children who are working class or poor. Like gender and race, class is something that should be attended to in the analysis (Jones, 2008). For example, in books where the child lives in a middle class home, money (barring the book *Millions*) is not discussed nor is work addressed other than to say the father or mother works too much. Middle classdom is so much the norm that is doesn't need to be mentioned, much in the same way whiteness and heterosexuality is not marked in the text set novels either (Thew, 2000, Sampson, 2000).

A given for middle class children in these books is the sense of entitlement the child protagonist displays. The "American Dream", or in the case of this study, the British and Australian Dream is taken for granted in the books that have a middle class setting (Lareau, 2003). While the child may struggle internally with fate and angst, as Justin certainly does in *Just in Case*, he does not need to worry about having a decent home, enough food, and enough pocket money to go on his quest to liberate himself from Fate's ugly grasp. The journeys the middle class children engage in are not hampered by monetary concerns, the middle class characters are entitled to pursue their quests unfettered by concern with meeting daily needs. This entitlement is never mentioned as it is seen as "normal" (Jones, 2008).

What is the anomaly, what has to be part of the narrative, is the other side of entitlement, the sense of constraint (Lareau, 2003). This is the marked category in which the narrative mentions and discusses issues such as the father's job and income. In *Kira- Kira* (Kadohata, 2006), Katie is well aware of how hard her parents work. She smells the urine that collects on her mother's diaper that she must wear as

her boss only allows three bathroom breaks during a twelve hour work shift. While Katie struggles with her sister's slow death, she is also struggling with her family in light of the high cost of medical care. Compare this with *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. Daniel is very ill, but no mention is made of the hospital bills or the quality of care he will receive, as his family has the means to make this issue a nonissue.

Like race and gender, class matters and it is the absence of class mentioned in books where the setting is "comfortable" that leaves readers with the idea that being middle class is normal, while being poor or working class is not within the status quo.

- **2007, *Just in Case* (Rosoff), Grades 9 up (realistic fiction) - U.K.**

This young adult novel, *Just in Case*, is a complex story about 15-year-old David Case's attempt to outwit fate. The story starts with David saving his toddler brother, Charlie, from jumping out of an open window. Instead of celebrating his quick thinking, David is suddenly thrust into an angst-filled personal and epic struggle against fate, as he believes he is being specially targeted for a quick demise.

David takes on a new name, Justin, and a new persona, which is created, in large part, with the help of a photographer called Agnes. He leaves home, falls in love with Agnes, becomes an unwitting model, survives an airport fire, and, finally makes peace with fate after he almost succumbs to meningitis.

Interestingly, for a novel that is about fate, *Just in Case* is narrated in omniscient third-person by Fate herself. When Fate is speaking directly to the reader the font is bold, otherwise Fate acts as an omniscient narrator allowing the story to unfold in chronological order with the main focus on David but on other characters as well, namely

Charlie, Agnes, and Pete . Another unusual trope the author uses is to have Fate let the reader hear what Charlie, Justin's toddler brother, is thinking. Charlie's thoughts, which are smart and observant, are not in quotation marks, unlike his words, which is typical toddler speaking.

The story takes place in Luton, a middle class suburb of London, in the present day. The story begins in the summer of David's 15th year, and ends soon after Christmas. The major child characters are David/Justin, his brother Charlie, his friend Peter, and Peter's younger sister Dorothea. The major adult character is Agnes Bee, David/Justin's friend/lover/photographer. Fate, of course, is second only to David/Justin in prominence in this story.

- **2006, *Tamar* (Peet), Grades 8 up (historical fiction) - U.K.**

This young adult novel, *Tamar*, is two stories in one. The first is the struggle of two young Dutch men who are Allied spies, Dart and Tamar (code names after British rivers), during World War II in Holland at the time of what is now called, "The Hunger Winter." The other story is a modern day narrative of a teenage girl called Tamar, who is left a strange package by her grandfather, William, after he commits suicide, which launches her on a quest with her distant cousin, Yoyo, to find the truth about her family.

Dart and Tamar parachute into Nazi occupied Holland. Dart, who is a new spy, poses as a doctor who is a resident of a mental hospital in the small Dutch town. In fact, he is a code cracker who must receive and transmit messages from London. Tamar, who is the commander of this mission, pretends to be a farm laborer on a farm where he is

renewing his love affair with the owner, Marijke. Tamar's job is to unite the fractioned Dutch resistance and bring them together to do Britain's bidding.

As the year goes by, Dart becomes addicted to speed and also to Marijke who he believes is in love with him. Tamar, on the other hand, falls more deeply in love with Marijke whom he impregnates. When Dart discovers Tamar and Marijke's love affair, he goes mad, and through extreme cunning and daring, plots a successful plan to have Tamar killed. This done, he and Marijke escape to England where they raise Marijke's son, Jan. Marijke never knows that Dart, now William, had her lover, Tamar, murdered. Jan, Marijke's son from that union, is never told the truth of his parentage.

Jan follows his father's advice and names his daughter Tamar without knowing why this is so important to William. When Tamar turns ten, her father just disappears one day and Tamar is raised by William and Marijke while Tamar's mother carries on an affair with her boss. Tamar and William become close over their shared obsession with crossword puzzles and she is mystified when he commits suicide.

By this point Marijke is suffering from Alzheimer's and is going back in time to that "Hunger Winter" when she lost her love and was rescued by William. Tamar, with the money and maps her grandfather leaves her, sets out along the Tamar river, for which she believes she was named, in Southern England, not knowing that she will find her father as well as love with her traveling companion Yoyo.

From this meeting, orchestrated by her dead grandfather, she learns the truth of her family and how it made her father have a nervous breakdown and abandon his family.

Jan, her father, is unable to forgive William for what he had done. The story ends ten years later with Tamar living in Amsterdam with Yoyo expecting their first child.

The story of Dart and Tamar is told chronologically by an omniscient narrator. It spans the years 1944-1945 in a small village in Holland. The main adult characters are Dart, Tamar, Marijke, and Trixie, Marijke's best friend. The only child in this portion of the novel is Trixie's daughter, Rosa, who is one-year-old at the time. All of the characters, in fact all of the townsfolk, are slowly starving during the Nazi occupation, although Tamar and Dart are well educated in England, where the reader can assume they lived a more comfortable life.

The other story, of 15-year-old Tamar, is narrated in first-person by the now 25-year-old Tamar in the style of memoir. The story takes place in middle class 1995 England, first in London, and then down the span of the River Tamar in Devon. The major child characters in her story are herself and Yoyo, her 19-year-old second cousin from Holland who is studying in London. The adult characters from the other story are the characters in hers as well, with the addition of her mother and father.

The novel goes back and forth between the narratives with a place and year page before each new chapter. The last chapters are where the two stories collide as Jan tells Tamar about the past and its secrets. The very last chapter is Tamar, now 25, speaking in the present tense.

- **2005, *Millions* (Boyce), Ages 9-12 (realistic fiction)-U.K.**

Millions, which started as a movie script before it was turned into a middle reader, is the story of Damian, a boy obsessed by Christian Saints, who believes a large bag of

Pounds descended from heaven to his backyard in a suburb of London as a reward for his attempts to lead a saintly life.

The major premise of the plot is that England is to switch over to the Euro and all British Sterling is to be burned as it is taken out of circulation. Damien and his much more pragmatic brother, Anthony, attempt to spend the 229,370 pounds in the span of seventeen days without anyone knowing. At the same time Damien is visited by a handful of Saints who guide him in his endeavors.

Of course the money doesn't fall from heaven, but from a bank heist gone badly and one of the robbers is after the money and, ultimately, Damien and his family. Damien's father is finally let in on the secret when the situation gets out of hand and Damien, though sage advice from Saint Joseph and shopping help from his father and his father's girlfriend, is able to save and spend almost all of the money, giving his family all they want and having enough left over to build wells in Africa.

Millions is narrated by Damien as a first-person memoir. The reader is not ever told how long ago the story took place. The action itself spans seventeen days. There are two main child characters, Damien who is 11-years-old and his brother Anthony who is 12-years-old. The highlighted adults in this text are the boys' father and dead mother as well as a mysterious woman called Dorothy who, it seems, is starting to have a romantic relationship with the father. The family lives in a "posh" subdivision and the father works long hours at an office. The family would be considered middle class

Millions is organized as an oral story. Damien begins the book by writing/saying, "If Anthony was telling this story, he'd start with the money" (p.1), and ends with the line,

"If Anthony has been telling you this story, it would be the most unhappy ending ever" (p. 246). Damien narrates in chronological order with some chapters beginning with an editorial. For example, chapter four beings with the statement, "It's not as easy to be good as you might think" (p. 25). Chapter 11 commences with, "Just to be logical about things: if it's wrong to give money to people, then it must be right to take it off people" (p. 102).

While the genre of this text might be considered realistic fiction, there is considerable interaction between various Catholic Saints and Damien, which could be interpreted as magical realism. While most of the Saints could be interpreted as "imaginary," Saint Joseph, who makes an appearance during Damien's school's nativity play, actually ends up sitting in for Damien when he must flee the robber. There is also a scene in which the boys' dead mother appears and is seen by both Damien and his brother, Anthony. In general, the book feels current and deals with modern issues in present day England.

- **2004, *A Gathering Light* (Donnelly), Grades 8 up (historical fiction) - U.K.**

This young adult novel based on real events is the story of Mattie, a sixteen-year-old girl, who longs to leave her life in the Adirondacks of New York and attend Barnard College in New York City in order to become a famous writer. Holding her back is the promise she made to her now deceased mother to care for the family.

Mattie gets a job waiting tables at a nearby hotel for the summer and becomes entangled with another young woman, Grace Brown, who entrusts her with a packet of letters the day she "drowns" in a boating accident. While Grace asks Mattie to burn the letters, she doesn't, and as Mattie reads the dead girl's letters she realizes Grace is

pregnant and was probably killed by her “fiancée”. Using Grace’s demise, her beloved teacher’s model, and her best friend Weaver’s courage (among other sources) as guides, Mattie eventually decides to follow her dream and leave behind her family, her engagement to Royal, and her promise to her mother in order to make a life for herself.

Mattie narrates the novel in the first-person memoir style. Each chapter is headed by a word that Mattie is learning at the time. The words summarize the feelings of Mattie in each chapter. For example, the first chapter’s word is “fractious,” a feeling surrounding Mattie as her many siblings, pets, and neighbors create havoc around her. Leaving her to clean up the mess to keep her father from feeling “snappish, peevish, irritable, or cross” (p. 15).

A Gathering Light is a complex novel with many characters. The major adult characters are Mattie’s father, her dead mother, and her teacher, Miss Wilcox, who is a famous controversial poet on the run from her husband. Also playing important roles in the narrative are Weaver’s mother, Mrs. Smith, a black woman who has come to the North Woods after her husband was lynched in the South, and Mattie’s next door neighbor, the village crazy woman, Emmie Hubbard. The major child characters, not really children but adolescents, are Mattie, her best friend Weaver, who is slated to attend Columbia on a full scholarship, and Royal, who wants to marry Mattie in order to get revenge on his father’s mistress and to enlarge his farm. Also critical to the story is the deceased Grace Brown, who Mattie and the reader get to know through her letters to her lover.

The novel takes place in the Adirondacks in a small town in the summer of 1906. The characters, barring Miss Wilcox, the teacher and poet, are poor rural folk who are barely scraping by. The novel begins with Mattie attempting to feed her large family with leftover cornmeal and ruing the fact that she can't write because she literally ran out of paper and cannot afford to buy more.

- **2003, *Ruby Holler* (Creech), Ages 9-12 (realistic fiction) - U.K.**

This is the story of twin foster children, Dallas and Florida, who after 13 years of being in and out of the Boxton Creek home (a group home or orphanage), going from one abusive foster home to another, end up living temporarily in Ruby Holler with an older couple, Tiller and Sairy. Dallas and Florida go to Ruby Holler to prepare to go on separate trips with the couple; Florida with Tiller and Dallas with Sairy.

The owners of Boxton Creek Home, the Trepids, have abused and neglected the Twins until they believe no one will ever want them and they plan to run away together to make their own lives. But being in Ruby Holler surrounded by good food, fairness, and kindness makes the Twins almost believe they are deserving of a home.

The plot thickens when the Twins inadvertently let slip to Mr. Trepid that Sairy and Tiller have a fortune buried in the Holler. While each traveling pair is on a test run for their trip, canoeing for Florida and Tiller and hiking for Dallas and Sairy, Mr. Trepid hires a mysterious man named Z to find the treasure. In the meantime Florida almost drowns and Tiller has a heart attack on the canoeing trip. Dallas and Sairy get lost on their hike. Both sets of Twins, the real Twins and the almost Twins who have been married for so long they find they cannot do without each other, come back to the Holler

where they are told by Z, who is a good friend of the older couple, about the Trepids' nefarious plot. The foursome hatches a plan to humiliate Mr. Trepid. The reader is left predicting the two sets of Twins will stay together in the Holler, with the Twins finally having a family and Tiller and Sairy having a family once again.

The story is told in the past tense in chronological order by an omniscient narrator. The major adult characters are Sairy and Tiller, an older couple with grown up children who have been in the Holler all of their lives where they have amassed a fortune making wooden carvings. The Trepids, the married couple who own the foster home and hate children, are also major characters. The only major child characters are the 13-year-old Twins. The story takes place mainly in Ruby Holler, the reader is never told where this is in the United States. While not explicitly stated, the reader assumes the story is modern, because of hints like the Twins getting paid $5.00 and hour for their chores, which is almost equal to recent minimum wages. The narrative takes place when the children are 13-years-old, although there are many pages devoted to examining their horrible pasts in the group home as well as in different abusive foster settings.

The Twins are poor; they have never been given anything new or enough food. The Boxton Home is too old, mean, and inadequate to meet the children’s needs. Sairy and Tiller, on the other hand, have a fortune buried in the Holler, but they live in an old home with no conveniences, like electricity and running water.

- **2007*, The Higher Power of Lucky* (Patron), Ages 9-12 (realistic fiction) - U.S.**

This realistic fiction story is about a motherless girl named Lucky, who is preoccupied with the idea of finding a Higher Power, a concept she learns from eavesdropping on 12-step meetings. This preoccupation stems from her insecurity that her Guardian, Brigitte, will leave her to return to France and Lucky will hit "rock bottom."

Lucky is with a Guardian because her mother has died, her father won't take care of her and instead, asks his first wife, Brigitte, to temporarily act as Lucky's Guardian. When the story beings this arrangement has lasted for two years and no one has told Lucky what will happen to her. She carries a survival backpack around with her constantly in case she is abandoned.

Lucky is also still mourning her mother. At her mother's memorial service Lucky is asked to release her mother's ashes to the wind, but finds she can't and clings to the ashes and her anger at her mother's early demise as closely as she clings to Brigitte.

Halfway into the book, Lucky finds a new suitcase and a passport in Brigitte's room. Assuming Brigitte is leaving her to return to France, Lucky runs away in a sandstorm. She has hit her rock bottom. During her short trek she is forced to take shelter from the storm in an abandoned mine quarry where she discovers Miles, another motherless child. They end up taking care of each other until help comes. Through this experience Lucky finds her Higher Power. At her rescue she conducts a new memorial service for her mother and releases her ashes. Brigitte finally tells Lucky that her suitcase and passport were out because she needed them to go to court to formally adopt Lucky.

The book ends with Brigitte opening up a French restaurant in town and Lucky with a permanent family.

The *Higher Power of Lucky* is narrated by a limited omniscient storyteller who concentrates only on Lucky's story and seems to inhabit her mind and heart. The narrator seems quite childlike as she tells Lucky's story as if Lucky herself were narrating it. For example, the narrator calls the people in the 12-step programs Lucky spies on "the anonymous people" and says empathetic things like, "So far, Lucky hadn't found a trace of her Higher Power, though she tried hard to be alert for the slightest hint of it" (p. 71).

The major characters in this story are Lucky, who is 10-years-old, Milo, who is 5 and lives with his grandmother because his mother is in prison, and Lincoln, a boy her own age, who is obsessed with knot tying. The major adult characters in this story are Brigitte, Lucky's French Guardian, and Short Sammy, a recovering alcoholic who peaks Lucky's interest in Higher Powers.

The story, which unfolds chronologically, takes place in a town called Hard Pan, California (population 42) set in the high dessert. It is a modern tale but because the town is so small and insular the reader must look for signs of modernity, like Brigitte's computer. Everyone in the town is poor as they all qualify for government surplus food.

- **2006, *Criss Cross* (Perkins), Ages 9-12 (realistic fiction) - U.S.**

This realistic fiction novel is a collection of vignettes about teenagers in a small town. Each character is connected, however loosely, to all other characters. There is no real story, but a number of interconnected mini stories with characters that go in and out. For

this reason this book has a difficult plot to describe, as it is an episodic plot, one where disparate stories are united, through a common theme (Lukens, 2007).

This theme is that people flit in and out of each other's lives and it is only by coincidence any two people or more manage to connect. There are myriad opportunities lost as people just manage to miss connecting with each other. For example, throughout the book Hector and Debbie peripherally come to like each other. At the end of the book, when the reader hopes they will finally come together this happens:

> Hector did look at Debbie, and he saw her, really saw her for a moment. Debbie looked at Hector and she saw him, really saw him, for a moment. If it had been the same moment something might have happened. But their moments were separated by a second. Maybe only half a second. Their paths crossed, but they missed each other. (p. 335)

The vignettes are told in third person. The narrator is omniscient as she seems to know everything that is going on in every character's head. Each chapter is told from the point of view of a different character. There are 38 short chapters in a book of 337 pages. The chapters include narrative as well as poetry, song lyrics, and art. Because the action shifts from chapter to chapter not much happens to individual characters. There are no major adult characters. The major child characters are Debbie and Hector, with too many minor child characters to mention without causing confusion. What is interesting about the child characters is that they are all high school aged, which is unusual for a book that is marketed to middle readers and wins a Newbery Medal. Most Newbery winners have characters close to the assumed readers' age, from 10 to 13-years-old.

Another character is inanimate, Debbie's necklace, which she loses. The necklace shows up as the book progresses going to person to person as they find it and somehow never manage to give it back to her. It is in the aforementioned last scene that Hector gives it to Debbie, not even knowing it is hers. That is what spurs them to look at each other and miss each other at the same time.

The setting of the novel is a small town somewhere in America. There is nothing that gives the reader a clue as to the time period. It presumably takes place sometime in the near past. The children in the book don't really discuss their class status. Again, the unmarked category is middle class and because the reader isn't told otherwise, that is the category this story will be put into.

- **2005, *Kira-Kira* (Kadohata), Ages 9-12 (historical fiction) - U.S.**

This text is about Katie and her Japanese-American family's lives in Georgia in the early 1950s. The family moves from Iowa to Georgia hoping for a better life, which doesn't pan out as both Katie's parents work long hours in the poultry industry trying to save money to buy a house. The book centers on Katie's strong bond with her older sister, Lynn, who, as the story progresses sickens and eventually dies of lymphoma, leaving Katie to carry both Lynn's dreams and her own.

An adult Katie narrates *Kira-Kira* in first-person memoir, she tells her story chronologically. The book takes place in rural Georgia from 1956 to 1963. Katie begins the story as a five-year-old and finishes as a 12-year-old. The main child characters are Katie and her older sister Lynn. The main adult characters are Katie's mother and father as well as her paternal Uncle Katsuhisa. All the characters in this novel are working class.

- **2004*, The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread* (DiCamillo), Ages 9-12 (fairy tale) - U.S.**

Despereaux is a romantic, artistic mouse who breaks all the rodent rules by falling in love with a princess called Pea. For this crime, the sin of cavorting with humans, he is sentenced to the dungeon by the mouse council, where he is expected to be eaten by rats. He survives thanks to his love of story. In exchange for his life he tells his jailer stories. Not only does Despereaux survive, he triumphs, by saving Princess Pea, and living happily ever after as her friend.

This novel is also the story of three other characters; Princess Pea, Roscuro, and Mig. Princess Pea is orphaned after her mother, the Queen, dies of fright when the rat, Roscuro, falls into her soup bowl. Pea is imperious, but lonely for her mother and for soup, which is outlawed by the King after his wife's demise. Roscuro is a rat who is a mixture of good and evil. He longs for light and has his heart broken by being banished to the dungeon after his presence kills the Queen. He longs for revenge and focuses on Pea as a way to exact it. Mig, a motherless child who is sold to a bad man in exchange for a table cloth, longs to be a princess.

All these characters meet up in the castle where Roscuro engineers Pea's capture with Mig's help. Despereaux saves the day by saving Pea and is finally allowed to be his own mouse. Pea is saved, Mig is reunited with her father, and Roscuro is allowed to be in the light of day. And, yes, soup is served and all ends well.

This novel has an omniscient narrator who not only tells the story, but also speaks directly to the reader, giving advice and making demands. For example, the book starts with this quote, “The world is dark, and the light is precious. Come closer, dear reader. You must trust me. I am telling you a story” (dedication page). The story of Despereaux is told in chronological order, with breaks in the narrative to go back in time to tell the stories of the other main characters. The narrator lets the reader know this break in time and space is going to happen. One gets a sense that the narrator is most definitely an adult as she tells the reader to go to the dictionary to look up words and makes wise pronouncements such as “hope is ridiculous.”

This book is an anomaly as two of its main characters, Despereaux and Roscuro, are animals. Despereaux is a young mouse, small and newly born, while Roscuro has a past, making him, for all intents and purposes, an adult. The other child characters are Mig and Princess Pea. Major adult characters are Gregory the Jailer, the King, and the deceased Queen.

The setting for this story is a fairytale kingdom of Gor in a castle. There is no real time setting for the story. Because the novel follows the fairy tale genre so closely it is probably “once upon a time.” *The Tale of Despereaux* is an anomaly in this text set as it so clearly a fairytale, the only one of the set that so fully matches that genre.

- **2003*, Crispin: The Cross of Lead* (Avi), Ages 9-12 (historical fiction) - U.S.**

This novel is the story of Crispin, a motherless boy who is falsely accused of stealing from the Manor House and then of murdering a priest, rendering him a “wolf’s head” or a non-person who can be killed for bounty. Running from his hunters, Crispin is captured

by an entertainer and political radical called Bear, who teaches him how to sing, dance, juggle, and smile. As the duo travels through England bound for Canterbury, Crispin and Bear form a bond and their relationship starts as one of master/apprentice until it grows to resemble a father/son love.

Crispin is carrying a cross of lead that has words no one has taught him to read. He also knows from the village priest that his mother, who he thought of as a peasant woman, is really an educated lady, who ended up as a vassal under mysterious circumstances and lied to him about his father. Through his adventures with Bear, Crispin learns he is the illegitimate son of Lord Furnival, who has just passed away, and that Lady Furnival wants him dead to protect her claim to the land and power. Crispin ends up giving up all claims to the title in exchange for a peaceful life with Bear.

The main child character, Crispin, narrates the story using first-person memoir. His story is only concerned with what is going on in his head, heart, and environment. The adult main characters consist of Bear, his captor cum foster father, his deceased mother, Astra, and John Ayecliff, the manor lord's lackey. Crispin exists in this story in a world without children. He will sometimes comment on seeing children working, but he has no contact with peers. The text is organized chronologically, beginning in 1377 CE with the day of Crispin's mother's death and continuing through his escape with Bear and the start of his new life as Bear's foster son. The text does not explicitly state how long the action lasts, but it seems to happen rather quickly. Crispin begins and ends the novel at age thirteen. The story's settings in medieval England are a small feudal village called Stromford and the city of Great Wexley. Crispin and Bear are both extremely poor,

Crispin is a peasant and Bear, while he went to seminary and is learned, chooses to be an itinerant entertainer and political radical preaching what we would now call socialist ideals.

- **2007, *Being Bee* (Bateson), ages 9-12 (realistic fiction)- Australia**

Beeing Bee is a realistic fiction novel about Bee, a young girl in modern day Australia, coming to terms with her father's new girlfriend, Jazzi. At the beginning of the story Bee and Jazzi clash over everything. Bee's mother is dead and she and her father have established their own family, with some help from Bee's maternal grandmother who lives close by. Bee, who Jazzi insists calling Beatrice (her real name), feels left out as her father wants to make Jazzi a permanent part of his life. Bee is lonely at home and at school where her best friends decide she is too eccentric to be friends with; consequently her closest companions are her guinea pigs, Fifi and Lulu.

Soon after Jazzi comes on to the scene, Fifi and Lulu start to write letters to Bee. Through these letters Bee confides her anger and sadness and Fifi and Lulu listen and offer empathy. Jazzi eventually moves into Bee's home and they become closer through a secret Jazzi is keeping from Bee's father, her mentally ill brother, who she never mentions and is only known to Bee.

The crisis of the story occurs when Jazzi accidentally throws out a carton of things that Bee is keeping to remind her of her mother. Bee runs away from home to Jazzi's brother where Jazzi finds her and things seem to be on the road to recovery. Through the guinea pig letters, Jazzi and Bee reach a new understanding of each other's strengths and needs.

Beeing Bee is narrated by Bee in first-person memoir. Some of the things she retells offer the reader clues that she is telling her story soon after the events happened. For example the story begins by Bee telling the reader that she didn't mean "to shove Lulu, my guinea pig, at Jazzi, my dad's girlfriend…I meant to place Lulu carefully in her hands but her hands weren't exactly where I expected" (p. 1). Bee tells the story only from her point of view, giving the reader no background information on her father's past, her mother's death, or details such as where they live or what grade she is in. This being said, the reader never knows Bee's age, the setting of the story, or how much time the story covers.

The major adult characters in this novel are Nick, Bee's father, Bee's (nameless) dead mother, and Jazzi, Nick's girlfriend. The narrative doesn't reveal what Nick does for a living but we are told that Jazzi is a special education aide. Jazzi's brother. Harley, who is schizophrenic and an artist, also plays a major role in the plot and theme of this book. The only major child character is Bee herself.

Beeing Bee is organized chronologically from the first time Bee meets Jazzi until there is a chance Bee's new family will be successful. Because Bee offers very few details concerning her day-to-day thoughts and actions the reader never finds out the setting of the story; however one can infer from details such as the multi ethnic food the characters eat and the shopping malls they visit that the story takes place in, or close to, a major urban center in Australia.

The narrative is straightforward, with occasional breaks for the correspondences between Bee and her guinea pigs. These letters are shown as letters and are in italics, further removing them from Bee's narrative.

While Bee never mentions her family's socioeconomic status, the fact that they live in a fairly large house, eat gourmet foods, and go shopping at malls for new commodities suggests they are middle class. Bee never mentions her age. Her narrative is not concerned with boys or puberty, but is replete with Bee walking places alone and generally taking care of her own day-to-day needs, it could be assumed Bee is somewhere between the ages of eight and twelve, the very ages the book is marketed towards in its "younger reader" designation.

- **2006, *Helicopter Man* (Fensham), ages 9-12 (realistic fiction)- Australia**

This is the story of Pete, a 12-year-old boy, who is on the run from things he doesn't understand with his father, who he discovers through the narrative is schizophrenic. The reader meets Pete and his father living illegally in a garden shed outside of Melbourne, Australia, follows them from place to place until the father is eventually remanded to a mental hospital and Pete is sent to live with a foster family. Throughout Pete's inner and outer journeys the reader comes to learn about Pete's past, his mother's death, his father's illness, and finally, at the end, the hope that one day he and his father will be able to live together in better mental health.

Pete narrates *Helicopter Man* in first-person memoir, in the form of diary entries, one per day from May 6th through August 18th. Pete is 12-years-old throughout the book. The action takes place in many different locations as Pete and his father are leading a

vagabond life while trying to stay ahead of the authorities. They start squatting in a garden shed that Pete calls the "Heritage Hotel," which is in a rural town outside of Melbourne. After fleeing due to Pete's illness, they stay with friends, Daph and Bill Flynn in Melbourne. Then it's back to the Heritage until they caught by the family on whom they are trespassing. They are homeless under a bridge in Melbourne, are caught by the police, and Pete goes to his first foster family, John and Karen, and then to a long term foster home, Prue and Godfrey, both in Melbourne, while his father is institutionalized. The story takes place in the modern day.

The major child character is Pete. The major adult characters are Pete's father, their friends Bill and Daph Flynn, and Pete's long term foster parents Prue and Godfrey. Pete's dead mother also plays a major role in Pete's narrative. Class changes through this story. When Pete lives with his father he is destitute, while Prue and Godfrey are wealthy.

2005, *The Silver Donkey* (Hartnett), ages 9-12 (historical fiction)- Australia

The Silver Donkey is story of two young French girls, Marcelle and Coco, who discover a blind English soldier, whose only possession is a silver donkey, in the woods near their home in rural Brittany. The soldier tells them he is trying to get home to his dying brother in England who gave him the donkey as a good luck charm and the girls conspire to protect him and care for him until he is well enough to cross the Channel. In return for their friendship, the soldier tells the girls stories of Donkeys.

The soldier begs the girls to let no one know of his existence, but they realize that they need help in order to get the solider home to his brother. They employ the assistance of their older brother, Pascal, and his crippled friend, Fabrice, who realize that the Soldier

is AWOL, but sympathize with his need to get home to his family. The novel ends with Fabrice and the Soldier on their way across the channel and Coco discovering the Silver Donkey was left behind for her.

An omniscient narrator tells the story in the past tense. Interspersed with the narrative are the stories the Lieutenant Shepard (the Soldier) tells the children about donkeys. There are four tales in all and are written as oral stories. The major adult characters are Fabrice, the crippled mechanic. The major child characters are the French siblings; Marcelle, who's 10-years-old, Coco, who's 8-years-old, and Pascal, who is 12-years-old. Lieutenant Shepard, the reader never learns his age, seems to be between adult and child, homesick and helpless, but old enough to sign on to fight World War I.

This novel is organized in chapters, and the action mostly happens chronologically, with some text space devoted to the Soldier's reminiscences of war and earlier childhood. Divided evenly through the narrative are the Soldier's four tales about donkeys. The story takes place in a small town on the Channel in Brittany, France, during World War I. The entire story lasts for less than two weeks. The French people in the story are poor while the Soldier is from an upper class family.

- **2004, *Dragon Keeper* (Wilkinson), ages 9-12 (high fantasy)- Australia**

Dragon Keeper the story of the last living wild dragon in China, Long Danzi, and the slave girl, Ping, who runs away with him when she is about to be punished for serving the Emperor pickled imperial dragon under her owner's orders. Long Danzi has in his possession what he calls a Dragon Stone and is on a journey to the ocean for unknown reasons. Ping, who has no home to flee to, makes this perilous trip with him, always one

step ahead of a dragon hunter. Ping learns through her journey across a large swathe of China about her powers, her *Qi*, which allows her to hear the dragon speak, to sense danger, and to use her wits to get out of all kinds of harrowing scrapes.

Ping eventually learns that she is a dragon keeper, a special human whose purpose is to care for dragons. When Long Danzi and Ping finally make it to the ocean, Ping is told the truth. The dragon stone is an egg and as the new dragon hatches she is left to care for it while Long Danzi leaves to heal himself.

Dragon Keeper is told in the past tense by a limited omniscient narrator, who concentrates on Ping, in a straightforward, chronological story. The book takes place in Northeastern China during the Han Dynasty. While the story centers around Ping, an 11-year-old slave girl, the only other really important character is a dragon. Long Danzi is supposed to have lived for hundreds of years and when he speaks he does so in terse pronouncements that sound like ancient wisdom. A good example of this is the following quote, “Sometimes advancing seems like going backward” (p. 196).

- **2003*, Rain May and Captain Daniel* (Bateson), ages 9-12 (realistic fiction)-Australia**

Rain May and Captain Daniel is the story of Rain, a 12-year-old girl, who moves to a small town in Australia from Melbourne after her parents’ divorce. It is there where she befriends Daniel, an 11-year-old boy who is obsessed with Star Trek. While Rain comes to terms with living in a small town, her mother’s new ways, her father and his live-in girlfriend, Julia, she becomes increasingly close to Daniel who, we learn, is very ill with a defective heart and almost dies.

The story is also Daniels'. Interspersed with Rain's narrative are "Captain's Logs" written as if Daniel is on the show Star Trek observing the strange life forms next store. His logs concern his inability to connect with his family and to make friends. Daniel also writes a great deal about Rain and her friendship.

The text is narrated partially by Rain in first-person memoir and partially by Daniel in present tense journal (log) entries. Throughout the story there are poems that Rain and her mother write to each other with refrigerator magnets. The story takes place during a school year in rural Australia in a town that doesn't even have takeout pizza.

The major adult characters in *Rain May and Captain Daniel* are Maggie, Rain's mother, Rain's father, Rain's father's girlfriend, Julia, and Daniel's mother Diana. While Rain makes friends in school, the vast majority of the story centers on her and Daniel. Rain and Daniel are both living in comfortable, middle class circumstances. Rain's father is in computers; her mother is able to not work, as is Daniel's mother whose husband is a doctor.

While most of the action takes place in the small, rural town, both children spend time in Melbourne, a large city in Australia. In the realistic fiction genre, the story feels modern and is replete with up to date slang, although the theme of Star Trek seems to be a bit old fashioned.

Patterns of the Texts

Genre

The vast majority of the texts fall in the realistic fiction genre: *Just in Case, Millions, Ruby Holler, The Higher Power of Lucky, Criss Cross, Beeing Bee, Helicopter*

Man, And *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. *Tamar*, *A Gathering Light*, *Kira-Kira*, *Crispin*, and *The Silver Donkey* are historical fiction. *The Tale of Despereaux* is a fairy tale, and *Dragon Keeper* is considered a high fantasy novel (Lukens, 2007).

Narration

The child protagonist tells her/his own story in the following novels: *Tamar*, *Millions*, *A Gathering Light*, *Kira-Kira*, *Crispin*, *Beeing Bee*, *Helicopter Man*, and *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. All other novels are narrated by an omniscient narrator, barring, *Just in Case*, which is narrated by Fate. Temporally, all novels are narrated in the past tense, other than *A Gathering Light*, which is told in the present tense.

Family

In the fifteen texts I analyzed, four: *Kira-Kira*, *Just in Case*, *The Tale of Despereaux*, and *The Silver Donkey*, have the protagonist living in a nuclear family. By nuclear family, I am referring to a family with a mother, a father, and child(ren) living together under one roof. In four novels: *Ruby Holler*, *Dragon Keeper*, *Crispin*, and *The Higher Power of Lucky* the main child characters have no home or family. The Twins, Florida and Dallas, have been given up by their biological mother and have never been adopted. Crispin's mother is dead and his father, he believes, is deceased. Ping's family sold her in slavery. While Lucky has a father, he does not choose to care for her, and after her mother dies she is cared for by a Guardian. In *Millions*, *A Gathering Light*, *Helicopter Man*, and *Beeing Bee*, the child lives with her/his father as the mother is dead. Only in one novel, *Rain May and Captain Daniel* are the parents divorced. In the novel *Criss Cross*, the many characters live in nuclear families.

In seven of the novels: *Tamar*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, *Crispin*, *Beeing Bee*, *Helicopter Man*, *Dragon Keeper*, and *Rain May and Captain Daniel*, the protagonist is an only child. In J*ust in Case*, *Millions*, *Ruby Holler*, and *Criss Cross*, the main child character(s) has one sibling. In the other four novels the child lives in a family with more than one sibling.

Demographics

In twelve of the novels the main child character(s) is white. I am using the idea of white privilege (McIntosh, 1988) that claims whiteness is an unmarked category and in twelve of the novels the reader will assume whiteness because of a lack of markedness. The protagonist in *Kira-Kira* is of Japanese decent and Ping, in *Dragon Keeper*, is Chinese. Despereaux cannot be counted as he is a mouse. I am, however, counting him as a boy because he is referred to by male pronouns.

Less skewed, gender is eleven girls protagonists compared with seven boy protagonists. The number eighteen counts twelve of the novels as having only one main character, while *Criss Cross*, *Ruby Holler*, and *The Silver Donkey* each have two main characters. All characters are to be considered heterosexual in that their sexuality for the most part is not mentioned, leaving heterosexuality as the unmarked category. In the novels that do feature sexual desire, *Just in Case*, *A Gathering Light*, *Despereaux*, and *Tamar*, all child characters are interested in partners of the opposite sex.

The youngest child in the text set is Coco, from *The Silver Donkey*, at eight-years-old. Next comes Lucky and Marcelle (Coco's sister) who are ten-years-old. Damien and Ping are eleven, Pete, Rain May, and Katie are twelve, Crispin and the Twins, Dallas and

Florida, are thirteen, Debbie and Hector, from *Criss Cross*, are fourteen, and Justin and Tamar are fifteen. Mattie is the oldest character, at sixteen. Despereaux and Bee have no ages specified, we can assume they are somewhere in the ballpark of the intended reader's age of eight to twelve-year- old.

SES among the child protagonists is varied. Six of the novels feature middle class families, again, reckoned by lack of clues otherwise. These include: *Just in Case*, *Tamar*, *Millions*, *Criss Cross*, *Beeing Bee*, and *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. In *A Gathering Light*, *Kira-Kira*, and the *Silver Donkey*, the families could be considered working poor. There is enough money for food and shelter, but not for extras. In *Crispin*, *Helicopter Man*, and *Dragon Keeper*, the child characters are destitute, living day to day, homeless, not knowing where their next meal is coming from. The Twins in *Ruby Holler* are also poor, but this depends on with whom they are living. Despereaux, once again, is hard to pinpoint. Lucky, is poor, she receives government surplus food, but her father also helps out and she doesn't discuss money at all.

Setting

Seven of the novels take place in a rural setting: *A Gathering Light*, *Ruby Holler*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, *Criss Cross*, *Kira-Kira*, *The Silver Donkey*, and *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. Two of the novels, *Tamar* and *Beeing Bee*, take place in large urban areas and the rest of the novels are, essentially, setting-less, as the characters travel in *Crispin*, *Helicopter Man*, and *Dragon Keeper*. *Despereaux* takes place in a mythical place called the Kingdom of Gor.

Just In Case is set in the United Kingdom as is *Millions, Tamar*, and *Crispin*. The United States is home to the following novels: *A Gathering Light*, *Ruby Holler*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, *Criss Cross, and Kira-Kira. Being Bee*, *Helicopter Man*, and *Rain May and Captain Daniel* take place in Australia. *The Silver Donkey* is set in France, and the action in *Dragon Keeper* is in China.

The demographics match similar studies I have read about Newbery Award winning novels (Cook, 1985; Parravano, 1989). The children are almost all white, close to puberty, and heterosexual. The differences I found in this newer collection of books are the greater prevalence of city settings, the greater class diversity among the child protagonists, and the overrepresentation of girl characters.

Meta-Plots, Childhoods and The Text Set Novels

Meta-plot is a concept I used to challenge what other scholars refer to as a "typical plot" (Nodelman, 2008; Clark, 2001; Bates, 2007). Meta-plot can be defined by first defining the prefix "meta" and then the root word, "plot." Meta, as defined in the Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary, is used to signify a new but related discipline designed to deal critically with the original one. In this case the thing being dealt with is the plot, or the actions of characters in a story. Meta-plot, for this study, is a critical and new look at the "typical" plot discussed, or ignored, in previous scholarship. The typical plot being one in which the child protagonist in children's literature leaves home to go on a journey and then returns home at the end of the story. This is not the trajectory I found in my text set.

According to Nodelman (2009), the typical children's literature plot follows the child protagonist on a journey from a safe home to the outside world and then back to the safe home again. *In the Night Kitchen* (Sendak, 1970) is an example of this journey par excellence. Mickey falls from his comfortable bed past his mother and father to the night kitchen where he saves the day by pouring milk in to the cake batter. The end of the book finds Mickey safe in his bed waking up to eat his morning cakes. Mickey's childhood includes a mother and a father, some adventure, and then back to the safety of mom and dad again.

Bates (2007) looks at two different typical plots. The first is found in fairy tales and the second is located in classic children's literature. The plot of the fairy tale is the child protagonist separated or abandoned by the "evil" parent or step-parent. She then must make her way through a perilous world, facing all kinds of danger, in order to return home. Back home the child protagonist rewards the good parent and punishes the evil parent.

An example of this journey can be found in Hansel and Gretel. The children are abandoned in the forest by their duped father at the behest of their evil stepmother. They battle the cruel witch, ultimately killing her and stealing her money. They return home to reward their father, the good parent, by sharing their wealth with him. In this instance the evil parent, the step-mother, in some versions of the story, has already been punished with death by starvation.

The other typical plot, the one of classic children's literature, involves the child leaving home on her own or by magic. Like the children in fairy tales, these children also

must face danger on their way home. Once home there is no reward or punishment for the parents as the separation was not the parents' fault. An example of this plot can be found in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865). Alice leaves home "as an indirect result of her own action (Bates, 2007, p. 49). In Wonderland Alice has adventures and escapes danger. She "goes home" by waking up.

These are not the childhood journeys I encountered in my research. I found in my data set (in 12 out of the 15 books) a different typical plot, one that follows the child from a place she doesn't (or can't) consider home to a journey, psychological or literal, to a new home that the child has constructed. The failed home at the beginning has its roots in fairy tales and is discussed by Bates (2007). However, my findings differ from Bates and Nodelman in the homecoming portion of the plot. The children don't return to the same home, if they return home at all. The child protagonist constructs a new home. This new construction is not to reward or punish a parent but is for the child's benefit.

The original home is no longer working or dysfunctional. This failure may be decided by the adult, as in *Rain May and Captain Daniel* or by the child herself as evidenced in *Just in Case*. Regardless, the child must act to change residences, real or imagined. This action can involve letting go of a dead mother, as in *The Higher Power of Lucky* and *A Gathering Light*, or it can involve learning to accept a new mother, as in *Beeing Bee*. Sometimes the child must flee. In *Dragon Keeper* the slave-girl Ping has to go with the Dragon because she believes if she stays with her Master she will suffer a terrible punishment. In the cases of *Helicopter Man* and *Ruby Holler* the children have no home at all.

This action is usually accomplished alone, although in the example of *The Silver Donkey* the child protagonist is really two sisters who are discussed as almost one entity. These actions involve extraordinary mettle of the child, mettle that may be called bravery, cunning, and resilience. This action is a form of *parrhesia*, the Foucauldian concept of speaking truth to power with the knowledge that this speech involves a certain amount of risk on the speaker's part (Pearson, 1985). I will discuss *parrhesia* in its own category after this initial foray into meta-plot.

And then the story ends and the child is home (again). But this home is not a place the child comes to but a place the child creates. The home itself is a metaphor for the safety, love, and acceptance the child creates, or what might be called a family. Sometimes this family is the original one, but the relationship is on the child's terms. In *Millions* Damien stays with his father and brother in the same home but ensures that the money his family tries to fritter away on material possessions goes to a charity that builds wells in Africa. Other times the child leaves all she knows to go somewhere totally new to lead the life she wants to. In *Tamar*, Tamar is reunited with her runaway father in England but finds her home with a distant cousin in Holland.

The child's relationship in this created/constructed home can be explained more deeply by using Buber's (1923) ideas about relationship. In each of these novels the child is, in the beginning, an object of the adult, what Buber refers to as an I/It relationship. The child is something for the adult to deal with, an obstruction, and a problem. Conversely, as I show in chapter five, adults, for children, are often seen as obstacles to

the child meeting her needs as well. However, the adult, the one in power, always inhabits the “I’ position.

At the end of the journey, when the child has constructed her new home, she has also constructed a new relationship with the adults in her life. The adult and child are connected in an I/You relationship. This relationship is non-hierarchical, in that it allows both the adult and child subjectivity. The child to the adult and the adult to the child are viewed as necessary for each other’s survival. After I analyzed the *parrhesiatic* act I found in each novel I looked for changes in the adult/child dynamic from a relationship of I/It to one of I/You.

What all the novels in the data set have in common is the idea that childhood is not an idyllic time. The home you come from may be safe at one time but the safety disappears. Children in these stories can’t go home again because their home isn’t where they want to dwell. Home isn’t a place of refuge or comfort. Children must set out on their own and make sense of the past in order to construct a better home, a place of their own creation.

In order to discuss this idea further I will look at what I call the meta-plots of each book (in the same order as listed above). I will then discuss these narratives in the context of the whole. Like Nodelman, “My main goal is knowledge of the texts themselves, and, specifically, of their various relationships with each other” (2008, p.124).

Just in Case

David Case’s home of origin becomes unsafe at the beginning of the novel when his brother Charlie almost falls out of a second story window. David saves him but

instead of celebrating the good outcome he becomes obsessed with what could have happened.

> My god, David thought. If I'd been two seconds slower he'd be dead. My brother would be dead but *I'd* be the one shattered, crushed, destroyed by guilt and blame and everyone everywhere for the rest of my life whispering *He's that kid who killed his brother*. Two seconds. Just two seconds were all that stood between normal everyday life and utter, total catastrophe. (p. 3)

David decides that he beat Fate this time but Fate will get him in the end. His world becomes a frightening place where something bad can happen at anytime anywhere. We learn from Charlie's narrative that this existential breakdown didn't just happen suddenly but was in the works for the past couple of years. Charlie looks at pictures of younger David and thinks, "The younger David looked cheerful and carefree… [he] gazed at the camera with expressions of trust…" (p. 6). Charlie notices that as David ages his photos begin to blur, "sometime between playing football at thirteen and losing his status of only child the following year" (p. 7).

This could be interpreted as that combination of puberty and a new sibling plus a near miss with Fate is what renders David's home, his entire life, unworkable. This forces David to make a journey to run from fate, to find somewhere safe to hide. He does this by changing his name to Justin, and his look with the help of Agnes, a photographer he meets in a clothing store. David/Justin is essentially recreating himself without the help of his parents, who rarely notice him. When they do their main concern seems to be David's possible homosexuality. Trying to create a sense of safety on his own, Justin

invents an imaginary greyhound called Boy, “The thought of a pet, even an imaginary pet, soothed him” (p. 25).

Justin also runs away from home as he is afraid Fate will find him there. He stays at the airport for three days basking the in the anonymity, but, as Fate would have it, an airplane crashes into the terminal, causing fire and death. Justin narrowly escapes and believes, once again, that Fate just missed him. He then seeks comfort and safety with Agnes. But her home isn’t safe either as she is seemingly using him as a free model for photographs to be in an upcoming show entitled, “Doomed Youth.” Instead of being a motherly figure, she is in her twenties, Agnes ends up having sex with the virgin Justin, further confusing him when she tells him the sex was a mistake and she doesn’t love him.

Alone and depressed, his imaginary dog disappears in the airport fire, Justin goes to his friend Peter’s house to stay. Peter and his two sisters (his mother is always at work and there is no mention of a father) offer Justin space and time to heal. His dog returns and the children of the family can see this as well. Just as Justin is starting to heal he, by a series of coincidences, contracts meningitis and almost dies. It in the hospital that Justin comes to terms with his epic struggle. This is where he constructs a new family with his brother Charlie. Justin realizes that though something bad really happened to him he wants to live in the uncertainty of life.

> Of course, Justin thought, I’m part of his (Charlie’s) fate just as he’s part of mine. I hadn’t considered it from his point of view…A butterfly flaps its wings in Africa and my brother in Luton thinks he can fly. The child (Charlie) nodded. A piano

> might fall on your head, he said. But it also might not. And in the meantime you never know. Something nice might happen. (p. 242)

With Justin's fate mixed with Charlie's the reader has a sense that Justin can go home again to a home that will feel safer as he is no longer alone. But it only through his struggle with Fate that Justin was able to reach that point. He was helped by Peter and his sisters and, ultimately, by Charlie. Many of the adults in his life let him down. His parents had no idea what was happening in his life and seemed relieved that he found alterative housing. His "friend" Agnes used him as a model and object. Ironically, because of all of this neglect from adults Justin was able to go on. As the last lines of the book read, "And a great number of things happened to Justin. Hundreds of millions of ordinary, unexpected, and occasionally quite astonishing things. And that was his fate" (p. 245).

Childhood, according to the example set forth in *Just in Case*, seems a dicey business. David *was* happy, but as he grew up his life became one of anxiety and alienation, playing into the whole tacit theory that adolescence must equal angst. It is interesting to note that David as a teenage boy is hurt by his first sexual experience. He equated sex with love, something that breaks with our traditional views that what all teenage boys want in gratuitous sex.

This novel may also suggest that many parents may be incapable of helping with a crisis of faith in the world. The succor received by Justin was from children his own age and younger. And Justin himself supplies his own safety. He goes out into the world to hide, but does it alone, with little money and few friends. He needs a dog to comfort and

protect him so he creates one. He needs a disguise and he creates this as well. At the end of the book when Justin is lingering between life and death he chooses life on his own terms. It is almost as if he *chooses* to be born this time. His brother "speaks" to him (this is, of course, up for debate as Charlie is one-years-old), but Justin does hear his thoughts and he comes back to let his brother know he will be there for him. After Charlie puts his Christmas present on Justin's bed, Justin slowly wakes up from his coma and speaks for the first time. "'OK', Justin replied, weakly but distinctly. And then with a good deal of effort. He opened his eyes to meet the deep black eyes of his brother's Christmas dog" (p. 243).

Tamar

The novel *Tamar* is two stories in one. For this portion I will concentrate only on the narrative concerning Tamar, the 15-year-old girl living in London. The other narrative, the one about Dart and Tamar, the spies in Holland, is in my analysis to contextualize the aforementioned narrative.

In the novel *Tamar*, home is a place full of secrets and guilt. Even Tamar's name is part of a giant conspiracy her step-grandfather, William, conducts in order to salve his tortured soul, as she is named after the man he murdered (her biological grandfather). Tamar embodies, through her name, the lies and hurts of the past and begins life as a tool for redemption. Her home is also a failed place as her father disappears without a trace one day when she is ten-years-old. Tamar's mother, instead of filling both parental roles, spends more and more time with her lover leaving Tamar in the care of her grandparents,

William and Marijke, a couple whose entire relationship and marriage of forty plus years is founded on lies and deceit.

When Marijke goes into a home for Alzheimer patients and William subsequently commits suicide, Tamar chooses to leave home, this time her mother's home, to discover her family's past, but perhaps she doesn't really have a choice. William has left her a shoebox. When Tamar finds it she, "absolutely did not want to touch it…I didn't open it until nearly three months later" (p. 194). At first she is scared of what she will find in the box and then she is too angry with William for killing himself, but finally she starts dreaming of him as a severed head and, "I felt sorry for the head. I wanted to help it but I didn't know how" (p. 195).

She opens the box and finds it contains 1945 pounds, maps of the Tamar River, an identity card from the Nazi era, and an old picture of two men who look almost like Twins. Knowing William's love of puzzles, Tamar quickly realizes this box is a mystery to solve, one that is important enough that her grandfather took the time to meticulously prepare it for her prior to his suicide. She thinks, "I knew that these things fitted together in some way, and I had to find out how" (p. 196). Tamar is compelled to go ahead on the journey with more than just curiosity, "It felt like opening the door to a dark cellar and not being able to see the stairs" (p. 202). She has long sensed William's reserve and knows that he is hiding something. Tamar laments, "If granddad wanted to tell me who he really was, why wait until he was dead?" (p. 202).

Tamar sets off on the journey with a 19-year-old university student called Yoyo who is a distant cousin. She invites him, much to her mother's dismay. This is also a risk

as he has made it clear he desires her, but Tamar goes ahead with so many unknowns to a place that is unknown. Through this journey which is physically safe, they have a car and plenty of money, Tamar is not psychologically safe. She is setting off on a trip orchestrated by a dead man, compelled to do so by a past she had no part in. They find the river Tamar and stop at all of the places William had circled on the maps. Nothing happens. And then everything does as Tamar and Yoyo kiss and she finds her father.

Tamar is on a journey William had made a few years before. She is following his exact path to her father. Jan, her father, has found out that William had his real father, Tamar, murdered, and William makes the trip to ask for forgiveness. Jan explains to Tamar that when he found out the truth about his family he "sat down on a bench and died" (p. 413). Jan cannot forgive, cannot return home to his family and eventually William kills himself over the guilt. Tamar is, once again, the tool of redemption. She finds her father, hears the whole of the story, and is expected to redeem William somehow in the afterlife and her father for his abandonment in this life. But Tamar makes her own decisions. She ends her visit to her father by "walking out into what was left of the daylight" (419).

This daylight could be interpreted as Tamar walking away from the darkness of her family toward her own destiny. The story ends with Tamar ten years later pregnant with Yoyo's child and far from home in Amsterdam. She writes, "The past is a dark house, and we only have torches with dying batteries. It's probably best not to spend too much time in there in case the rotten floor gives way beneath our feet, like it did for Dad.

Like it nearly did for me" (p. 423). *Nearly*. Tamar was able to discover the truth and make her own future, presumably leaving her old family behind.

Millions

In the novel *Millions* Damien's home is failed by the death of his mother Maureen and his fear of abandonment by his father. He thinks, "One thing about me is that I always really try to do whatever Dad tells me. It's not that I think he'll go off and leave us if we're a problem, but why take the risk?" (p. 3). Damien becomes obsessed by Catholic Saints as his mother lies dying in the hospital. After his mother dies he continues to learn about Saints on the website totallysaints.com, "It was good to read about all the miracles they did and to think that things did not always turn out the way you expected" (p. 39). Damien is hoping that he may find a Saint who will give him hope that his mother will make it. His obsession with Saints is a way to be good, to be able to see his mother again in Heaven.

While the major action of *Millions* is the story of the money, Damien's journey has very little to do with the money other than he sees it as a reward from Heaven for being good. The money is a sign that he is on the right path, nothing more. When Damien first shows his brother Anthony the bag of money he explains its appearance this way;

> You know when you tell people Mum is dead and they give you stuff?
>
> He nodded.
>
> Well, I told G-d. (p. 53)

While Damien and his brother Anthony are attempting to spend the money before "Euro day", Damien also spends his time in his hermitage he built in the backyard trying

to be more saint like. He sleeps on the floor of his bedroom and puts holly in his shirt to mortify his flesh, trying desperately to be good. And then Damien gets visited by Saints. The reader never knows if these are Damien's fantasies or actual visitations, but this point isn't the point as these visits give Damien a chance to ask the Saints about his mother.

Damien's journey is about the struggle to be good, when how to be good is no longer obvious. He is confronted with these conundrums in little ways as shown by the following example. The doorbell rings, but Damien is told by his father never to answer the door when his father isn't home. However Damien needs to open the door in order to walk to school:

> So it was a moral dilemma—answer the door (disobedient) and be on time for school (good), or don't answer the door (good) and be late for school (bad). (p. 25)

Some of Damien's dilemmas are far more serious. His father can only speak of his mother's death euphemistically, as in "she's in a better place." But, as Damien points out, no one ever showed him this better place.

> They just said, "She's gone to a better place and now you have to be really, really, really, good boys for your dad." They seemed to be hinting that *he* [my italics] might go off to the better place himself if we weren't careful. So we were careful. Always. All the time. (p. 40)

Damien must make sense of this, how to keep his father from leaving as well and how to find his mother. He does this by always trying to be "excellent." Every Saint

Damien meets is asked if she knows St. Maureen (his mother) but none of them do. Damien persists in his quest, alone.

And then he meets St Peter who helps him start to see there may be a different way. Telling the "real" story of Jesus' miracle with the loaves and the fishes, St. Peter makes the hero of the story a young boy.

> A little kid stood up and was read to be generous and that's all it took. One little kid. He wasn't planning to save the world. He was planning lunch. He just did the right thing at the right time…Do you understand what I'm talking about?
>
> A bit.
>
> I'm talking about you. (p.177)

St Peter's story of a child who saved the world by just being himself spurs Damien from being scared and reactionary to being resilient. Through his quick thinking he saves the money, his family from harm, and, ultimately, himself. This is evidenced by his mother making a post grave visit to Damien at the end of the story. Through his actions he is able to find her in his own back yard. He asks if she's an actual Saint.

> Oh, I'm in there. Course I am.
>
> What was your miracle?
>
> Don't you know? She looked me up and down, then said very quietly, It was you (p.241).

Whether this visit is imaginary or not, it confirms that Damien *is* good, he will be okay. Damien can finally relax. The money is burned, the criminals have been caught, and he, miraculously, isn't involved in the scandal. Damien discovers he is the only one

who didn't pocket some of the money to keep for himself; of course he is too honest for that. When his family decides to spend the leftover money on charity, Damien's idea, it feels like he is home again, but in a newly constructed home where he doesn't have to worry about his father disappearing, his mother's saintliness, and where the temptations of money are burned or spent.

For Damien childhood is an intensely lonely time. He worries by himself and no one around him, including his brother, can understand. His father, teachers, and brother think he is emotionally disturbed. Damien, like many people, finds comfort and meaning in faith. What changes for him in his journey is that he learns to place some of his faith in himself. He comes to terms with the fact his mother really did go to a better place. She is a Saint and she is in Heaven. He can live on.

A Gathering Light

Mattie's life in *A Gathering Light* is also changed by her mother's death. On her deathbed, her mother makes Mattie promise she will always be there for her family.

> As she (Mattie's mother) cried and cried, franticly telling me that Pa didn't know how to braid hair, or mend a dress or put up beans
>
> I saw her as she begged me never to go away, as she made me promise to stay and take care of her babies.
>
> And I saw myself, tears in my eyes, promising her I would. (p. 211)

Mattie tries to keep her promise as not soon after her mother's death her older brother runs away, which leaves her doubly bound to her family. She takes on the responsibility, but it brings her no joy. Her father is unhappy, the younger children

unruly, and she is not prepared emotionally or intellectually to fulfill this role. Mattie's home is one of dreams deferred, not love and support.

Mattie's need is to go to college and despite her father's grumbling about high school, she manages to get a full scholarship to Barnard. What is holding her back is her promises and her guilt.

> My mother left us. My brother, too…my pa stayed, though. My pa always stayed.
>
> I looked at him. And saw the sweat stains on his shirt. And his big, scarred hands. And his dirty, weary face, I remembered how, lying in my bed a few nights before, I had looked forward to showing him my uncle's money. To telling him I was leaving.
>
> And I was so ashamed. (p. 172)

Mattie tries to make the best of things. She is a gifted writer but can't write for lack of paper. When she manages to make a little bit of money and buy a notebook her father burns it because she should have used the money to help the family. Her fiancée, Royal, goads her about her love of the written word. He asks her, "Why do you always want to read about other people's lives, Matt? Ain't your own good enough for you?" (p. 190). He doesn't understand her need for a wider world, other narratives, and expression. Mattie tries to conform and allows herself to believe that marrying Royal is what she is supposed to do when he kisses her she thinks,

> And so I closed my eyes and all I knew was his nearness. And all I wanted was my own story and no one else's.

And so I said nothing. Nothing at all. (p. 192).

But Mattie is one of those people who can't conform, cannot keep quiet. She goes off to a hotel to make money to help her family in an emergency. While there she is given a packet of letters by Grace Brown who is murdered by her lover, to burn. But Mattie doesn't obey and through the letters she reads the world she doesn't want to be a part of. This is a world where a girl can be so totally dependent on a man she loses herself and her life. Mattie realizes that she cannot stay, despite the fact that she is, "good at telling myself lies" (p. 1). She realizes she is denying herself a future to please everyone else. Mattie calls her hope, "the eight deadliest sin. The one G-d left out" (p. 114).

Mattie's journey continues with the help of seeing what she doesn't want to be in her friend Minnie, a girl who has followed the status quo, gotten married, gotten pregnant, and stayed put. After spending an afternoon with Minnie and her Twins Mattie thinks;

> I knew then why they didn't marry. Emily and Jane and Louisa. I knew and it scared me. I also knew what being lonely was and I didn't want to be lonely my whole life. I didn't want to give up my words. I didn't want to choose one over the other. (p.274)

Mattie begins to see the world as full of possibilities, that a young woman can have love and a career. She sees that she needn't give up who she is to please those she must leave behind. And Mattie does leave them all behind. Her family. Her fiancée. Her dead mother's wishes. Mattie also doesn't keep her promise to Grace, to burn her letters. She gives them to the authorities before she leaves for the city. "I'm not going to do it,

Grace, I whisper to her. Haunt me if you want to, but I'm not going to do it" (p. 374). By Mattie turning her back on promises to the dead she is freeing herself to go on living.

Ruby Holler

In *Ruby Holler* the Twins, Dallas and Florida, have no real home to leave, but a series of mentally and physically abusive places that substituted as "home." The Dickensonian world Creech creates has Dallas witness a young boy who dies from neglect asking, "Who am I? Who am I?" (p.94). The Twins are constantly told from a young age that they are bad and aren't deserving of a "real" family. "She (Florida) was five, and what she felt was that she and Dallas had been very bad and they would never be in a real family" (p.19).

Despite being locked in basements for the smallest rule infraction (e.g. laughing or running) Florida and Dallas keep up their spirits by planning to run away on a freight train.

> Don't think about them, Dallas said. Erase them. Someday we'll get on that freight train and ride out of town and we'll be on our own, and we won't have to put up with people like that. Someday we'll; live in a beautiful place, and…. (p.20)

Their home is failed and they know they must seek a new home. They also have learned that adults cannot be trusted as every foster family has let them down. But the Twins do trust each other. Unlike the other characters in the text set, Dallas and Florida are never alone. They have promised never to part and their personalities balance each other out with Dallas being the dreamer and Florida the realist.

In an interesting twist on the meta-plot, this story involves the Twin's making a journey that will separate them. Strangely, Florida and Dallas are given the opportunity to go to Ruby Holler to serve as companions to Tiller and Sairy. This arrangement is not typical in any way unless you compare it with the Fresh Air foundation for children in New York City. The Twins go expecting to be abused and neglected and are constantly surprised at the fair and kind treatment Sairy and Tiller provide.

They learn to live with the anomaly of no rules, plentiful food, and pay for their chores. At first the Twins decide to use the money to escape on the train but as time goes on they begin to see that maybe they aren't so bad after all and there may be adults who can help them. One night as Florida is going to sleep in her clean comfortable bed,

> Florida heard the faint wail of the freight train as it wound its way through the distant hills, and she pulled the quilt up close to her face. The train sounded so lonely. (p. 74)

This is the first part of their journey, learning to trust Tiller and Sairy. The second potion is the "test run" of the actual physical trips Sairy and Dallas and Tiller and Florida will make. The trips are disastrous, Sairy and Dallas get lost hiking and Florida almost drowns while Tiller is having a heart attack. Florida ends up saving Tiller's life. Both duos realize they can't live without the other person. It is interesting that Florida, the tougher twin, almost dies, almost as if she can't make it in the world without her brother's softening hopeful attitude.

The Twins emerge from these journeys with the idea that they may be good after all. At the end of *Ruby Holler* the Twins discover they have a choice. They can create

their own family with Tiller and Sairy. They can hope and not be disappointed. Earlier in the story when the Twins make an attempt to run away Tiller and Sairy finds them and greets them with a fresh breakfast cooked in the woods. With hope and more self esteem the Twins "run away" again. This risky choice the children make pays off. When they awake in the forest:

> Dallas lifted his head and glanced at Florida.
>
> Dallas, take a whiff. What's that you smell?
>
> He inhaled. It was the best smell in the world.
>
> Bacon. Welcome home bacon. (p. 310)

The reader assumes this bacon represents Tiller and Sairy's willingness to continue to assume parental roles in the Twins' lives. The Twins make the choice to try and be a part of a family, to see themselves as capable of love and acceptance and, at the end of the story, the choice seems to have paid off.

The Higher Power of Lucky

The Higher Power of Lucky follows the similar meta-plot configuration. Lucky's home is failed. Her mother has died two years before. Lucky does have a father but he refuses to care for her, and, instead, works out a temporary arrangement for Brigitte, his first wife, to care for Lucky until things can be sorted out. This leaves Lucky in the position of a Ward, a role she describes this way:

> A ward must stay alert, carry a well-equipped survival kit at all times, and watch out for danger signs---because of the strange and terrible and good and bad things that happen when you least expect them. (p. 16)

Lucky's description of Ward is not conducive to having and maintaining an atmosphere of safety. She knows that this arrangement is temporary and because of this she must always be on her toes. If a home is supposed to offer love, safety, and acceptance, this one has failed in the safety department. How can a person feel safe in a temporary arrangement, even one that lasts for over two years?

It can be argued that Brigitte loves Lucky and intends to keep her. This interpretation may be true, but it does not position this novel in the "typical plot" motif (Nodelman, 2009). Lucky does not understand that Brigitte will stay. Throughout the story she is aware that Brigitte could leave at any time like her biological mother did. By not explaining to Lucky her long term plans, Brigitte gives Lucky the appearance of a home that could fail at any moment.

Aside from her Ward status, Lucky is also grappling with another big conundrum, how to find a Higher Power. She is keenly aware of her oppressed role in society as both a child and as a Ward.

> Being ten and a half, Lucky felt like she had no control over her life---partly because she wasn't grown up yet---but if she found her Higher Power it would guide her in the right direction. (p. 5)

Lucky is frustrated that no one speaks of how this Higher Power is found. Of course, no one speaks to Lucky about the subject at all; all she learns is gleaned from eavesdropping on 12-step meetings. After one of these meetings Lucky thinks, "It was a little disappointing that today nobody had explained how exactly they had found their Higher Power, which was what Lucky was mainly interested in fining out about" (p. 5).

Lucky needs to find her Higher Power to deal with the loss of her mother. Still in the process of accepting her mother's death, Lucky seems to be stuck on the anger step. She lists good and bad traits of mothers, with the good traits being ways her mother failed her, for example, "Pick a husband who will be a solid father for your child and can be counted on to take over if anything bad happens" (p. 14). Lucky's mother marries and divorces a man who never wants children. Her mother also fits the bad traits by, "Marrying a husband who does not like children" (p. 14).

Lucky is never sure that Brigitte will stay. Brigitte does not help matters by crying whenever her mother calls her from France and bemoaning the poverty Lucky's father leaves them in, "Brigitte sighed,. She kept staring out the window. 'No, only the little check that is never enough'" (p. 48). One day Brigitte tells Miles, a neighbor boy, about how she came to be in Hard Pan,

> For a long time we cannot find any foster family for Lucky. Then her father tells me all the paperwork for California will be easier is I become her Guardian…I say okay…
>
> Lucky was thinking that even though Brigitte said okay, she meant only until they did find a foster family (p. 42).

Lucky never asks Brigitte what the future holds, she may be too scared to. Instead, Lucky looks for signs. These are mostly little, nuanced, signs like the pet names Brigitte calls her in French translate to "my cabbage" and "my flea." Lucky interprets these pet names as less than loving, that Brigitte would, "call her French baby something lovely and tender" (p. 10).

Lucky stays in this failed family for most of the book (pp. 1-76) and then she hits "Rock Bottom" and must set out in order to construct a new family. Lucky is using 12-step programs as a guide to solving problems, she sees herself like the anonymous people, "Only after they'd hit rock bottom did they get control of their lives. And then they found their Higher Power" (p. 79). Lucky's rock bottom is finding in Brigitte's room a new suitcase with her French passport inside. "The only reason people need a passport is when they travel from one country to another country. Now she [Lucky] realized what was going on" (p. 79). Lucky is convinced her temporary home will be vacant and she will be forced to move in with a real foster family.

But taking control is complicated by Lucky's perception that she is, as a child, helpless as children need to have an adult to care for them.

> It's almost impossible to get control of your life when you're only ten. It's other people, adults, who have control over your life, because they can abandon you.
>
> They can die, like Lucky's mother.
>
> They can decide they don't even want you, Like Lucky's father.
>
> And they can return to France as suddenly and easily as they left it, like Brigitte. (p. 80)

Lucky decides to run away from home with her survival backpack and her mother's ashes. She can no longer wait, but forces Brigitte to choose to come and get her. "The best way would be if Brigitte made her own decision to stay because she loved Lucky, And in order for Brigitte to realize how much she loved her Ward, the Ward had to run away" (p. 103). Lucky hopes to run away long enough to force Brigitte's hand

which has power over her. “Brigitte would feel sorry and worried and abandoned, and that would make her understand exactly how Lucky felt” (p. 103). The risk Lucky assumes is an outcome wherein Brigitte will leave her despite her running away.

Lucky runs away during a sandstorm and meets Miles who is simply lost in the sandstorm. They are found and the entire town comes to celebrate their being found. This is when Lucky constructs her own (new) family. She is wearing the red silk dress Brigitte arrived in (a reminder of the past) and decides to hold her own memorial service for her mother, letting the past go.

Lucky literally lets the past go as she flings her mother’s ashes into the air. She has liberated herself from the past and maybe found her Higher Power after all.

> Suddenly a breeze came, a little afterthought of the storm, as if, Lucky thought, some Higher Power was paying attention and knew what was needed. She walked to the edge of the ring of people and flung the remains of her mother up into the air, and everyone watched, singing as the breeze lifted and carried them out into the great waiting desert. (p. 130)

By running away, Lucky does what she set out to do. Brigitte finally tells her that she is planning to legally adopt Lucky. Perhaps Brigitte was waiting for Lucky to let go of her biological mother, or perhaps Brigitte didn’t understand how Lucky felt. In the end it is Lucky, a ten year old, who gets control by doing something very childish, running away from home.

The Tale of Despereaux

In *The Tale of Despereaux*, the child/mouse protagonist is cast out from his home because he doesn't follow the status quo. Despereaux ignores the call to conform and does everything a mouse shouldn't do, reads, talks to humans, and falls in love with a princess. Like all the homes in this text set, his home is a place of failure (for him). No one understands him, "[his] brothers and sisters soon abandoned the thankless task of trying to educate him in the ways of being a mouse" (p. 26). His own mother can't accept him, "You are such a disappointment to your mama" (p. 18). And his father is the very mouse who reports his misconduct to the mouse council.

> If there is one thing I have learned in this world, said Lester [Despereaux's father], is that mice must act like mice or else there is bound to be trouble. I will call a special meeting of the Mouse Council. Together, we will decide what must be done. (p. 35)

In a typical fairy tale way, Despereaux's journey is a straight line. He is banished to the dungeon where he escapes thanks to his cunning and ends up saving the princess. Despereaux doesn't change on the journey because his epiphany happens at the beginning of the book, when he reads his first fairy tale.

> Once upon a time, he said aloud, relishing the sound. And then, tracing each word with his paw, he read the story of a beautiful princess and the brave knight who serves and honors her. (p. 24)

The journey, for this mouse, is fulfilling the prophesy Despereaux has set out for himself. He is to be the brave knight who serves the princess. And he does. When he

rescues Princess Pea from the dungeon she says, “You are my knight, with a shining needle” (p. 265).

The construction of a new family happens in this story as Despereaux, ever true to himself, does not go back to his family to beg for forgiveness. In fact, he doesn’t go back to his family at all. Despereaux waits for them to come to him.

> *Mon Dieu*. Look, look, says Antoinette [Despereaux’s mother]. He lives. He lives!
>
> And he seems such the happy mouse.
>
> Forgiven, whispers Lester. (p. 259)

Unlike the typical fairy tale, Despereaux does not win the hand of the Princess, but rather her friendship. With Princess Pea, his life is filled with adventures that are hinted of on the closing page, “Those adventures, however, are another story, and this story, I’m afraid, must now draw to a close” (p. 267).

Crispin: Cross of Lead

In *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, the child protagonist, Crispin, is forced to leave his home. Not that this home was ideal. Crispin speaks of his life in Stromford Village as being lonely and marginalized. “I had few friends and none I completely trusted. I was oft the butt of jests, jibes, and relentless hounding” (p. 13). The villagers also shunned his mother, Astra. She couldn’t or wouldn’t offer Crispin the love he needed, “At other times she seemed to find me…repulsive. Sometimes I thought I was the cause of her misery” (p. 108). Regardless, this is the only home Crispin has ever known and he doesn’t view his life and his home as terrible. He is resigned to his fate through his faith in his

particular Christianity practiced in medieval England. His priest gives Crispin this advice, “Be accepting. Think how our Blessed Christ was taunted on His cross” (p. 13).

> This was the life we led. With all my heart I believed that we would continue to live the same until Archangel Gabriel announced the end of time. (p. 15)

Crispin also believes his lot is his own fault. As he spends the night of his mother’s funeral hiding in the woods from punishment for a falsely made charge of robbery he thinks, “Even as I waited for His next blow, I sought, with earnest prayers, forgiveness for my sinful life” (p. 11). Crispin accepts his marginalization as G-d’s will. He realizes he is seen as less than by the villagers and he thinks, “It was if I contained an unnamed sin that made me less than nothing in their eyes” (p. 2).

This faith does not keep Crispin safe from injustice. Injustice is rampant in the system in which they live, the feudal system where the serfs must work tirelessly for their Lord Furnival. However, the other villagers have the succor of friendship, and community, something that is denied Crispin.

Crispin goes to his only friend the Priest who lets him know he has been declared a “wolfs head” or non-person who must be killed. The Priest tells him to flee and then he can later claim his freedom.

> Freedom? I said. What has that to do with me?
>
> You could live by your own choices… (p. 37)

The Priest plants the seed in Crispin’s mind that this is not G-d’s plan, but the evildoing of men. And so Crispin sets out on the prerequisite journey, without hope. “The truth

was---and how great my shame---I no longer wished to live; which, was, I know, a sin" (p. 62).

In a strangely ironic twist, Crispin is enslaved by a man called Bear who declares he, "hate[s] all tyranny" (p. 76). Through his forced relationship with Bear, Crispin is inundated with anomalies that start to change his beliefs. Bear is a lapsed Christian, a man who once trained to be a priest, but who now earns his bread as an entertainer and who is also a spy for the forces opposed to serfdom. When Crispin calls Bear "Sir" he retorts, "Don't call me sir. It's servile" (p. 94). Bear tells Crispin that God abandoned him in seminary. The troop of actors he took up with taught him something more important than can be learned in Church, laughter. And Crispin, too, begins to laugh. He learns how to dance and sing and make music. Bear tells Crispin, "Lose your sorrows and you'll find your freedom" (p. 11). Through Bear Crispin also learns, "There's bad and good" (p. 111). But most important. Crispin learns to question, something he has never done before, "…living by answers is a form of death. It's only questions that keep you living" (p. 111).

In this novel the adult, Bear, offers the child, Crispin, the opportunity to construct a new family. Bear asks Crispin,

> Will you join me? I give you the freedom to choose.
>
> You're my master, I said. I have no choice.
>
> Crispin, decide, he barked.
>
> I shook my head. It's not for me to do so.
>
> Should not every man be the master of himself? (p. 112)

Crispin is not ready for this kind of freedom. When Bear tells him, “The only cross you need is the one in your heart” (p. 114). Crispin is shocked. And yet, though Bear offers him his freedom to set out on his own, Crispin stays with Bear, in part, because Bear is such a good teacher and Crispin soon realizes, “The sooner I learned, I told myself, the longer my life” (p. 130).

Bear tries hard to teach Crispin the “truth” and to strip Crispin of his innocence. Bear remarks, “I can’t make sense of your…innocence. In a ruthless world I find innocence more a puzzle than evil” (p. 138). Bear also works hard to show Crispin he is a free person who is worth something. When he pays Crispin for helping him, Bear explains it this way, “Ah, but you’ve earned it. And we’re free men” (p. 151).

Slowly Bear’s teaching take hold. Crispin thinks, “Never have I felt so free. Never have I had such constant joy” (p. 152). And Crispin begins to love Bear. Like so many children in these books Crispin is afraid to love, because it means the beloved may let you down. This is the turning point in the journey for Crispin. He speaks truth to power with risk by asking Bear, “you…you won’t betray me…will you? (p. 156). For this risk Crispin is rewarded with Bear making Crispin his apprentice. No longer a servant, Crispin truly is a free person.

Of course he is still being hunted and this is what finally tests his newfound agency. Crispin, now aware of his birthright to claim his father, Lord Furnival’s, holdings makes the choice to give up what could be his in order to continue being Bear’s apprentice. In return Crispin gains a family.

> Then he [Bear] said, Crispin…I do love you like a son. Did…did I betray you?
>
> No, Bear, you didn't. And now you're set to be free…We're both leaving. To go free. (pp. 283-284)

Beeing Bee

In the novel *Beeing Bee* the meta-plot follows the trajectory of failed home-journey- child constructed home. Unlike other child protagonists who lose their mothers Bee is okay with just her father. The house is lonelier, "after Mum died. My friends didn't come around as often" (p. 5), but her father lets her be herself.

The novel starts as Bee's home is becoming a failed place. The reader meets Bee at the moment her father gets serious with his new girlfriend, Jazzi. Jazzi comes into Bee's life and turns it upside down. She starts off on the wrong foot by calling Bee "Beatrice", her given name that she can't stand. And then Bee's father changes suddenly. For example, Nick hypocritically tells Bee MacDonald's is no good because Jazzi doesn't approve:

> Too many Big Macs, Dad said, glaring at me, that's the trouble. Sugar in everything these days.
>
> You eat Big Macs! I said.
>
> Dad and I sometimes had MacDonald's breakfasts, when he's slept in. (p. 6)

Bee has to learn quickly to share her space and her father with a woman who is not her choice. The first night Jazzi stays over Bee walks in on the couple by accident. "I

didn't even know Jazzi was still there. It wasn't fair. They could have warned me, even if they'd left a note on the fridge: *Jazzi is sleeping over*" (p. 9).

None of this is in Bee's control. Her father explains that, "I want her to be a permanent fixture in our lives" (p. 10), but Bee doesn't want Jazzi in her life. On the weekend that Bee made her father promise would be Jazzi-free, Jazzi has to be included because she is upset over losing her apartment. Instead of the weekend being about Bee it becomes a weekend about Jazzi with the conclusion that Jazzi will move in. Again, Bee has no say:

> I really want us to live together, Bee…We need each other.
>
> What about me? (p.67)

There is no answer. Bee sets off on a psychological journey to make this situation work for her. She may have no choice in Jazzi being in the home, but Bee does have a choice about how she will fit in this new family configuration.

After Bee makes it clear that Jazzi cannot replace her mother, "You're not my mother, Jazzi, and you never will be" (p. 25), Bee's journey evolves into one of empathy. This journey begins when Bee is introduced to Jazzi's mentally ill brother, Harley, a secret Jazzi has kept from everyone up until now. He calls Jazzi by her given name Jasmine, just like Jazzi calls Bee by her given name Beatrice. Bee finds they have something in common after all.

> I'm not Jasmine…you're too young, Beatrice, to understand…
>
> Bee, I said. Jasmine---Jazzi. Beatrice---Bee. If you'd just remember that we'd get along a lot better, I reckon. (p. 43)

After this the situation begins to change. Bee notices things about Jazzi her father can't see. Jazzi is working really hard to knit Nick a scarf and Nick comments, "It's only knitting. I mean, it's not Michelangelo's ceiling or anything" (p. 59). Bee sees, "tears coming in to Jazzi's eyes" (p. 59). At dinner one evening Nick mentions Bee's mother. Bee is sensitive to Jazzi's feelings.

> I wondered in Jazzi minded Dad mentioning Mum like that. It would be hard loving someone who had loved someone else before you. You'd know all the time that they'd loved the other person and missed them. You might feel second-best.
>
> It's Jazzi's dinner, I said to him [Dad] when I could get him alone for a minute. I don't think you should talk about Mum.
>
> I didn't talk about her, Bee.
>
> You did, Dad, you mentioned her. I don't think you should tonight.
>
> I'm sure Jazzi didn't mind, Bee. I doubt that she even noticed. I hardly noticed myself.
>
> But Jazzi had noticed. I was certain of that. Sometimes Dad didn't pay quite enough attention. (p. 85)

Bee continues on this journey of empathy and then Jazzi does something unforgivable. She inadvertently throws out Bee's Bee Box—a collection of odds and ends Bee has kept that reminds her of her mother. It is as if Jazzi is throwing Bee's past away. "I hate you, I told her. I really do. You've ruined my life Jasmine" (p. 109). It is as if all the concessions Bee has made amounted to nothing. Bee had to give up so much and now she has to give up her mother's memory as well.

Bee runs away to Harley. There she learns that Harley mistakenly allowed Jazzi's dog, a dog she had spoken of with love and regret, to die. Harley tells Bee that Jazzi needs her. He says,

> She [Jazzi] will miss you and miss you. She wants something small like you. Always…She will be scared and sad all over again forever. (p. 118)

Jazzi comes to collect Bee. This is where Bee really starts to construct her relationship with Jazzi. She tells Jazzi, "…we've misjudged each other. I think maybe we should have told each other more" (p. 123). Bee, on her own volition, has her father buy Jazzi a dog to make up for the dog that died long ago. "I chose the dog, of course, because I knew exactly what I was looking for" (p. 125). This is the example par excellence of Bee calling the shots; she picks out the dog because she is forming a relationship with Jazzi on her own terms.

Helicopter Man

In the book *Helicopter Man* Pete, the protagonist, has no home to leave. Because of his father's schizophrenia he is constantly on the run from forces only his father can see. Pete's journey starts after his father is placed in a mental hospital, when he is finally stationary.

Pete's journey is one of coming to terms with his father's sickness and finding out the truth about the lies his father told him. As mentioned above, this journey begins when Pete speaks truth to power and does not help his father escape from the institution. This is when Pete decides to accept the facts; his father is crazy and cannot take of Pete, let alone himself. Pete has a painful epiphany,

> Dad is for real. All of a sudden, I realize for sure that the enemy is not out there, but somewhere in Dad's mind…And I do the hardest thing I ever, ever done…There's a buzzer on the wall and a microphone next to it. I press it and call for help. (p. 105)

This is not an easy time for Pete, he is severely isolated, despite living with his foster parents Prue and Godfrey.

> Don't just feel alone, the really scary thing is I am alone. If you stuck me on Mars and I was standing there in the dark on a rock looking down at earth, I wouldn't feel one bit more lonely than I am now. (p. 95)

He also misses his mother terribly. Pete writes, "The only way I got through this was to think of you, Mum, as my guardian angel" (p. 106). And yet he is angry with her as well. Pete believes she walked out on her dad and him without leaving a note. "I wouldn't leave my kid to go through this all on his own" (p. 126) and that it is partially her fault his father went crazy,

> If she'd left a note, Dad might not have packed us up three days later, straight after the funeral, to go look for her. That's when the wandering began. (p. 126)

About this time Pete dreams about Ms. Weiss, his mother's friend and next-door neighbor. Pete sets out on his first journey of his own choosing. He is determined to find Ms. Weiss to perhaps find out the truth of his mother's abandonment. Pete goes to the neighborhood he lived in with his intact family. A kid who is living in his old house asks, "What y'starin' at? This used to be my old place [Pete answers]. Yeah? Well it's not now" (p. 139).

It's true. Pete cannot go back in time. In fact, in order to move forward with his life he must make peace with the past in order to let it go. Pete eventually finds Ms. Weiss in a nursing home. In her room she has an envelope that says, "For Michael and Peter. Per Kind Favour of Miss A. Weiss" (p. 144). Pete reads the letter meant for him and learns his mother left to find a place for a holiday from Michael, his dad, and she was to fetch him as soon as possible.

Oddly, the choice Pete makes about constructing his family is to stay with his dad with or without mental illness. On the final pages Pete and his Dad take a walk in a park and there is a helicopter, Pete thinks, "If the medication hadn't got rid of the fear, and dad felt he had to run. I'd go with him" (p. 158). But this is still a choice.

Dragon Keeper

In *Dragon Keeper* Ping, the main character must flee her home as she is accused of a crime she didn't commit and of being a sorceress.

> We have to keep a sharp lookout for the sorceress. She will appear to be a young girl, but she's very dangerous. The Emperor has ordered her to be executed on sight. (p. 64)

Ping travels with the imperial dragon Danzi, who she freed, who is on his own journey to bring his "dragon stone" to the ocean. Ping, a slave girl who was sold by her parents, has nowhere else to go and no one else to go with, thus she tags along at first for lack of a better opportunity. Still Ping is scared and wants to go home. Even though Danzi tells her, "Ping no longer slave. Free. Travel with Danzi to Ocean" (p. 67). Eventually Ping realizes she is a fugitive and cannot turn back.

Ping begins this journey believing she is a good-for-nothing slave. Her Master, the Imperial Dragon Keeper, constantly neglected and abused her; she never had enough food or proper clothing. But Ping soon realizes she may be special after all, “only she could hear the dragon’s voice” (p.75). And through her time spent with Danzi, Ping learns how to channel her *Qi* or spiritual energy, in order to fight back at enemies. As it turns out Ping may be a dragon keeper, a special person who is born with the skills needed to care for dragons. If she is, she would be the first girl dragon keeper.

Ping also learns through her experiences that she is just and brave. During her first trip with money to a market she is robbed. She chases the robber all by herself to his humble hut.

> Ping looked around the room. It was empty except for a pile of rags that must have been the family’s bed. Her anger disappeared. She took back the pouch and opened it. She knew what it was like to be hungry enough to steal. (p. 127)

Although Ping is learning and gaining self worth she is still not with Danzi by her own choice. By chance she befriends the new emperor, a little boy who is lonely and wants Ping to stay with him and be his friend. He makes her the Imperial Dragon Keeper. “If she wished, she could choose that life, she would eat baked owl and persimmons” (p. 278). Mulling over all she has to gain, Ping, instead, chooses to be Danzi’s keeper, “Such a life wasn’t possible for her. She had to get the dragon to the ocean” (p. 278).

Ping chooses Danzi, but Danzi doesn’t choose Ping. He loses faith in her and sets off on his journey with his ex-keeper, Wang Cao. “The dragon hadn’t trusted her. Danzi had chosen Wang Cao to go with him to the Ocean instead. She had failed the test” (p.

289). Like she always has in the past, Ping regresses and blames herself for circumstances that aren't her fault. Danzi didn't believe that Ping would make the choice to leave the comfort and friendship of the Emperor. Danzi punishes Ping for something she hasn't even done.

Dogged, Ping makes the choice the second time to be Danzi's keeper when she, through great risk to herself, saves him and the stone from the Emperor's clutches. "Now the Emperor was her enemy" (p. 317), and Ping isn't even sure Danzi will take her back. But he does. Ping has made her decision, constructed her own future family. She is a dragon keeper.

Rain May and Captain Daniel

In the novel, *Rain May and Captain Daniel*, Rain is forced to leave her home after her mother decides to make a fresh start after her husband leaves her for Julia, the other woman. Rain is told by her mother, "I don't want to live here. We need a fresh start" (p. 1). Rain, on the other hand, is not keen to move from the city to the country in the middle of the school term.

Rain's journey is to learn how to make a new life in a new place with just her mother. Rain surprises herself by not missing her father too much. "I don't miss Dad the way I thought I would" (p. 9). But her mother is trying, insisting Rain call her, Maggie, rather than Mum, and insisting they save money by having Rain bathe in her dirty bath water.

Rain and her mother communicate on an intimate level through refrigerator magnets. "Mum and I wrote poems to each other. Not soppy poems. We wrote about stuff

that maybe we don't want to actually talk about" (p. 15). Rain doesn't at first understand that her parents are not going to get back together. She expects her dad will come over to see how the house is shaping up. Rains mother quickly quashes that idea. "Rain, this house has nothing to do with Dad. My life, now, except for where you are concerned, has nothing to do with Dad" (p. 49). Rain and her mother are in conflict because while Maggie refuses to remember good times, Rain refuses to remember the bad.

> Rain, do you remember the fights? Do you remember your dad driving off in the night?...
>
> It wasn't always like that, I said. Remember going to St Kilda, eating fish and chips on the beach?
>
> I remember going to St Kilda and you and I sitting on the beach waiting for him to come back from Julia's place… (p. 50)

Rain doesn't want to/ isn't ready to hear this kind of truth. Perhaps she doesn't miss her dad so much because she believes the separation is temporary.

Rain is patient with both of her parents because she believes the situation is temporary. Her first weekend at her father's turns out to be a shopping trip with Julia for Julia. When Rain questions one of Julia's purchases in front of the saleswomen Julia says, while twittering, "She's my stepdaughter, from the country" (p. 67). Rain decides then and there she hates Julia. Not only because of the catty remark, but because it is becoming clearer to Rain that her dad will not be going back to Maggie.

> I had thought that the weekend would be fantastic. I thought I would drop enough hints about the Dreamhouse and the platypus and the mist in the mornings that Dad would want to come up and see it all. (p. 70)

Rain's father further disappoints her by letting Julia come along on Sunday, a day that was supposed to be just for Rain and her father. He also doesn't come in the house when he drops her off, something Rain assumed he would do.

In the meanwhile, Rain has befriended the strangely wonderful boy next door, Daniel. Daniel lives in a world ruled by Star Trek. He is the school geek, and Rain makes it her mission to stick up for him. This seems to give Rain meaning in her life. Just when she really clicks with him, Daniel must be hospitalized because of a heart defect. He is in the hospital near her father's apartment and she asks him to take her there.

Her father is too busy working to take her and Julia says she can, but gets Rain to the hospital too late to visit. Rain has finally had enough. This is her turning point,

> I want to go home, I told him [dad]. And I want to go now. Neither of you really want me here. And I don't want to be here…I'm only here every other weekend but you still have to work…I hate you, I screamed. I hate you. (pp. 105-106)

When Rain gets back to Maggie's house, her mother doesn't side with Rain. She tells Rain that while she told Julia and her father the truth, it was hurtful. "The real test of how brave and loving you can be is when you allow someone to make a mistake and you keep loving them, despite their mistakes" (p. 108). Rain starts to understand that life is messy and even people you love can hurt you.

The book ends with Rain discovering that Julia is also a trekkie and she sends some DVDs to Daniel, making her more human to Rain.

The Text Set and Meta-Plots

Most of the books discussed above follow the meta-plot of failed home-journey-constructed new home. Before I look at the commonalties found among the novels in the text set, I examine the books that didn't have this meta-plot. I will call these novels, *Kira-Kira*, *Criss Cross*, and *The Silver Donkey*, the outliers.

The Outliers

Kira-Kira. *Kira-Kira* does not follow the same meta-plot as the other stories in this text set. Katie, the protagonist, never leaves her home, literally or figuratively, to set out on a journey. Katie's home is a place of refuge, as it is where her beloved sister Lynn resides. The journey, in this case, is thrust upon her by her sister's sickness and subsequent death. Katie needn't move. She stays stationary, while her world moves around her. Her new family, sans Lynne, at the end of the story is not constructed by Katie, but by fate. It is almost as if *Kira-Kira* ends where the other stories in this text set begin.

At the end of the book, Katie's family is failed, as she has lost the one person who believed in her, who loved her, and who accepted her as she was. For the whole of the story, Katie has Lynne. Her older sister who fulfills the role of giver-of-safety protagonists are searching for in the other novels. It is as if *Kira-Kira* ends where the majority of the books begin.

Criss Cross. The nature of the plot makes this novel ineligible for having a meta-plot, or, for that matter, a "typical plot" (Nodelman, 2009). *Criss Cross*, unlike all of the other books in this text set, which have progressive plots that lend themselves to character driven trajectories of change, has an episodic plot. The "episodes" in this novel are cemented with the theme of connection and disconnection. The characters in this novel almost connect and then something happens that makes this connection fail. This kind of plot is too fragmented and disjointed to follow any one character for long enough to see a beginning, middle, and end. The only character that the reader could follow in this way is the necklace, but the necklace's journey doesn't speak to my study of the construction of childhood in children's literature.

The Silver Donkey. Depending on the character the analyst chooses to focus on this novel could fit the meta-plot I found in most of my text set. The soldier character, Lt. Shepard, does leave a failed home, sets out on a journey, in this case to fight a war, and constructs a home in the woods of France with the help of two children. However, I chose to analyze these books for childhood, and the Soldier is an adult as he has power over the children in the book, despite the fact he is wounded psychologically and physically.

If I examine the plot in terms of the child protagonists, Coco and Marcelle, the meta-plot I discuss doesn't hold up. In terms of plot, this novel follows Nodelman's (2009) idea closely of a "typical plot." The children's home is happy. They find the soldier literally in their back yard and do have adventures taking care of him. At the end of the story he is on his way home and the children, Coco and Marcelle, return to their home, the same one they left and came back to daily as they participated in their

endeavors to save the soldier's life. While surely the children's lives are made richer by this new set of experiences, there is no practice of *parrhesia* and no change in their objectivity in relation to the adults in their lives. For these reasons, this text is being viewed as an outlier.

Failed Homes

I am defining failed homes, as home where the child protagonist must journey from, literally or metaphorically, to achieve the feeling of safety she needs in order to be able to construct a new home. In other words, the home is a place that must be abandoned in order to grow.

Danger is different in each of these novels. In *Just in Case*, it takes the guise of fate, the realization that bad things can happen at any time for any reason. In *Millions*, *A Gathering Light*, and *The Higher Power of Lucky*, the feeling of not being safe is precipitated by the loss of a mother. Being wrongly accused of a crime is the danger inherent in *Despereaux*, *Crispin*, and *Dragon Keeper.*

Some of the child protagonists have multiple and complex reasons for having to leave their homes. In *Crispin*, *Dragon Keeper*, and *Ruby Holler*, and *The Higher Power of Lucky*, the child(ren) has no family and therefore no home. In *Helicopter Man*, Pete's safety is compromised by his mother's death, his father's mental illness, the loss of a home, and a mystery to solve, the conundrum of why his mother just up and left with no warning.

This feeling of being unsafe because of enigmas is also present in *Tamar*, who must leave her home to solve the puzzles left her by her grandfather and in *A Gathering*

Light, in which the mystery of Grace Brown's "drowning" spurs Mattie to understand the danger she, herself, is facing in succumbing to the status quo.

And sometimes the danger is more subtle, as in *Beeing Bee* and *Rain May and Captain Daniel*, where the danger is actually the child's difficulty in adjusting to a new life on someone else's terms. In *Despereaux*, the danger the mouse protagonist faces, is self inflicted, as he simply cannot follow the status quo, he is compelled to be himself.

***Journeys and* Parrhesia**

The journeys found in this text set fall into two categories, literal and metaphoric, but they can be both. Literal journeys can be found in the following novels: *Just in Case, Tamar, Ruby Holler, The Higher Power of Lucky, Despereaux, Crispin, Helicopter Man, and Dragon Keeper*. In all of these novels the child protagonist leaves her home for some, most, or the entire novel. In *Millions, A Gathering Light, Beeing Bee, and Rain May and Captain Daniel*, the child's journey is in her head, but the child stays put at home.

What is the important feature of the journey, what distinguishes it from aimless wandering, is the point where there is no going back. This point is called *parrhesia*. This is the Foucauldian notion of speaking truth to power at some personal risk. *Parrhesia* is what makes the difference. This is where the child becomes an agent in her own destiny and sets the stage for constructing a new home.

For Foucault, *parrhesian* acts needed to involve a speech act. What I found in my analysis were speech acts that didn't necessarily involve "talking." When the Twins, Florida and Dallas, run away from Ruby Holler and when Lucky runs away from her

home, these characters are saying something, performing a speech act, with action rather than verbosity. Because the characters I am dealing with are children, who may believe they won't be listened to or don't have the experience to "speak" truth, I am interpreting "speech acts" to include talk *and* action on the part of the child.

Foucault also makes clear in his lectures that *parrhesia* must involve a certain amount of risk. His examples all involve physical risk. While some of my examples do involve the threat of physical danger, most involve the risk of being emotionally hurt in tandem with physical violence or not. Again, because these books are about childhood, I would expect to see emotional harm as often as physical harm and it could be argued that both are equally pernicious.

Below I explicate instances of parrhesia found in the texts that have a meta-plot. In the subgroup of texts that are missing a meta-plot, the group I dubbed the outliers, there was no act of *parrhesia* included in the plots.

Just in Case. Justin speaks truth to power when he decides to live despite his fear of Fate. Fate, in this book, substitutes for the adult. Fate is the uber-adult, the ultimate decider, enforcer, obstacle, and power. Justin's speech act is making the conscious decision to live. The risk he incurs, a physical, spiritual, and emotional risk, is what all human beings who subscribe to an existentialist (Frankl, 1959) philosophy incur, living in the unknown. This risk involves knowing that you are going to die one day and still trying to find meaning.

Tamar. Tamar speaks by not speaking when she turns away from the lies and deceit of her biological family. This happens at the end of the story when she finds her

father who has run away because he is too weak to face the demons of his past. In this *parrhesian* act Tamar "speaks" truth to power, the power in this case is hold the past has over her and her family. This power can also be seen as her step-grandfather, William, as he manipulates and uses Tamar to salvage his now dead soul. For Tamar, the "truth" that she so eloquently puts out by turning her back on her father (as the keeper of the family's past) is that she doesn't need them. Tamar can make her own way in the world without the good and bad of her family. The risk Tamar incurs is just that, going it alone.

***Millions*.** For Damien the power he must stand up to is the hold his mother's death has had on his life, the worries and insecurities her death has caused Damien to feel. Whether he conjures up his mother in his mind, or she truly visits him, Damien is able to speak his truth, which is, in this case, to ask the question he is most afraid of knowing the answer to, Is he good? When Damien asks this question of his mother he is risking the house of cards he has built around his fragility, made up of Saintly acts and trying, but often, he believes, failing, to be good.

***A Gathering Light*.** Mattie, like Damien, has her dead mother's power holding her hostage. Mattie is also concerned with being good, in this case, keeping her promise to her dead mother to care for the family. But unlike Damien, Mattie cannot actually speak to her mother in words. Instead she speaks her truth that she cannot care for her family and find meaning in her life, by breaking her promise to the dead. Mattie's speech act is leaving her family with no goodbye, getting on the train to New York City and attempting to make her own life. This *parrhesian* act has incredible implied risks. Mattie may never be welcome home again as her father warned. She may not make it as an

author. Yet, with these and many more possibilities of risk, Mattie is courageous and speaks her truth her way.

Ruby Holler. The *parrhesiatic* climax for Dallas and Florida is at the end of the novel. After testing Sairy and Tiller many times the Twins are still not convinced they are worthy of love, security, and a family. This crisis reaches its peek when Sairy and Tiller's "real" children gather in Ruby Holler during Tiller's convalescence after his heart attack. The Twins "speak" by running away from the Holler, something they had done in the past and in the past Sairy and Tiller had gone to find them. This time the speech act aimed at the power Sairy and Tiller hold over the Twins as their chance, maybe last chance, for a home. This is especially risky as the reason for the Twins being in Holler is gone. By running away at this crucial point they are, in essence, saying to the couple, if you want us, prove it. This is a risky venture for orphans who have never had love before.

The Higher Power of Lucky. Lucky, also, uses the speech act of running away to speak her truth to power. The power she is addressing is Brigitte, her guardian, who has never told Lucky either way if she will stay and care for her or go back to France. The power is not Brigitte herself, but the motherhood Lucky needs that Brigitte represents. Like the Twins, Lucky is forcing the adult she needs to make a decision. The risk for Lucky is finding out sooner than later if Brigitte wants to be her permanent mother or abandon her like all the other adults in her life.

The Tale of Despereaux. Despereaux speaks truth to power when he refuses to conform to the mouse code. His truth is that he loves Princess Pea and wants to be a knight in shining armor. The power, in this case, is the mouse council that decides what is

appropriate for mice to do or not to do. The risk Despereaux incurs is being cast out of the mouse community, something that happens early in the story and doesn't seem to bother him. More important to Despereaux is the risk of his heart. He could rescue the Princess and they might not live happily ever after.

Crispin. Crispin's speech act is more nuanced than those discussed previously. The power he is speaking to is the power of the oppression he has been a part of since he was born. This power is the feudal system. Crispin's speech act isn't one particular action, but a series of actions as he turns away from the established patterns, habits, and thoughts in his life and dares to see himself as in charge of his own future and not an object of government and church authority. By remaining with Bear, a heretical radical, and learning from Bear, Crispin transforms himself from a cringing peasant who takes the Priest's words as gospel to a free person who chooses what to believe and sees himself as having options in his life. The risks Crispin incurs are monumental, as they involve a whole paradigm shift. He is physically risking his life by refusing to be a part of the feudal system, but more important, he is risking his soul's salvation, by choosing to turn away from the control of the Church.

Beeing Bee. Bee's *parrhesian* act is nuanced like Crispin's. It also takes place over a period of time. Bee's truth is letting Jazzi become her substitute mother. The power Bee must overcome is the life she made for herself after her mother's death. By loving Jazzi, Bee is turning away from the memory of her mother. The climax of this act is when Jazzi inadvertently throws the memorabilia Bee has kept of her mother. This upsets Bee so much that she runs away to Jazzi's mentally ill brother, Harley. Harley is

Jazzi's past, and by going to him, Bee forces Jazzi to empathize with her plight of having the disappointment and hurt of a dead mother. The risk Bee incurs is Jazzi not understanding her.

Helicopter Man. It is a *parrhesian* act in the novel *Helicopter Man* when Pete refuses to help his father escape from the mental hospital; in this instance Pete is speaking truth to power (his father). Ironically, it would have been easier, less risky, for Pete to do as his father wishes, as he has always done in the past, accepting whatever his father's schizophrenic mind tells him is plausible. By not abetting his father's escape, Pete is sealing his fate to remain with strangers, a foster family in a kind of limbo state. But Pete doesn't do what might be easier or safer or, at least, familiar. Instead, Pete finds the strength to first acknowledge the truth that his father is truly mentally ill and needs to be in a hospital, and second, deal with it by placing himself back in his foster family with unfamiliar people and things for an unknown amount of time.

Dragon Keeper. Like Crispin and Bee, Ping's *parrhesia* is subtle and occurs over a long period of time. The truth Ping must speak is that she is a worthy person, not a slave who is merely an object. The power she speaks to is comprised of all the adults who see her as less than, her master, Long Danzi's former dragon keeper, and even Long Danzi himself who doesn't trust Ping until the very end of the novel. The risks Ping takes are commensurate with a child who is seen as a slave and has no family. To prove her worth, Ping risks her life, her well being, and the possibility of a life of ease with the young emperor who befriends her.

Rain May and Captain Daniel. Rain's truth is one where she must come to grips with herself that her parents are never going to reconcile and her old life, the one she liked and knew, is over. The power Rain speaks to is really her own imagination. By allowing herself to see her family for what it is, Rain risks the disappointment and hurt that divorce entails.

In all of these books *parrhesiatic* acts played a major role in the child protagonist's journey. It was the raison d'être for the journey. By speaking truth to power the child was able to get to a point where she could construct a new home. It is by facing fears, challenging adult normativity, at great risk, that allows the character to achieve the agency to imagine the new possibilities of a different, a better life. This is a life where the meaning is given by the child, not to the child.

In order to have this meaning the child must change the tenor of the relationship she has with the important adults in her life. I analyze this change in terms of Buber's ideas about connection between human beings.

Constructing a New Home- *I/It* to *I/You*

The conclusion of the meta-plot is the child constructing a new home. This home may or may not include a new building, but it does include the child protagonist positioning herself in a "you" spot in her relationship with the major adult(s) in her life if the relationship is to continue. In some cases this proves to be impossible and the relationship is cast aside with all the other parts of the child's life that must be left behind in order to create a new existence.

Just In Case

Justin doesn't enter in to a new relationship with an adult in this story but rather with his baby brother, Charlie. Throughout the novel Charlie is the "wise" one, really the only character who seems to understand what Justin needs, in certain ways the "adult". Justin ignores Charlie, even when Charlie tries to "speak" with him. In this instance Justin views Charlie as an "It," an object that started his decent into the hell of having to struggle with Fate. At the end of the novel, when Justin, through *parrhesia*, decides to live, it is because of the change in his relationship with Charlie. By recognizing that Charlie needs him, that Charlie's life will be ruined if he dies, Justin places Charlie in the "You" position. He sees Charlie as a part of his fate and himself as a part of Charlie's fate. And Justin must live as he is responsible to Charlie. This is the meaning Justin finds in his otherwise bleak world.

Tamar

Tamar is able to create her own life by taking herself out of the I/It relationship she has with her father and grandfather. They are both using her as an object in their own struggles to find meaning, posthumously in the case of the grandfather. In order to find her own meaning, Tamar extricates herself by turning her back on her family. While she doesn't form an I/You relationship, she refuses to be an "It" any longer.

Millions

Damien is able to construct his own childhood by changing his relationship with his dead mother from an object of sorrow and insecurity, self induced but powerful, to a "You." He does this when his mother tells him that she has been made a saint in heaven

and her miracle was Damien. Damien becomes the precondition for his mother's new existence. In this "You" position Damien is able to make sense of his life, tell his story, and be who he is, excellent or not.

A Gathering Light

Like Tamar, Mattie creates her own home by removing herself from her "It" position in terms of her dead mother. By leaving her family and turning her back on the promise she made to her dying mother, Mattie succeeds in breaking out of her object position and jockeys for gaining her own agency by imagining her own life.

Ruby Holler

The Twins have, throughout their lives been "Its." They have been told over and over again that they are no good and not deserving of a family. This is a difficult mold for them to break as it has become part of their own belief system. Sairy and Tiller begin to change this when they offer the Twins the possibility of being in the "You" position by showing them how good and important they are. At the end of the story, when the grown-ups do follow the Twins into the forest, the reader is left with the feeling that Dallas and Florida, by practicing *parrhesia*, are beginning to see themselves worthy of a subject position.

The Higher Power of Lucky

Like Dallas and Florida, Lucky runs away as an act of *parrhesia*, but unlike the Twins, Lucky is forcing Brigitte to make a commitment to her as both a guardian and as a person. As I have discussed earlier, Lucky is aware of her powerlessness due to her age, and she knows that she must be constantly vigilant. Lucky wants Brigitte to see her as

giving her (Brigitte) meaning in life. In the end, Brigitte allows Lucky in the "You" position when she commits to adopt Lucky and make their lives together in Hard Pan.

The Tale of Despereaux

Despereaux, like Mattie and Tamar, chooses to remove himself from the relationship he has with his parents. He is seen by his mother as a disappointment and by his father as a failed mouse, this is shown when his own father turns him in to the mouse council. Rather than be an object of his parents' scorn, Despereaux lives happily ever after as Princess Pea's friend, electing her as his family.

Crispin: Cross of Lead

Crispin has only known how to be an "It" an object in relation to adults. His mother, who loves him, also at times rues his existence that had cost her so much. Crispin is made the ultimate "It' when he is declared a wolf's head, a non-person. His relationship with Bear also starts out in the I/It relationship. Bear "captures" Crispin to use him to enrich himself. But as they both come to respect and love each other, this relationship evolves into one where each person needs the other as a subject of love.

Beeing Bee

Bee's relationship with Jazzi is at the beginning, a classic "I/It" example. Each person views the other as a hindrance to happiness. For Bee, Jazzi is an unnecessary interloper into the family she and her widowed father were able to cobble together. Bee, to Jazzi, is a bratty child who walks in on her and her lover without knocking. But as the girl and the woman get to know each other's strengths, and especially each other's frailties, they are able to connect on a deeper level. Bee discovers through Harley, that

Jazzi is also a wounded child and Jazzi discovers through Bee's guinea pig letters, that Bee is hurting in the same ways. This growing empathy, on both the child and adult's part, enables an "I/You" relationship to grow. Bee's new position allows her to be able to imagine a life that includes Jazzi and is even better for her presence.

Helicopter Man

As I have discussed previously in this paper, the end of this novel is troubling. After all that Pete has had to endure at the mercy of his father he claims he will stick by his father no matter what. When looking at the ending using Buber's framework, it begins to make sense. At the end of the novel, Pete chooses to stay with his father despite or because of the truth he now possesses. This choice is measured. This choice is what changes their relationship to one of "I/You where Pete realizes his existence is a precondition to his father's.

Dragon Keeper

When Ping and Danzi, who in this novel substitutes for the adult, start their journey, Ping is a tool that Danzi uses to protect the dragon stone and to help him survive. But as Ping proves herself brave, cunning, resilient, and a true dragon keeper, she literally becomes a precondition for his existence and the existence of future dragons. When Ping accepts the job of caring for the newly hatched dragon, she is doing it out of her own agency; she sees the possibilities inherent in her gift and calling. Ping is not a slave again, but a free agent who chooses her destiny.

Rain May and Captain Daniel

Rain's relationships with her mother and father change throughout this story. It is only when Rain can live with the truth, that her parents are not going to reconcile, is she able to reposition herself in terms of them. Rain does this by refusing to ignore how shabbily her father is treating her in deference to his new girlfriend. By getting really angry with him she is able to relate to her mother who, Rain discovers, wants Rain to maintain a relationship with her father. In the past Rain had worried that her mother's hurt precluded her ability to value Rain's relationship with her father. Rain also lets her father know that she is important and not just a nuisance that interrupts his wooing of his new girlfriend. By insisting she become a "You," Rain is able to envision a life without married parents that can still be full of possibilities.

None of the characters in these novels goes back to where they left. Their lives may not be perfect, they may be even less secure than before, but they have existences of possibilities, childhoods that are not recycled, but are more like found object sculptures. The child picks up some things from the past to fashion something completely new, not better or worse, but created by the child. The meaning these children need to live (Frankl, 1959), like all humans, is not given them or forced on them, but rather sought by the child. This is the idea of freedom.

Conclusions

I am struck by the amazing amount of work the child protagonists in this text set must accomplish. This challenges the status quo's Romantic view of childhood and the academic's Modernist view of childhood (Coats, 2001). The children in this text set,

barring the outliers, would fit squarely in the postmodern child category (Coats, 2001). They are all put in the middle of amoral adult behavior and multiple truths, and are expected to find their way out of the forest, without even a breadcrumb to guide them home. The meta-plot that I found seems to be a postmodern convention as well. There is no happy "in the beginning" not any "happily ever after." Everything that happens from the journey onward is up to the child. Mostly alone. Mostly with no models to follow. What these children accomplish is incredible for any human being, large or small.

In the next chapter I continued to analyze each part of the meta-plot by looking at the categories I found that speak to each particular potion of the plot. In order to unpack the "failed home" motif, I looked at the categories I call "children with parents" and "children's roles." The journey portion of the meta-plot is explored further within the categories "do the right thing" and "keeping secrets." The child-constructed home part of the plot is explored more deeply in the category of "freedom."

Of course this is a complex subject and each category speaks to more than one part of the meta-plot. I put things in tidy packages and then unwrap them in order to show the whole of the books and how they speak to childhood.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT SET: THEMES AND POSTMODERN CHILDHOODS

A tension that I found doing this research was the idea of the postmodern child. Partly, the tension arose from my ignorance of this term. I have heard postmodern applied to art, to architecture, to literature, but not to a group of people. I have yet to read about the postmodern woman or the postmodern Jew. From this ignorance I was struck by this term being applied to children by people who spend much of their time and energy studying children (Kincheloe and Steinberg for example). Because postmodern is usually an adjective for a thing; art, childhood studies, etc., using it to describe childhood and children, a collection of people, feels to me like further objectifying children.

Postmodern childhood as described by the late Joe Kincheloe (1997) speaks to the "adultification" of children and the "childification" of adults wherein "boundaries between adulthood and childhood blur to the point that a clearly defined, traditional, innocent childhood becomes an object of nostalgia" (p. 45). Postmodern children, Kincheloe posits, are objects of child abandonment and child-parent alienation. These children have been caught in the crossfire of the gender, race, class, and culture clashes between adults.

As I discussed in chapter two, Harry Potter is a postmodern child because he fights adult discipline with magic and resists adult control by sidestepping ideological traps laid out by powerful adults (Chappell, 2008). The postmodern child has the responsibility to sort out the complexities and ambiguities of the adult-made world. Potter

represents all postmodern children who, Chappell writes, don't have a developmental endpoint, but are always in the process of becoming. Coats (2001) continues this definition when she discusses the postmodern child as a child who is put in the middle of amoral adult behavior and multiple truths, and is expected to find her way out of the forest, without even a breadcrumb to guide her home.

I did find evidence of the postmodern child in my research. Many of the child characters were abandoned by and alienated from their parents. While none of the child protagonists in my text set are wizards, they used their cunning, bravery, and doggedness to sidestep some parental control. And they all seemed to shoulder the responsibility of sorting out the complexities and ambiguities of the adult-made world

The tension remains for me, is the child postmodern or is the child's environment postmodern? And do children actually serve as nostalgic *modern* characters for the adults who produce and (co)consume children's literature? Coats, again discussed in chapter two, believes that our society (adults) mostly sees children through the Modernist lens, one in which expectations for children and childhood are standardized and there is a sense of absolutes, for example right versus wrong.

In order to buttress this tension here is a quote from Roni Natov (2003).

> [Children's literature] engages childhood as remembered and imagined by adults. So we are always to some degree or other talking about the imagined child and the place of childhood in the imaginative life of the adult. (p. 3)

Is the imaginary child, the product of the imaginative life of the adult being, constructed as postmodern? I saw in my research children who were able to navigate a

messy, unpredictable, postmodern world, while remaining its moral center, a modern role. Part of what the child protagonists had to resist was their parents' inability to grow up or what Kincheloe (1997) refers to as the childification of adults. This did include, in many cases, taking on adult roles or the adultification of children. The need for these roles was to maintain a reactionary equilibrium. The child in these books wants a "normal" family and part of her quest is to construct a more ordered, fair, and safe home to spend her childhood.

This problem of postmodern child cannot be solved in this study, but it was an intriguing tension to keep in mind as I examined the following themes found in my text set that spoke to the construction of childhood within the books: *children with parents*, *morality*, *secrets*, and *freedom*.

Children with Parents

"Justin felt pretty sure that unless they actually found him with a loaded gun in one hand and a suicide note in the other, they wouldn't worry overmuch about the levels and sources of his anxiety. But that was OK. He didn't expect much from his parents. He knew they were busy, He knew they'd tried to be good parents". (Just in Case, p. 21*)*

One of the defining aspects of childhood is the child's need to be cared for by an adult (Kehily, 2004, Mills, 2000). A child, by my definition, is a person who is not yet able emotionally, intellectually, and financially to live alone. In this text set the child protagonists have relationships with adults that are problematic. These are not the "elusive traditional families" of patriarchal authority, happy homemaking mothers, and obedient children (Coontz, 1992). Instead, these books concentrate on the tensions

inherent in the relationships between childhood and adulthood, where there are no clear cut roles set out for each member of the family ala *The Little House* series of books (Ingalls-Wilder). In the *Little House* books, Pa worked and gave out sage advice that was listened to and appreciated by his daughters and his wife. Laura could sometimes be naughty, but she would soon discover the error of her ways and, with Pa's help, get back on the right road.

In the reactionary *Little House* books and others of their ilk, children gave their parents respect, and in return, parents gave children the love, security, and discipline they needed in order to thrive. In this text set neither the child nor the adult holds up her end of the bargain. These books tend to be post-patriarchal, there is a realization that patriarchal families do not work and there is no safety afforded by traditional structures. The novels in this text set position adults as obstacles that children must overcome in their search for agency (Clark, 2000).

The children in my text set are postmodern as they must deal with the complexities and ambiguities of the adult made world (Chappell, 2008). These children must also, at the same time they are dealing with multiple truths, deal with the single truth that they need adults to care for them. This is a complex feat; the child protagonist must perform a balancing act with needs for love and safety from adults on one side and unreliable adults on the other.

Father Doesn't Know Best

"Why didn't Lucky's father take care of her himself?" asked Miles.

Brigitte poofed air out of her mouth in a way she did to show she thought something was ridiculous. "He is," she said, "in some ways, a very foolish man, Lucky's father." (The Higher Power of Lucky, p. 36)

In general, the fathers portrayed in the text set are failed parents. In four of the fifteen novels fathers are completely absent. In *Crispin*, Crispin's father doesn't acknowledge him as he is the result of an affair, while Ping's father in *Dragon Keeper* profits from his abandonment by selling Ping into slavery. The reader never knows if the Twins' father in *Ruby Holler* was a part of the decision to give them to the Trepids. In *The Higher Power of Lucky*, Lucky's father acknowledges his responsibility to Lucky by procuring his ex-wife to be her Guardian while a foster family can be found and sending a monthly check that "is never enough" (p.48).

In the eleven novels where the father is in the child protagonist's life, he is not the mythical "father knows best" dad. Of course, the father as a failed parent is hardly a new literary trope in children's stories, but can be traced back to the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale (Knoepflmacher, 2005). With the tacit approval of the biological father, Hansel and Gretel are cast out of their home by their stepmother, left ostensibly to die in the woods. All by themselves, the siblings save themselves and steal a fortune from the witch, which they then proceed to share with their father, who is now alone and (depending on the story) contrite about what he allowed his evil wife to do to his children.

This story sets up the idea of the father as a weak character, who is at the mercy of the woman in his life. This father's weakness and inability to protect his children is to be understood and pitied by his children, who go on to forget the trauma caused (in part) by their father, partly to spare their father's feelings and partly because the children still need him. In an ironic twist, Hansel and Gretel's father profits from his failed parenting by sharing in the witch's booty with his devoted children.

Hansel and Gretel also serves as a guide for children to explain their fathers. Fathers are essentially weak characters who require a strong and good woman to enable them to parent. Children forgive their fathers for their weakness and sometimes see their job as to care for their father. This is not always done cheerfully, but as a necessary chore. This chore is compounded when the mother figure is uncaring or absent as she is in so many of these novels. Fathers are seen by their children as an almost peer, a person who has power over them, but is, at the same time, in cahoots with the children as the father and children are ultimately at the mercy of the mother.

Of all the books in the text set, *Helicopter Man* is most concerned with the child/father relationship. This is, in part, due to the organization of the text. The story is told by the reader perusing Pete's journal entries. Because Pete is so isolated, the only steady person in his day to day life for most of the book is his father. So that is what he writes about, his dad. In fact, his journal is a close observation of his father. While the story is about Pete, it is really about Pete vis-à-vis his father.

Pete's father in *Helicopter Man* is an example of the above mentioned father par excellence. After his wife leaves, Michael's (the father) schizophrenia worsens. Daph, a

family friend, tells Pete that, “Your mum was the best thing that ever happened to Michael. She kept him sensible” (p. 66). Pete is left to care for him, to take over for his mother, but he realizes he is not succeeding, “How come I can’t keep him sensible?” (p. 66).

Pete tries. He tries to believe what his father tells him, to be an obedient son, and, at the same time, to take care of both himself and his father. The beginning of the book finds Pete and Michael squatting in a garden shed. Pete’s journal reflects his respect for his father’s preoccupations when he writes, “So far, so good. Seems to be safe” (p. 9). But as the days go by and Michael deems the world too dangerous to venture out into, Pete takes it upon himself to leave his napping father to steal food, which earns him two shotgun pellets in his shoulder after the general store owner shoots him for breaking and entering. Pete calms his father down by giving him the one item he was able to steal, a pot of strawberry jam. “Told Dad I found it on my walk. Sort of true. He’s so starving he said, Good on you, Pete, then wrenched the lid off the jar” (p. 18). Pete’s father is not able to parent, at this point he is too hungry and scared to chastise his son for stealing.

Pete is not happy about having to assume this adult role, to have to parent his parent. “Sometimes I feel like I’ve skipped being a kid and just gone to being old” (p. 26). But despite everything, Pete loves Michael. Pete’s journals are rife with observations about how his father is trying. “I’ve got to give it to him, Dad tries. Sometimes he can be pretty strict” (p. 50). But Pete’s tired, physically and mentally.

> I’m exhausted, just how long do we have to keep going like this? I know Dad needs me, but my head hurts from so much worrying and thinking. (p. 28)

And yet, Pete can't confront his father because, "I'm scared to ask. Dad's all I've got" (p. 45). Contradictorily, Pete knows his father needs him and, at the same time, he needs his father. Pete's relationship with his father is summed up by this quote, "Dad gets the messages, but I have to do the managing" (p. 55), meaning dad calls the shots, but Pete must figure out how to manage their lives.

Like most relationships, Pete and Michael, have a complicated situation. Michael is trying, but he is mentally ill. He tells the family friend Daph, "I've tried to bring up Pete the way Laura [Peter's mother] would want me to. And keeping him safe hasn't been easy" (p. 123). Pete knows his father is attempting to parent him and failing, but can't admit it to himself, because this would mean giving up what comfort he gleans from being with his father. In this example of childhood, Pete is the one who figures out how to do day-to-day things, like procuring food and shoes. He knows his life is strange, "It's tough being your dad's dad" (p. 100). He longs for school, friends, and a normal home,

> The mums, dads, and kids are strolling about doing ordinary family things. It looks safe and golden warm, like lounging with your feet up by an open fire. That'll be us as soon as possible. (p. 29)

But his responsibility is to his father. And he finds things to keep himself loving his father because, "Other people might try to care, but your mum or dad loves you no matter what" (p. 102). In his journal Pete records a time his father went out of his way to help an immigrant family at the welfare office. "Dad says they're refugees from Afghanistan, Dad wants to know how much justice these people are going to get here" (p. 20).

As already mentioned, when Michael ends up in a mental hospital Pete does not help him escape. At this time Pete is still taking care of them both. He knows his father needs help and he knows that he needs to be in school. At the end of the novel, after all that Pete's father has put Pete through Pete writes,

> I knew in my heart I'd have no choice. If the medications hadn't gotten rid of the fear and Dad felt he had to run, I'd go with him. (p. 158)

When it is all said and done, Pete's father remains Pete's responsibility. He understands and pities his weakness, and chooses, like Hansel and Gretel, to stay with a failed father, rather than being with no father at all.

Mattie, in *A Gathering Light*, has a similar dynamic with her father. After her mother dies, she is left to take on the responsibility of her family, including her father. While this father is not mentally ill, he is a deeply unhappy man who is also a failed father as he is unable to provide Mattie with the love and understanding she needs. Mattie wants to go to work for the summer at a hotel but her father won't hear of it, doesn't ask her why she wants to work at a hotel, just says, "You don't have to go looking for work. There's plenty…right here" (p. 23).Yet many times Mattie takes her father's side trying to understand him even when what he wants interferes with what she wants. When her father makes her stay home from school to help with the sugaring she thinks,

> I was angry with my father for keeping me home, even for a day, but he was right, He couldn't run a sixty acre farm alone. (p. 22)

And like Pete, Mattie resents having to be an adult before her time. But she understands her place and her responsibility:

> Cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, feeding chickens, slopping pigs, milking cows, churning cream, salting butter, making soap, plowing, planting, hoeing, weeding, harvesting, haying, threshing, canning—doing everything that fell on the eldest in a family of four girls, a dead mother, and a *puissant* brother who took off…(p. 23)

In the above list, Mattie doesn't mention that her biggest responsibility to her father, aside from helping with the farm and her siblings, it is simply being there. He has been abandoned by his wife and son, he is bothered, "by the idea of someone else leaving him" (p. 24).

Mattie stays despite her father's abuse. One night he comes home drunk after going to town to sell maple syrup and finds the new notebook in which Mattie has been writing poetry. He rips the poem out of the book and burns the paper. Angry that Mattie spent the money she made picking fiddleheads on the notebook when the family has been eating mush, he hits her, "And then there was a loud, sharp crack and lights were going off in my head and I was on the floor" (p. 99). Instead of being angry with him, Mattie understands and pities him,

> There was a bill of sale…and money—a dirty, wrinkled bill. Ten dollars. For twelve gallons of maple syrup. I knew he'd been hoping for twenty.
>
> I looked at him then. He looked tired. So tired. And worn and old.
>
> "Mattie…Mattie, I'm sorry…I didn't mean to…," he said reaching for me.
>
> I shook him off. "Never mind, Pa. Go to bed. We've got the upper field to plow tomorrow." (p. 100)

Mattie pities her father because he is still the wounded child he was when he ran away from home at twelve –years-old. When Mattie is younger she asks her mother why her father never speaks French (he is French). “She said, because the scars run too deep. I thought she must have meant the ones on his back. Pa’s stepfather put them there with a belt” (p. 150).

And he is an unhappy man who gave up being a riverman, a job he loved, to stay at home and farm because that is what his wife wanted and now he has four children to care for. This comes out in a conversation between Michael (Mattie’s father) and his brother, Fifty:

> I heard my uncle say, “Why you stay here squeezing cow teets all day long, Michel? Wat kine life dat be for a reevairman? Why you not come back and drive da logs?
>
> Pa laughed. “And let four girls raise themselves?
>
> “Your Ellen, she make you come off da reevair. Don’t tink I don’t know. But she gone now, and I tink da reevair be a better ting for you. You like dis farming?”
>
> “I do.”
>
> I heard my uncle snort. “Now who tell da tales, eh?” (pp. 152-153)

Mattie and her father have something in common. Ellen, Mattie’s dead mother and Michael’s dead wife, still exerts a lot of power over them. Mattie longs to leave to be a writer and her father longs to leave and work on the rivers. They are both beholden to a dead woman. Maybe that is why Mattie can understand and pity her father. This does not, however, work in the reverse. When Mattie’s teacher comes to the house to beg Michael

to let Mattie go to Barnard College he won't listen and tells Mattie, "Go then, Mattie. I won't stop you. But don't come back if you do" (p. 168).

Unlike Pete, Mattie does leave. Her responsibility to her father ends as she realizes through Grace Brown's letters that if she stays she will never be a writer. The last line of the novel says, "To Amsterdam to Albany and beyond. To New York City. To my future. My life" (p. 380).

A Gathering Light and *Helicopter Man* are the two novels in this text set that deal directly with the child/father relationship. The other novels deal more indirectly with this relationship and the lack of narrative concerning the father is just as telling. In the novel *Just in Case*, Justin's parents are married and his father lives in the home. The only conversation Justin and his father have in the entire novel is about Justin's sexuality. His father, whose name we never learn, asks Justin if he is homosexual.

> "Not that I know of," he [Justin] said finally.
>
> His father exhaled impatiently and returned to his paper. "Well, that's a relief," he snorted. "Life's complicated enough without having a poof for a son." (p. 23)

The reader notices that this conversation is really about Justin's father, not Justin. The father is relieved because having a straight son means *his* life will be easier. That is all we ever hear of the father again. It is as if he doesn't exist. The mother makes a few appearances, but never with her husband. Justin never mentions his father. There is no pity or understanding on Justin's part, just apathy. Justin never tries to speak with his dad and his dad never tries to speak with him. There is a total breakdown of any patriarchal

power. Justin's father tacitly allows Justin to do as he pleases. The same is true for *Criss Cross*. Fathers simply aren't mentioned.

The father in *The Silver Donkey* has a similar non-role in the children's lives. Marcelle and Coco's dealings with their parents in this novel are to seek permission in order to do as they please. Their father is not the boss; the mother makes the final decision as illustrated nicely in this excerpt where the children ask their father for permission to go to the harbor,

> Their father clamped his hands to his ears. "Pascal, take your sisters to the harbor! It's the only way I'll get any peace."
>
> "None of you are going anywhere." The children's mother did not look up from her darning. (p. 235)

The children continue to pester their parents and their father tells them a story from his youth.

> Coco gurgled with laughter, "You're so funny, Papa."
>
> "Mama," said Pascal, "if we promise to wake up early and do our chores…" (p. 236).

The reader notices that first the children ask their father for permission, which he gives. The mother nixes the idea. The father tries to humor her into letting the children go. The children find him funny, but realizing he holds no power, quickly turn back to their mother. This is what happens in the four other instances where the children encounter their parents.

In the book, *Kira-Kira*, the father is in cahoots with the Katie, the protagonist. When Katie asks him what the word "sheeeit" means, he tells her and then says, "Whatever you do, don't tell your mother I told you that" (p. 29). This is an example of her father colluding with Katie. The father plays the "good cop." When Katie wets herself (at five years old), her mother is disgusted. The father, on the other hand, "…was proud of me [Katie]. He was proud of us no matter what we did" (p. 38). Katie notices that, "He [the father] never got truly mad at us, ever. That was our mother's job" (p. 102).

Katie's father, like many of the other fathers, needs to be taken care of by Katie. After his daughter Lynne dies, full of rage that a man called Mr. Lyndon set a trap on his land that hurt Katie's younger brother, the father brings Katie with him to watch as he destroys Mr. Lyndon's car. They are soon stopped by a sheriff,

> "Going for a ride?"Said the sheriff.
>
> My father hesitated; I saw that he suddenly couldn't think. I felt a protective surge, I'd never felt before that I needed to protect my father. But now I needed to protect him against this man. (p. 211)

Katie sees her father commit a crime and understands and pities him his grief and rage, feelings that she herself is experiencing as well. Her father, who had always sided with her behind her mother's back, needs her and she risks lying to do so.

The father in *Despereaux* is so worried about being a good mouse that he turns his own son in to the mouse authorities. His concern for the status quo renders him unable to understand, pity, or love his son, because of or despite Despereaux's differences.

Despereaux returns this betrayal by never mentioning his father or even seeking him out once he saves the princess. The father, a weak mouse, becomes a non-entity in the story.

This weak father motif is also found in *Tamar*. Tamar's father leaves her, the reader later finds out, because he has a nervous breakdown. But even after he recovers he doesn't bother to get in touch with his daughter, because,

> It's unbearable, knowing what I knew…How could I stop you spending time with the bastard and not tell why? (p. 415)

Tamar tries to understand,

> I said, "I'm sorry, Dad, I can't get my head around all of this. I mean, why didn't you just get in touch with us" Didn't you want to? Didn't you realize we were all off of our heads with worry?" (p. 416).

And then she begins to understand that her father can't forgive his stepfather and this renders their relationship over.

> And Dad said, "I hope he [William] rots in hell,"
>
> I went back to the living-room doorway and said, "Remind me again, Dad—who was it who asked you to name me after your father?"
>
> Then I walked out into what was left of the daylight. (p. 419)

Maybe Tamar understands her father's selfishness too well. It renders her unable to pity him. Instead, she leaves him where he ran away to, leaves him in the past.

The relationship between Damien and his father in *Millions* is one in which both parties are trying to make a go of things after Damien's mother's death. Damien misses

his mother terribly and his relationship with his father is predicated on pleasing him so he won't abandon him as well.

> One thing about me is that I always really try to do whatever Dad tells me. It's not that I think he'll go off and leave us if we're a problem, but why take that risk? (p. 3)

Damien's father keeps encouraging Damien to be "excellent." Damien interprets this as being saint-like. When his father discovers he is sleeping with holly boughs under his pajamas he says, "Damien. Be good, won't you? Be really good." "That's what I'm trying to be all the time" (p. 24). Damien believes that mortifying his flesh is being good, while his father interprets this as strange behavior, but neither can really communicate what they are thinking. Damien's father brings him to a therapist. Damien sees this as a punishment, "Then what are we doing here? I have been trying to be good, you know" (p. 42). His father answers, "I know. And you are good. Very good. Excellent. I want them to see how excellent you are" (p. 43). Again, their relationship is rife with missed opportunities for communication.

However, most of the time, Damien's father notices nothing. For the majority of the book, Damien and his brother are trying to spend a great deal of money. The brothers buy cable. Damien worries that his Dad may notice thirty extra channels on the TV. Anthony replies, "Dad never notices anything" (p. 79). And he doesn't. He doesn't notice the boys' new shoes or the hermitage Damien builds or Damien's loneliness. The boys, on their part, don't tell him anything.

Then when their father finally is told about the money, instead of insisting the boys return the money to the proper authorities, he decides to help them spend it all. He justifies this by the fact that the bank robbers trashed their house.

> He laughed again, but it wasn't a happy laugh. "They took our Christmas. We'll take their cash."
>
> And that was the first time I realized he was going to keep it. (p.197)

This is not the father of the *Little House* books. Instead of admonishing the boys for stealing, he is egging them on to spend all of the money before Euro Day. In the end we find that he even steals some of the money from the kitty. If he has a moral message to teach Damien, the reader is not sure what it is.

The fathers in *Beeing Bee* and *Rain May and Captain Daniel* are very similar characters, this could be partially explained by the fact that both novels were written by the same woman, Catherine Bateson. They are the most similar to Hansel and Gretel's father, allowing the new woman in their lives to call the shots and change the rules. In both novels the child protagonist is promised a weekend day with just her father and in both the father gives in to the girlfriend and goes back on his word.

They do differ in one aspect, Bee's mom is dead and this creates the same dynamic motherless children in this text set share, she is supposed to care for her father. Bee, unlike Mattie and Pete, doesn't choose to accept the role despite her grandmother's pestering, "Sometimes she [grandmother] gives me lectures about how I need to look after Dad, as if I were the gown-up, not him" (p. 15). In times of desperation, however, Bee seems to equate Jazzi as punishment for her failure to care for her dad.

> "What did we do before Jazzi, Bee?"
>
> "We had pizza," I said, "and noodles and casseroles sometimes soup in winter and we had barbeques, too. I was planning to learn how to cook." (p. 29)

Bee, in the end, understands and pities her father. She forgives him for ignoring her and bringing a strange woman into her life, "I wanted to be happy because Dad was happy" (p. 96). And even though Bee resents Jazzi, Jazzi notices her more than her father does. When Bee runs away it is Jazzi who finds her, "Dad didn't even know I'd gone…" (p. 122). In fact, through most of the book, Jazzi is there in the narrative and on the pages. Dad spends a great deal of time working and eating.

Rain's father is caught up with his new woman as well; in fact he leaves Rain and her mother for Julia. When Rain comes to visit every other weekend Rain's Dad is too busy working to do things with her. Rain does not understand or pity her father; she is angry with him and hateful toward Julia. Rain has a mother, someone to care for her, which gives Rain more room to be angry. She also doesn't have the responsibility to care for her father, Julia took that role. He is also missing from most of the book, other than in the fantasies Rain creates where her parents get back together.

In the fifteen novels, there are only two, *A Gathering Light* and *Helicopter Man* where the father is a large part of the narrative. In the rest of the books the father is mostly absent, physically or emotionally. Childhood, in these books, is a place where fathers don't play a large role, or, in many cases, a role at all. This is because both the child and the father don't choose to (or don't know how to) communicate their needs to each other. In families where the mother is dead, the child is the mother by proxy, she has

to care for the father. In the books where there is a mother, the father is just there, not contributing too much. In all the books that have fathers, the father doesn't notice what is going on with his child(ren). This is because the child doesn't share and the father doesn't ask.

The fathers in these books tend to be selfish and unequipped to parent. The other characters in the books, however, don't expect very much from the fathers. They all play second fiddle to the mother, whether she is alive or not, the mother seems to be the boss, the families portrayed in these books are more matriarchal than patriarchal.

Mothers, Alive and Dead

"He never got truly mad at us, ever. That was our mother's job." (Kira-Kira, p. 102)

In the text set there are only two books, *Dragon Keeper* and *Ruby Holler*, where the mother isn't mentioned at all. Mothers play a more pivotal role in the child protagonist's life than fathers. When the mother is dead, as she is in *Beeing Bee*, *A Gathering Light*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, *Crispin*, *Helicopter Man*, and *Millions* she seems to be more of a major character, a greater influence on the plot, than when she is alive in the novel.

Alive Mothers: The Bitch in the House. In books where the mother is alive their influence is just slightly more important than that of the father. In *Just in Case*, Justin's mother is mentioned three times in the 246 page novel. His mother is trying, in her own way, to figure out what is the matter with her depressed son. At first she thinks it may have something to do with a tongue piercing and as she is trying to see in Justin's mouth he thinks, "The thought of such a piercing sickened him, It made him sad that this was

the level on which she believed he operated" (p. 22). Then she wonders, now that the homosexuality issue has been resolved by his father, if the cause of his problems is dyslexia, "David, love, tell me. Can you tell the difference between 'dog' and 'god'?" (p. 29).

Justin leaves home, he lies and says he is going a school trip to Wales, for the airport, after the accident he moves in with Agnes. His mother comes to visit at Agnes' urging, because,

> She (Agnes) hoped they would come get him or at least suggest an alternate solution to what Agnes felt wasn't entirely her problem.
>
> His mother, however, merely thanked Agnes for allowing him to stay. (p. 123)

Justin's mother visits and leaves comforted,

> Suddenly it all made sense: the eccentric behavior, the mood swings, the nerves. First love, of course! Well. She certainly wasn't going to be one of those obstructive mothers the ones who preached morality and abstinence at ever turn. Let him have his love affair, she'd help him pick up the pieces when it ended. (p. 126)

These are the sum of Justin's mother interactions. His mother is trying, but is clueless as to what is going on in her son's life and head. Not that Justin is giving anything away, but his mother only comes to see him at Agnes' at Agnes' request. She is totally in the dark about Justin, not offering him safety or love or understanding.

In *The Tale of Despereaux*, Antoinette, Despereaux's mother, also offers no succor to her son. His birth leaves her disappointed, "All that work for nothing" (p. 11).

She names him Despereaux, “for all my sadness, for my many despairs in this place, Now, where is my mirror” (p. 12). Antoinette is not a particularly motherly mother. She declares there will be no more children, “They are hard on my beauty. They ruin, for me, my looks” (pp. 13-14). She is a singularly selfish mouse.

When Despereaux is being led to the basement to die his mother shouts *adieu* to her son. As the narrator points out,

> Adieu is the word for “farewell.
>
> Farewell is not the word that you would like to hear fro your mother as you are being led to the dungeon by two oversized mice in black hoods.
>
> Words you would like to hear are “Take me instead. I will go to the dungeon in my son’s place.” There is a great deal of comfort in those words.
>
> But, reader, there us no comfort in the word “farewell,” even if you say it in French. “Farewell” is a word that, in any language, is full of sorrow. It is a word that promises absolutely nothing. (pp. 65-66)

Despereaux receives no comfort from his mother and she in never mentioned again in the story. He doesn’t miss her in the dungeon and there is no reconciliation at the end. It is a failed relationship that is dismissed.

The mother/daughter relationship in *Tamar* is hard to decipher as the mother is barely mentioned. She drops out of the picture after Tamar’s father leaves, the reader infers she is too busy having an affair with her boss, Andrew, to continue taking care of Tamar full time.

> There were quite a few calls to and from Andrew, and fairly soon Mum started working full-time. She had to, I daresay. So I started spending more and more time at Gran and Granddad's. I'd go there most days after school because Mum was never back before six or half past. The she started going away for a day or two, for work, or to conferences at the weekend, and I'd stay over their flat. They made their spare bedroom into my room and bit by bit I took a lot of my stuff over there. Pretty soon I was living with them as much as I was living with Mum. (p. 104)

Tamar is happy with her grandparents. When her mother asks about Tamar's upcoming 13th birthday plans she lets her know that her grandparents have it sorted out.

> I felt bad, but I knew it was okay really. Mum was probably thinking she could spend the weekend with Andrew after all. Cynical little cow, wasn't I? But then, why not? (p. 105)

Why not indeed. Tamar's father disappears and her mother is slowly disappearing as well. It is only after William commits suicide that Tamar's mother is mentioned again. And this time it is only as an obstacle to Tamar's plan to go on her journey with Yoyo.

> Yoyo reached up and opened the sunroof. "So tell me," he said, "how did you do it" How did you make Sonia [Tamar's mother] change her mind?"
>
> It hadn't taken much. Just three weeks of reasonable argument, unreasonable argument, nagging and whingeing, tearful discussion, begging, throwing tantrums, sulking, being charming, and emotional blackmail. (p. 235)

And that is the last the reader hears about Sonia. Like Tamar's father, she is left behind with the past.

Like the father, the mother in *The Silver Donkey*, is mentioned in the story only in relation to being an obstacle to what the children feel they need to do. Examples of this are, "What if Mama says we can't go to the woods?" (p. 37) and, "We must go out, Mama. It's important" (p. 82). The girls' relationship with the soldier is a secret they keep from their parents and in the story the parents are only peripheral. The only difference between the mother and the father, as mentioned in the above section, is the mother is the ultimate decision maker.

The mother in *Kira-Kira* is also the "bad cop" of the story. While Katie's father is always trying to see the good in his children, his wife is not so easy to please.

> Our mother looked at us suspiciously. She didn't like it when we whispered. She thought that meant we were gossiping and she was against gossiping. (p. 10).
>
> 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 an empty street, because you never knew. She didn't want us to go to college someday, because we might get strange ideas. (p. 17).

Katie's mother doesn't do this out of spite, she is trying to keep her children safe. As Katie points out, "my mother never seemed to feel safe" (p. 16). Her life is difficult, this is 1950s Georgia where there is racism against Japanese people. The family is poor. She may not feel safe, but she wields considerable power. "Our mother was obviously unhappy, which made our father unhappy" (p. 42).

Katie notices how hard her mother works and how she suffers for the family, "And her wrists were so sore somedays, she could hardly move them after work" (p. 90). Katie understands that her mother's sacrifice is aging her, "She was starting to look tired all the time" (p. 95) and, "Tonight she grunted when she stood up. And even in the dim light, her face seemed older that it had even the previous month" (p. 117).

Knowing her daughter, Lynne, is probably dying, Katie's mother works even harder to save money for a house, something that Lynne longs for, she says, "We want to get your sister's house" (p. 132). She must also slave to help pay Lynne's medical bills. "All they did was work. My mother came home only to sleep" (p. 180).

Katie's relationship with her mother is not close, mostly due to the fact that all her mother has time to do is work and take care of her dying daughter. Katie appreciates her mother for what she does and gets the love and acceptance she needs from the other members of the family.

Rain's relationship with Maggie, her mother, is strained at the beginning of *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. Maggie is emerging from her failed relationship with her husband who has left her for another woman, and she is eager to start a "new life" one in which she wants her daughter to call her "Maggie" and not "Mum." Maggie decides to move with Rain to her mother's home in rural Australia from Melbourne. She wants to go right away and Rain is not happy,

> 'No Mum, Maggie---I mean, why do we have to move? What about school? What about my friends?'
>
> 'You'll have a new school.'

> ‘But it’s halfway through the year. I can’t change now.’
>
> ‘You’ll have to, Mum said. ‘I’m sorry, Rain, but that’s all there is to it.’ (p. 2)

There is no back and forth with this decision, one that will affect Rain as much as Maggie. Maggie, at this point, according to the narrative, is very much concerned with herself and simplifying her life. Rain, who is telling the story, says,

> She (Maggie) wanted to find herself a place in a small community. She wanted to chill out for a couple of years, grow vegetables and plant her feet firmly on the earth. (p. 6)

Maggie and Rain use magnetic words they put on the refrigerator to write poems to each other. “We wrote about stuff that maybe we don’t actually want to talk about” (p.15). Their poems at the beginning of the novel further illustrate how disconnected Rain and Maggie are.

> Rain’s poem
> Me
> Cleaned out
> Homeless
> Girl
> Everything about me
> Decay
> I am haunted
> And asking
> Why
>
> Maggie’s reply
> Celebrate grass
> Tree
> Cloud
> No concrete
> Every day
> Can laugh
> And will heal

> We are secretly feline
> Our slow rhythms
> Flower brilliantly
> O crap
> Have a bath (p. 24)

Rain is writing about how sad she is to be in a new place and asking why. Maggie is celebrating her (Maggie's) chance for renewal after a difficult marriage. In response, to why, Maggie tells Rain to take a bath. In Maggie's poem she may also be talking about what she believes a child needs; grass, trees, and clouds, with no concrete. However, Rain, her child, likes living in the city, having a garden that was, "most of it was concrete, but that was great for rollerblading and scootering" (p. 7). Maggie, by moving back to her deceased mother's home, may be seeking the comfort of childhood (again). Maggie says,

> "I miss her [mother]," Maggie said. "I miss knowing she's up here. I think that's when it all started with your father and me, after Mother died. People dying, your mother dying, makes you think about how *you* are living." (p. 8)

Still, Maggie is definitely the parent as shown when Rain asks for a cat, "No," Maggie said firmly, "I'm having enough problems with wildlife as it is. A cat is not on the agenda" (p. 47). Not on Maggie's agenda, she never asks what is on Rain's agenda.

Rain is extremely protective of her mother vis-à-vis her father and his girlfriend, Julia. When Julia comments on how provincial their new town must be Rain answers (not necessarily truthfully), 'We're both very happy there" (p. 65). And when she gets home from her first weekend with her father Rain is careful to censor her recount of the days as not to upset her mother.

> I didn't tell her about Julia's four hundred and fifty dollar coat or about me putting her off buying a striped jumper and a denim skirt. And I didn't tell her about Julia and Dad having a spa bath together. (p. 75)

This visit seems to be a turning point in Maggie and Rain's relationship. That night they snuggle together in bed, "because we'd missed each other" (p. 75) and read fairy tales. Maggie comments on one fairy tale saying, "Because although I wouldn't mind a dragon ride, I wouldn't want to leave my baby behind" (p. 75). Maggie's poem reflects how much she missed Rain and loves her,

> Celebrate
> Cake
> Pie
> Champagne
> She is home
> My melon baby
> Wild green girl
> My other heart
> My daughter (p. 77).

The child/mother relationship changes even more after Rain's father disappoints her by not ensuring she can see Daniel in the hospital. Maggie, who had previously had nothing nice to say about Rain's father, is understanding. She advises Rain to try again with both her father and Julia.

> 'The real test of how brave and loving you can be is when you allow someone to make a mistake and you keep loving them, despite that mistake.' (p. 108)

This clicks for Rain, she begins to understand things from her parent's point of view.

> I decided that Dad and she (Maggie) were right—adults are complicated, messy people with complicated, messy lives. (109).

Rain has begun to see her parents as fallible people, something that comes with age and wisdom.

In the novel, *Criss Cross*, mothers play no prominent role in any of the vignettes. The only mention of them is in the role of "obstacle", in the case of this book the mothers keep their daughters from wearing "cool clothes" (p. 47).

The mothers in the novels discussed so far, are the bitches in the house. They may need to be as the fathers are not there enough, physically or emotionally, to co-parent. The mother is the "grown up" when the father sides with the children or is child-like himself. It is interesting to note that in all the novels discussed, only two mothers, the mothers in *Dragon Keeper* and *Ruby Holler*, physically leave their children. They may be bitches, but they remain. The only reason mothers in this text set leave is because they die.

Guardian Angels: The Dead Mothers

" *In the midst of life comes death. How often did our village priest preach those words. Yet I have also heard that in the midst of death comes life. If this be a riddle, so was my life."(Crispin, p. 1)*

Like the weak father, the dead mother motif has a long history in children's literature. From *Cinderella* to *Nancy Drew*, children's literature has been rife with childless mothers. In this text set, which has fifteen novels, a total of eight books, the majority, are stories without living mothers. But as I wrote earlier, these mothers are powerful characters from the grave. When analyzing this theme in my text set, I cannot use the mother's dialogue, as the mothers are dead and can longer speak. Instead, what I

am looking at is how the mother shaped the plot, how she affects the child protagonists' experiences, before and after her death.

In *A Gathering Light*, Mattie reminisces about her mother in the most glowing terms. This is influenced by Mattie's inability and indifference to filling her mother's shoes. When Mattie is having trouble feeding her family in the spring she remembers how her mother, "provided good meals all through the winter and still managed to have meat left in the cellar come spring" (p. 13). Her mother was able to feed the family well because she could watch the children while her husband could go logging for months at a time to supplement his farmer's income. Mattie remembers these as happier times,

> He'd [Pa] would show us all the new scars he'd picked up and tell us of the antics of the wild lumberjacks…it was better than Christmas those nights Pa came out of the woods (p. 20)

But now that Mattie's mother is dead,

> He [Pa] hadn't gone into the woods this year. He didn't want us by ourselves. Without his logging money, things had been hard indeed. (p. 21)

Mattie's mother's death takes more away than just extra money from logging. Her demise strips Mattie of her dreams, the very dreams her mother helped to foster. When Mattie wins five dollars in a poetry competition, money that was, "only one dollar and ninety cents shy of a train ticket to Grand Central Station" (p. 29), she had to use it, not to help get closer to college, but to, "pay for Mamma's headstone" (p. 29). Mattie has stopped writing after her mother's death something she blames on, "the big damn farm

that's nothing but endless damn work" (p. 35). Mattie's friend, Weaver, hits on the truth when he retorts,

> It's not the work that stops you, is it, Matt? Or time? You've always had plenty of one and none of the other. It's that promise. She shouldn't have made you do it. She had no right. (p. 35)

When Mattie's mother lay dying, she made Mattie promise to stay and help care for her siblings and family. Weaver interprets this deathbed wish as, "G-d took her life, and she took yours" (p. 36). Mattie's mother wasn't like this when she was alive. She encouraged Mattie's dreams to be a writer and praised her stories and poems. "Mamma told me I was to get my diploma even though Pa wanted me to leave school" (p. 59). As Mattie's father reminds her, "You're lucky you're going to school this year… [because it] meant something to your mother" (p. 22).

But after her death, Mattie's mother keeps Mattie from accepting a scholarship and placement to Barnard college, "And I had made a promise—one that would keep me here even if I had all the money in the world" (p. 66).

As the story proceeds, Mattie begins to question having to keep her promise to her mother. She asks a co-worker,

> "When you make a promise, do you always have to keep it?"
>
> "My ma says you do."
>
> "Even if the person you promised dies?"
>
> "Especially then…you can't break a promise to anyone who's dead. They'll come back and haunt you if you do." (p. 103)

Mattie continues to try and honor her mother's wishes. She gives up her dreams of going to college and becoming a writer, gets engaged to Royal, who lives on the next farm, and continues to clean her Aunt Josie's home (for free!) because, "That was what Mama would have wanted me to do. So I did" (p. 111). As Mattie points out, "You can't argue with the dead. No matter what you say, they get the last word" (p. 175). But Mattie does not allow her mother to get the last word and ends up leaving her town, her family, and her mother's promise, to make a life for herself in New York City.

Damien, in the novel *Millions*, is affected by his mother's death more indirectly. As I discussed above in the section on fathers, the abandonment of his mother has made him fear his father's abandonment as well. Damien is trying to be "good" as a way to keep his father in his life and as a way to ensure his mother has become a Saint.

Damien wants to become a Saint himself and does things like mortify his flesh and build a hermitage to be more authentic. He brings to his hermitage a book on Saint Francis and "a tube of tinted moisturizer" (p. 19), this moisturizer had belonged to his mother. This route works as Damien begins to be visited by Saints. His always asks the visiting Saint if she knows St. Maureen (his mother). On a visit from St Clare Damien asks, "Only I did wonder if you'd ever come across a St. Maureen" (p. 36). The answer is always no.

Until finally one day, in his darkest hour, St. Maureen makes an appearance. The police have just come to Damien's home and he believes he will be arrested for stealing the money, punished for being bad. The reader is left to infer that Damien is thinking of committing suicide.

> When it [the train] had gone, I had thirteen minutes till the next train came. I stepped onto the track. The rails were shining blue. They looked like a long metal ladder leading all the way to the moon and the moon looked like the entrance to a tunnel full of light. (p. 237)

As a reader, I infer this passage to mean Damien is waiting for the next train to take him towards the light, a way that near death survivors have described the process of dying. And then his mother shows up. She tells him to use conditioner on his hair and not to neglect his oral hygiene. And then she tells Damien not to worry about her, "…don't. It's very interesting where I am" (p. 239). St. Maureen gives Damien some advice,

> Well, people are even more complicated. You want things to be good or bad. But things are complicated. The thing to remember is that there's nearly always enough good around to be going on with. You've just got to have a bit of faith, you know. And if you've got faith I people, that makes them stronger, and you…you've got enough to sort all three of you out. That's why I'm counting on you. (p. 240)

Like Mattie's mother, Damien's mother gives him the responsibility for caring for his family in her absence. In this case, however, this is what Damien needs. His mother tells him her miracle is Damien. This responsibility and knowledge frees Damien to continue living. He has meaning in his life, an important job. And the confirmation from his sainted mother that life is messy, the same advice Rain gets from Maggie. This knowledge seems to be libratory for these children. Like grown ups, children, too, are

allowed to be messy, to be complicated and to allow life to be that way, freeing the child up to pursue her own life.

In *Helicopter Man*, Pete also sees his mother as his guardian angel, albeit an enigmatic one. He misses her terribly, but must suffer in silence out of concern for his father's feelings, "Miss her all the time. Can't let on to Dad, though" (p. 26). Some of Pete's journal entries are letters to his dead mother. He tells her how tired he is and wonders if his father made her go off, "…my head hurts from doing so much worrying and thinking. Was that why you used to sometimes go off by yourself and cry?" (p. 28).

As mentioned earlier, Pete doesn't know why his mother left. All he knows is she is dead and didn't say goodbye. The unanswered questions bother him as much as her death. Pete doesn't understand his father and needs his mother's help to figure things out, "Dad's talking, but not to me. Mum, I need you" (p. 60).

But Pete doesn't know the circumstances surrounding his mother's death. When he is in child court he writes,

> What made me angry today was the way the Human Services man put together a story about Dad and me that was only half the truth. About Mum deserting us and then dying soon after in a car crash (p. 85)

Pete goes on to muse in the same entry,

> Big question of the year. Why hasn't Dad ever properly explained to me about Mum? …And if Mum was really leaving she'd have written a note. It would be just plain cruel to leave your family without a note. Mum wasn't cruel. (p. 87)

When Pete goes and finds the letters his mother left him and his dad (as mentioned in an earlier section) this frees his up to live again without the mystery of his mother's disappearance. He can mourn her without the cloud of uncertainly hanging over his grief. Pete can go on with his life.

Lucky, in *The Higher Power of Lucky*, is angry with her mother for casting her in the role of a Ward at eight-years-old. The whole of the novel centers on Lucky's fear of being abandoned by Brigitte and going to a foster home. In her list of qualities of a bad mother and good mother (p. 14) her mother fits all of the traits of a bad mother and none of the traits of a good mother. A bad mother is listed as, "Going out in the morning after a storm in the desert, no matter how beautiful this is, especially barefoot" (p. 14). Lucky's mother dies stepping on a live electrical wire that was downed after a storm. While a good mother is, "Totally alert for dangers, especially ones caused by storm" (p. 14).

Lucky is angry and not ready to let go literally or figuratively of her mother as illustrated by her inability to scatter her mother's ashes in the desert at the memorial service. In answer to her friend, Lincoln's, question as to why she didn't scatter the ashes, Lucky replies, "Because they were the *remains* of my *mother*" (p. 66). She chooses to hold on to what is left of her mother.

In the end of the book, Lucky is finally able to scatter the ashes, let go of her anger, after discovering her Higher Power. This precipitates her Guardian, Brigitte, to adopt her and allows Lucky to go on with her life.

For Crispin, the death of his mother puts him in mortal danger as she has lied to him about the circumstances surrounding his birth. He discovers after her death that they

both had been living a lie. His mother was not a peasant woman, but a gentle woman who got pregnant by the Lord of the village, with the result being Crispin. She doesn't let him know that she can read or even what his name is, until her death he is only known as Asta's son.

Asta's death, and Crispin's ensuing struggle to live, leaves him open to meeting Bear and learning how to be free. By Asta dying, she gives Crispin, wittingly or unwittingly, his life.

In *Beeing Bee*, Bee's mother's death makes room for Jazzi, her father's new girlfriend to move in and turn Bee's world upside down. The reader never learns how long ago Bee's mother died, and while she rarely mentions her, it is only when Jazzi throws mementos of Bee's mother away, that the crisis of the narrative occurs, which, in turn, allows Bee to finally accept her new life.

The overarching theme of this section seems to be the child can't grow with the dead. The dead mothers keep the child protagonists in a space where they are rendered unable to construct a new life. It is only when they can let go, let the dead stay buried, that they are able to make a life for themselves.

Mothers, in general, in this text set, are obstacles to their children's growth. Fathers, also obstacles, are more road bumps in smaller, day-to-day ways. Mothers, on the other hand, hold the true power in the family, and the child must negotiate a new relationship with her mother, living or dead, in order to construct her own life.

Children's Roles

The child protagonists in this text set have a varied set of roles within adult created structures, these functions include: child-as-savior, child-as-secret-keeper, child-as-quasi spouse, and chills-as-moral-compass.

Child-as-Savior

Children in this role help save adults, not other children. This saving may include saving adults from the despair of the growing old, saving adults from themselves, and saving adults from harm; body, spiritual, emotional, or financial. Examples of this kind of behavior can be found in *Ruby Holler*, when the children help Tiller and Sairy rediscover the beauty in their lives.

> "Whoa!" he [Dallas] said. "You see that bright blue bird?"
>
> "Dallas, that's just an old blue jay."
>
> "Well, it's a mighty incredible blue jay."
>
> "Is it?" Sairy said, following his gaze. (p. 64).
>
> Tiller put down his brush and went to the open bard doors and gazed out across the holler. He tried to picture it as Florida was seeing it, and as his won children had seen it, and as he had seen it as a child. (p. 62).

Through the children's new eyes, Sairy and Tiller's old eyes can see new things again, too. By asking innocent questions, the Twins also play the role of helping Sairy and Tiller to understand each other better. Florida asks Sairy if she misses her children who have long ago moved away.

> "Used to be we missed them every day, every minute," Sairy said. "We couldn't

figure out how to fill up our time. Sometimes even now it feels kind of…kind of empty here in the holler."

Tiller stared at his wife. *She feels that way, too*? (p. 66)

Maybe one of the reasons Sairy and Tiller invited the Twins to come to the Holler was to be saved from the fear of loosing each other. Sairy and Tiller, like Dallas and Florida, have never been apart and they decide as an experiment to take separate vacations, to pursue their own interests. As they start to chicken out, they use the Twins to keep them on track.

"We could cancel out trips, you know," Tiller said.

"Naw. Those kids are counting on these trips. It would be a shame to disappoint them." (p.165)

Florida literally serves as Tiller's savior when he almost drowns on their canoe trip after having a heart attack. Florida, despite not knowing how to swim, manages to pull Tiller to safety, saving his life.

Saving lives is seen in other novels in this texts set as well. In *Dragon Keeper*, Ping saves Danzi's life on at least three occasions, Pete rescues his father from drowning in *Helicopter Man*, and Crispin risks life and limb and gives up all claims to a royal title to save Bear from torture. Coco and Marcelle, in less dramatic ways, save the soldier's life with their pilfered food and their kindness. In *A Gathering Light* Mattie saves Emmie Hubbard's family's well being and farm by using money she had saved to go to college to pay off Emmie's taxes.

Ironically, children in these books, who are supposed to be the ones in need of saving, are the ones who end up saving the adults. This is also seen in subtler ways in *Beeing Bee* where Bee salves Jazzi's hurts by understanding her need for a dog while Rain helps her mother get through an ugly divorce by sticking it out in the boondocks with her. These girls also help save the adults in their lives by helping to resurrect the grown-up's ideas and plans for a "proper family."

Child-as-Secret-Keeper

In a following section I discuss the roles secrets play in children's (and adult's) lives. This section deals with the role of the child protagonist in being responsible for keeping adult secrets. While much of children's literature is concerned with keeping children from the truth, in some of the novels in the text set, adults use children as confidantes in order to keep the truth from other adults. This is the case in *Beeing Bee* when Jazzi introduces Bee to Harley, her mentally ill brother, who not even her best friend knows about. After they visit him, she makes Bee promise not to tell her father. In *Tamar*, William gives his granddaughter the tools to discover a dark secret he has been keeping from everyone. He does this posthumously, which doesn't lessen the responsibility she is handed.

Children are trusted with really big secrets. Case in point is the soldier in *The Silver Donkey* relying on an eight-year-old and ten-year-old to keep his existence a secret from the village authorities and their own family. Florida and Dallas in *Ruby Holler* are given the secret to keep of the Tiller and Sairy's fortunes buried in the Holler. Bear gives Crispin the secret that he belongs to an outlawed group of revolutionaries. In a complex

system, secrets are both withheld from and given to children. This speaks to adults' perceptions of children as being too innocent to make sense of some truth or too "wise" to give away important confidences.

Child-as-Quasi-Spouse

The roles the children are expected to assume in many of these texts are those of a quasi-spouse. By this I am referring to the care the child protagonist must provide to younger siblings, but mostly to the single parent she lives with. This is not care of a sexual kind, but it may be physical labor or difficult emotional work.

In *A Gathering Light*, Mattie is expected to replace her mother in all ways. She must care for her younger siblings, the farm, and her father. She is expected to bear her father's anguish and put her own aside in the process. Similarly, Pete in *Helicopter Man* tries to replace his mother who, he finds out, was able to keep his father "sensible." Pete largely fails in this enterprise as his father's disease is progressive, but like Mattie, he puts his own needs after his father's needs.

Bee, as discussed earlier, chafes at the idea of replacing her mother and believes her father should be able to take care of himself. It is not until Jazzi shows up and assumes the role of quasi-spouse that Bee regrets not having fulfilled this role and leaving it open to another person. Rain, like Bee, doesn't want to become her mother's quasi-spouse and fights the role until she realizes that her mother's needs outweigh her own. That is partly why she makes peace with living in a place and a way that her mother yearns for.

Lucky in subtler ways assumes the role of quasi-husband, protector of the family, when she rescues Brigitte from having to deal with a snake in the washing machine. Lucky tries to help Brigitte become more comfortable with living in a place far removed from Paris.

What I find in the novels is the child putting her needs after the needs of the adult. This may be done for reasons of self-preservation. In the cases of Ping and Crispin, they need to help rescue the adult (or adult dragon) because they see this other as their ticket to safety and freedom. This may also be accomplished out of a sense of pity. The children in these novels see their parents clearly. Coco and Marcelle care for the Soldier not out of a sense of duty but out of pity for his blind, scared, helplessness. Mattie sees the sadness in her father, his sense of failure, and this drives her to help him as much as a sense of duty. Children in these novels have heavy responsibilities as evidenced in the many roles they must take on.

Childs-as-Moral-Compass

This category is covered in depth in the following section on morality. In essence this role consists of the child protagonist, despite being surrounded by amoral behaviors by adults, doing the right thing eventually in the story.

Do the Right Thing: Morality

"Since I was the only entirely honest member of the family, Dad said I could decide what we did with the money. And with 20,345 new Euros we built fourteen hand-dug wells in northern Nigeria". (Millions, p. 247)

A central preoccupation of children's literature historically has been to use story to convey lessons of right and wrong (Tatar, 1992). Typically, child characters who are good are rewarded, while bad children are punished. The children in this text, within the story itself, are confronted with "complicated and messy adults" (*Rain May and Captain Daniel*, p. 109) who challenge the idea of a static right and wrong. For example, in the novel *Millions*, Damien's father, rather than being outraged at his children's crime, joins in. In *Tamar*, a beloved grandfather turns out to be a murderer and in *Crispin*, the heretical Bear is the "good guy". Children in these novels sometimes stray from conventional morality as well. In *The Silver Donkey*, Marcelle and Coco lie and steal with no guilt or ill affects and in *The Higher Power of Lucky* the only way Lucky is able to learn to find her Higher Power is by eavesdropping on private, anonymous meetings.

While each novel has elements that are morally elastic, each novel also has a clear moral meta-message that involves the child protagonist making the correct choice, doing the right thing. For no matter what transpires in children's literature, adult structures are always kept in place (Nodelman, 2008).

However, this structure can be muddied by the postmodern nature of the child protagonists in this particular text set. These children must make the adult normative decision in the midst of the ambiguities and complexities of the adult made world where the bad guys aren't always bad and the good girls aren't always good (Chappell, 2008). For example, in the quote I used to start this section, Damien, remains good, despite his family's morally ambiguous behaviors.

To look at this in more depth I will examine this idea of post modern-modern morality in the context of the novel *Millions*. The post-modern morality in this novel is that, despite its preoccupation with Catholic Saints, the Saints that the reader and Damien meet, turn out to be less than saintly, and far more human. St. Clare tells Damien she'd send people a vision to, "sort them out" (p. 36). She snorts at the idea of her sister St Ursula having "eleven thousand holy companions" correcting the record, "There were only ever eleven of them, truth be told" (p. 36). St Charles Lwanga visits Damien to rail against the "I M bloody F and the World Bank" (p. 107). St. Peter swears and advises Damien not to give his name and address to charity groups because, "Every beggar in Christendom will be on your doorstep. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about, I'm infallible" (p. 173).

Damien's father, however, is not. Having been left out of the scheme to spend the pounds prior to Euro Day for fear on Anthony's part that he would make the boys give the money back, he surprisingly loves the plan and helps the boys try and spend the last of the money, even stealing some to use for himself later on. This is all post-modern. The Saints aren't all that saintly and Damien's father is good, wanting him to be excellent, and then not so excellent himself, or so it seems to Damien.

Damien is a post modern child with a modern sensibility about right and wrong (Coats, 2001). He believes the money fell to earth from God, to reward his for being so good. His mother has to tell him that, "You want things to be good or bad. But things are complicated" (p. 240). She is explaining to her child about the idea of contextual morality. But his job, really the job of all the children in this text set is to persevere, to do

the right thing in the midst of chaos. His mother tells him she "is counting" on him to be good for his family (p. 240). And he does do the right thing. Damien doesn't steal any of the money for himself and, as the moral center of the family, convinces them to donate the leftover monies to build wells in Africa.

The child protagonist has the role of being the moral center of the story, the one who sorts things out. In *The Silver Donkey*, Coco and Marcelle may lie to and steal from their parents, but it is all in the name of helping a wounded soldier who tells them he left the war in order to return home to his dying bother. The reader, and the soldier, assumes that an adult would have turned him in for being AWOL,

> "No! No!" the soldier waved his arms, "You can't tell anyone about me---you mustn't!"
>
> "Why mustn't we?"
>
> "Because…Why, because…Because other people might not understand about John, and his being ill, and his calling for me feverishly at night. People might say I should go back to soldering and forget about my brother, since he's only a boy and sickly, and since there's a way being fought." (p. 16).

The "people" the soldier is referring to, are adults. Marcelle, the older girl, agrees to keep his secret and help him because she "had noticed many injustices in the world" (p. 16). She helps him because she feels his anguish about his dying brother and because it is simply the right thing to do.

Then soldier, who is a slippery post-modern creation of a good guy who does bad things, deserts his comrades in arms, and lies to the girls about his brother, who had died long ago, needs the girls not only to care for him, but to be his moral compass.

This child-as-the-moral compass theme is found in many of the other novels as well. Mattie, in *A Gathering Light*, does leave her past behind, but not before she saves the home of Emmie, the fallen woman in town, who, she discovers long after everyone else in town knows, is sleeping around. Emmie's property is going to be foreclosed on at the urging of Royal, Mattie's fiancé, who hates her because she has been having an affair with his father. By saving Emmie's home, Mattie is, in the middle of amoral behavior, the moral foundation of the town, doing what is truly right, for a woman the town has written off as a "slut" and whose lover is willing to let her and the children he fathered illegitimately, become homeless to appease his "real" son.

The child protagonists in these situations serve a complex role, they are to make sense of situations that reflect judgment for beyond their years, and still maintain the status quo, the modern version of morality, where there still are clear cut rights and wrongs (Friedman & Cataldo, 2002).

Of course the children in these books aren't always good, they break rules and do things behind their parents' backs, but they always, in the end, serve to ensure the book has the proper moral message. Despite the post modern milieu these children exist in, the moral thrust of children's novels has remained the same, to maintain a reactionary social order, in other words to reproduce the past. This reproduction is apparent in *Dragon Keeper*, when Ping takes on the responsibility of caring for the newly hatched dragon.

Her job, one which she willingly and freely takes, is to carry on the tradition of being a Dragon Keeper and ensuring the next generation continues to have dragons. This is also true of Bee in *Beeing Bee*, where by choosing to include Jazzi in her life and family, she is helping to recreate a nuclear family, one complete with dad, child, and mum.

Keeping Secrets

"*Psychologists tell us that keeping things buried inside is bad for us, makes us sick. Maybe it does. But I happen to think there are certain things that are best left buried, that we should take to our graves with us. Terrible things that we have witnessed. I'm sure you disagree. You belong to a liberated generation; you believe in freedom of information. But I am sure one day you will change your mind*." *(Tamar, p. 4)*

There are many possible reasons why adults keep secrets from children. It may be because as adults we aren't comfortable with the truth ourselves and certainly don't want to admit it to ourselves by discussing it with our children. In this case children can serve as buffer for adults between what is real and what should be real. Nikolajeva makes this case when she writes, "Children's authors tend to tell their readers what their childhood should be like, rather than what it is" (2005, p. xi). It is in this disconnect where the secrets pop up. By withholding the truth from the child protagonist the adult (author or character) is trying to show childhood as an idealized state, which requires lies and secrets, as childhood, we learn from this text set and from our own experiences as children, is never as halcyon as producers of child culture would have us believe (Steinberg, 1997).

Secrets make be kept by adults from children to ensure that children's literature reflects our culture's beliefs that, "Our ideas about childhood tend always, it seems, to express otherness and difference and separation and the need to bridge the gulf" (Travisano, 2000, p. 23). An expedient way to keep a strong boundary between adulthood and childhood is for adults to withhold information children could use to cross the frontier from child to adult. By slowly and painfully procuring the truth, the children are able to "bridge the gulf" in order to gain agency in their otherness. This withholding of information works to maintain the status quo of the tension constructed socioculturally between adulthood and childhood.

Another reason for secrecy in children's literature may be to further this genre's aim of, "of trying to be both optimistic and didactic at once" (Nodelman, 2000, p. 2). This balancing acts requires that children are shielded from the harsh realities of life for part of the book (in order to keep the story optimistic) and then given the truth in order for the child to make the eventual "right" decision that is the didactic aim of children's literature.

The dichotomy of children's literature lies in the tension between innocence and ignorance and wisdom and knowledge (Nodelman, 2000). Secrets buttress this tension by allowing the child to be innocent at the beginning of the story and then when the truth is discovered, able to seek freedom or grow up. This is a one way street, the child can never return to this innocent place and must leave her/his old life behind in order to achieve agency.

In a way, this keeping of secrets from the child protagonist renders all the stories in this text set fairy tales. I am using Nodelman's (2009) definition of fairytale as wish fulfillment fantasies where characters get what they want and are happy with the results. In order to fulfill their wishes, the child must find out the truth, cross the boundary of child as innocent to child as knowing. This border crossing, this one way ticket, is where children find their "happily ever afters."

Adults control the child's experiences by withholding information, knowledge, by keeping secrets that give children the tools to make informed decisions or true freedom (Dewey, 1938). Both the structure of the novels as well as the adult characters serve the purpose of ensuring children are given information at the time the adult deems the child is ready or deserving. This is a normative move as it ensures child protagonists, substituting for "real" children, have their doses of reality carefully compounded and administered by adults and only adults. Children in these books do not learn the truth from other children but must seek it out from grown-ups who give it to them when they deem the time is right, which is not always the time that is most appropriate for the child characters.

Examples of this abound in the novels being explored in this text set. Ping, in *Dragon Keeper*, is only told of her responsibility to care for the dragon stone when Danzi has thoroughly tested her. He allows her to almost die on a number of occasions to prove she is ready to cross over to the other side. In *Crispin*, Bear lets Crispin wander for weeks, outrunning danger at every turn, before he reads to him what is written on the cross of lead, his father's name and the explanation for his being hunted to death. In *The*

Silver Donkey, the girls are never told the truth of the soldier's escape from the army, leaving them in a childlike state at the end, while in *Kira-Kira*, Katie is not told of her sister's cancer until her parents can no longer hide the truth from themselves that Lynne is going to die. In all the examples listed the adult decides when the child (and the adult) is ready for the truth.

This secret keeping protects the adult from having to confront the truth and the adult from having to deal with the truth through the child. Secret keeping also acts as a rite of passage, when the child is ready, worthy, and able, when the adult decides this, then and only then will the truth be released and the child allowed to finish her journey to freedom.

Freedom's Just Another Word for Nothing Left to Lose

"He hadn't been allowed to leave boarding school—he's been made to do what adults thought he should do, as children always are. It had seemed to take forever for him to grow old enough to be free again." (The Silver Donkey, p. 32)

"Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." (Kris Kristopherson)

What Kris Kristopherson in his song, "Me and Bobbie Magee", may have been sung about the novels in this text set. The ideology that rests in twelve of these books, is one in which the child cannot be free until she has lost the past. This "losing" means letting go of the past, the anger, the grief, the insecurity; childhood, in essence, and constructing something new, a future. "Losing" in most of these books does not mean literally walking away from your home, your family, but rather repositioning yourself and

your thinking to be able to have nothing left. It seems that it is in this absence where true growth can be found.

Freedom is the predominant theme of childhood that I found across my data. By freedom, I am referring to the idea of the child being free to make decisions based on observation and judgment (Dewey, 1938). This is essentially the freedom to consider consequences prior to acting. It is a freedom "to;" to act, to think, to be responsible, and to grow up. This kind of freedom, which I will refer to as true freedom, is the ability to act after reflection (Dewey, 1938).

. Dewey (1938) writes that the most important freedom is freedom of the intellect. He argues that we (as Americans) waste a lot of time discussing "freedoms from." His push is for the "freedom to" side. In the "freedom to" creed the individual has power. This power stems from intellectual freedom. It is this power that allows people to think for themselves, to create, and to solve problems. This is not to be confused with what Dewey refers to as "ultimate freedom."

Dewey makes the argument that ultimate freedom does not make us free. Freedom that allows people to infringe on other people's well being; freedom that destroys group cohesion is not freedom. This kind of no holds barred freedom is, in fact, a kind of bondage not only for the people affected, but also for the person who is exercising her freedom without care for others. By interfering with the group's functioning the individual is enslaving her own intellect, because as Dewey argues, intellectual freedom is only possible within a group as thoughts and ideas and problem

solving must be generated in concert with other minds. By trying to control others, the individual ultimately stagnates.

True freedom can found within the text when the child protagonist is given the time, space, and information needed to make an informed choice. This kind of freedom is also offered the adult when she no longer controls the child. The reader can also take this up when she transacts with the text. The reader may create a poem but must create this interpretation within the constraints of being true to the text (Rosenblatt, 1994). The reader makes choices during the reading event informed by the text. Like the child protagonist, the intended reader of children's literature is living through the story because, "In a literary work there is no one else for whom we are substituting" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 68).

Just in Case

For Justin, true freedom is found at the end of the novel as he lies dying in his hospital bed. After running so long and hard from Fate, he contracts meningitis from one droplet of mucus passed by bumping in to a woman on a street while he is, ironically, running from Fate. Justin learns that while he can never be free from Fate, from the possibility of bad things befalling him, but he can be free to want to live despite the uncertainty of life.

Justin has nothing left to lose, he has exhausted all possibilities of escaping Fate and now he is about to lose his life. He is able to stop running and think. Justin is able to connect to the people in his life who matter, his friend Peter, Peter's sister Dorothea, and his brother Charlie. Dorothea tells him to," Stop thinking about yourself for a change.

The answer isn't in your head, it's out here, with us" (p. 239). Justin listens and thinks, "Dorothea? Please don't go" (p. 239). This is the reader's first indication that Justin may choose life.

Then Justin is visited by his brother, Charlie, who started off the chain of events by trying to jump out the window to fly. Charlie says (we never know if Charlie, who is one-year-old can speak, or if this conversation is really in Justin's mind),

> I'm sorry I started all this by trying to fly and I'd take it back if I could but I can't, so please think of it from my point of view: if you die I will have a dead brother and it will be me instead of you who suffers. (p. 242)

By getting out of his own misery, and connecting with other people's feelings, Justin is able to be free to choose to live. As Charlie exits the hospital room he says, "See you later", and Justin replies "weakly but distinctly, "Okay" (p. 243).

Justin's freedom is the freedom to connect with life, with the people who love him. This is not gratuitous freedom, but a real kind, the kind that lends itself to "hundreds of millions of ordinary, unexpected, and occasionally quite astonishing things" (p. 245), the freedom to make decisions about how to live now, not to cower from the future.

Tamar

Tamar is able to free herself of her past, to lose everything, by finding out the truth. She is brought up in the midst of lies. It is ironic that the man who precipitated the lies, her step-grandfather, William, is also the catalyst for Tamar's journey to the truth.

Tamar begins life as an offering by William to the man he murdered, Tamar's true grandfather, who the reader only knows by the code name, Tamar. By asking his son, Jan,

to name his baby Tamar, William is beginning the process of using his step-granddaughter to save his own soul.

With the mystery box William leaves Tamar, she is once again used as a tool for redemption as the journey William plans for her is both a map to her father and a map to the past. Tamar is to find her father to put some closure on his anger at finding out the truth of his father as well as to put closure on her own anger at her father's desertion.

But Tamar finds a true kind of freedom where she has the information to make an informed decision about how to continue as she is unable to erase the past. Tamar decides, on her own, to leave the past behind, to lose the past, to leave her father with his hatred and guilt and to make a life of her own with her lover Yoyo in Holland.

Millions

Damien's freedom comes with the knowledge his mother gives him that he is a miracle (read excellent) and that she is fine being a Saint in heaven. This communication, whether real or imagined, frees Damien from his worries about being deserted by his father for not being good enough and that his mother is not happy in heaven. He needn't take his own life as his search for saintliness has paid off.

When Damien's mother gives him the mission to put his faith to good use, to help sort out his father and brother, Damien is free to live, to find goodness on Earth and not to seek it prematurely in heaven or from emulating Saints. He begins to see that he is good, not perfect, but excellent in his own way and this is the catalyst to go on living and being himself. Damien is able to leave the quest for perfection behind and start fresh.

A Gathering Light

For Mattie, freedom is to stop living with the dead and for the dead and go out into the world to tell the truth. At the beginning of the story she writes, “For I am good at telling myself lies” (p. 1). She tries to go with the status quo as a way to gain freedom from letting down her family, going back on a promise to her mother, and having to try to make it as a writer.

Through her transactions with Grace Brown’s letters, Mattie learns that this find of freedom, freedom from, is just another kind of bondage and that while Grace’s story needs to be told, so does her own. By telling Grace’s story she is breaking her promise with the now dead girl to burn her letters. Mattie writes, “I’m not going to do it, Grace [burn the letters]. Haunt me if you want to, but I’m not going to do it” (p. 374).

Mattie has made an informed decision, garnered through the letters and observations of the young people who remain in the town, that she has a choice. Her informed choice is to leave the past behind, start with nothing, lose everything, and possibly gain her own life.

Ruby Holler

For Dallas and Florida becoming free has everything to do with trusting in the possibility of love. They have been hurt, physically and emotionally by everyone in their lives other than each other. Tiller and Sairy offer a home, protection, love, and safety and in order to accept these rights, for these are certainly children’s human rights, they must test this offer.

They test over and over again and Sairy and Tiller never let them down. Even when Dallas and Florida do something wrong they are offered unconditional acceptance. This support allows the Twins to be free to choose to stay in the Holler and give up their dreams of running away. They are not being foisted on a new family, but; instead, choose to stay with this family, the only one where they are safe enough to do so.

The Higher Power of Lucky

Lucky claims her freedom when she discovers her Higher Power. The reader is never totally sure exactly what happens that makes Lucky find her Higher Power, but maybe that's the way it has to be, as Lucky herself points out, "nobody had explained how exactly they had found their Higher Power" (p. 5). For Lucky, her Higher Power is the ineffable thing that could "guide her in the right direction" (p. 5).

Lucky requires this guidance because she understands that at ten-years-old, "It's almost impossible to get control of your life. It's other people, adults, who have control of your life, because they can abandon you" (p. 80).

After Lucky runs, as she is being rescued, something seems to click. She takes control of her life, as she conducts her own memorial service for her mother. As she is about to throw the ashes to the world, "Suddenly a breeze came, a little afterthought of the storm, as if, Lucky thought, some Higher Power was paying attention and knew what was needed" (p. 130). It was what Lucky needed as well. She has the courage to say goodbye to the past and face up to her future.

The Tale of Despereaux

Despereaux's bid for freedom is fueled by both love and story, although it could be argued that Despereaux was born free, in that he made choices to be himself from birth, and not a "typical" mouse. In order to be free, the character must lose everything, which he does. Thanks to Despereaux's measured choice to model himself after a hero in a fairytale and try and woo Princess Pea despite the mouse code, he is sent to the dungeon to die for his betrayal to his genus.

Once in the dungeon, Despereaux experiences true freedom, he has the options to recant, to despair, or to follow his heart and save the princess. His decision to rescue Pea is an exercise of freedom, the ability to act after reflection (Dewey, 1938). Despereaux uses his freedom to follow his heart and carve out his own story, with himself as the hero.

Crispin: Cross of Lead

Crispin begins the novel believing he is subject to the whims of the manor lord and his G-d's plan. Having lost everything, his mother, his good name, and his village, Crispin is in the vacuum necessary to find freedom. Through his journey with Bear, learning by observation, Crispin sees that he can break through the bonds that he believes tie him down. Bear teaches him how to laugh, how to question, and how to have faith, not only in God, but in himself. At the beginning of the story Crispin isn't sure that he can be free,

> "Freedom?" I said. What has that to do with me?"
>
> "You could live by your own choices… [answers the priest]." (p. 37)

As Crispin learns, he realizes that freedom is within his grasp,

> That made sense. For what I had recalled most was his (Bear) saying, "that no man, or woman either, shall be enslaved to any other, but stand free and equal to each other. (p. 253)

With this knowledge Crispin makes his choice to go on with Bear, to give up any claim he may have as Lord Furnival's illegitimate son. "To be a Furnival was to be part of that bondage" (p. 253). Crispin chooses not to be the oppressor or the oppressed, but to go with Bear to make people laugh and tell them that they, too, can be free.

Beeing Bee

For Bee, in order to move on, to become free, she must let go of her dead mother and accept her new family, with Jazzi included. Through observing Jazzi and reading the guinea pig letters, Bee learns that Jazzi is also a wounded child. Her mother didn't die when she was young, but her beloved dog did at the hands of her mentally ill brother. It is the acknowledgement of Jazzi as a real person that enables Rain to make the informed decision to try and make her new family work.

Rain does this in concrete ways. She has her father buy Jazzi a puppy to replace the once she lost long ago. This is Rain's attempt to on her own, make peace with Jazzi and accept her into her heart and life.

Helicopter Man

Pete gains the ability to seize his freedom when he has the necessary information to make informed decisions, he has already lost everything a child can lose. At the beginning of the book, he doesn't understand what is the matter with his father nor why his mother left without telling him. This ignorance is keeping him in bondage. After he

finds out the truth he is able to make informed decisions, even ones the reader may not agree with. It is strange that at the end of the book Pete claims he will stay with his father no matter what. However, he is armed with all the information he needs to make his own decision.

Dragon Keeper

Ping is another child protagonist who begins the book with nothing left to lose. She cannot return to her slavery, nor does she have family or friends to turn to. Through her relationship with Danzi, she learns her powers as a dragon keeper, that she is special, not a commodity that was bought and sold in the past. Ping literally flies away from her past, to a present in which her mettle is tested. She fails, makes wrong decisions, trusts unscrupulous characters, but through her trials, Ping gains knowledge.

When Ping chooses on her own volition to leave a life of ease with the emperor to save Danzi and the dragon stone, she has the information necessary to make this decision an informed one. Ping knows the risks she is taking, but they are worth it to her. At the end of the novel, when she takes over the responsibility of the baby dragon, she assumes her place in the world, finds her meaning, by being a true dragon keeper.

Rain May and Captain Daniel

For Rain, who has little control over her life, seizing freedom is more nuanced than in most of the other novels. Like so many of the other child protagonists, she must let go of the past. In this case lose her fantasies of her parents reuniting, in order to be free to make a new life for herself.

Rain does this when she finally gets really angry with her father and step-mother. She learns that her father is not coming home and Julia is a force that must be dealt with. Rain's mother is the one who gives her the knowledge she needs in order to make informed decisions when she tells her that adults are messy people who make big mistakes. It is this epiphany, that parents are infallible, that frees Rain to go ahead and make a new life that includes divorces parents and a step-mother.

Common Threads of Freedom

The common threads that run through these stories of freedom are the Foucauldian idea of *parrhesia* and the Buberarian idea of the I/You relationship. In each story, the child speaks truth to power at personal risk in order to become free. The child must claim her agency or gain "the ability to imagine the world differently and then act differently (Chappell, 2008, p. 282). This "acting differently" is the *parrhesian* act. When Foucault was writing about this concept he imagined adults speaking truth to power, and his examples involve risks such as death.

This idea can be used with children as they are always in the object position, and are controlled by adults directly or by adult normativity indirectly. For the children in this text set, some of the *parrhesian* acts involve possible bodily harm, as in *Dragon Keeper* and *Crispin*, where the children challenge authority that can kill them for treason. In most cases, however, the *parrhesian* act is one of risking love, safety, or acceptance. An example of this kind of risk is when Florida and Dallas speak truth (by running away) to power (Tiller and Sairy). The risk they take is that the adults will not follow them into the woods, but leave them there on their own once again.

Buber's idea of justice and freedom being found in the space between people, when each person sees the other as integral to herself is also apropos for this theme. This space is where many of the children find their power. Justin decides to go on living when he realizes dying would leave his brother grieving. Bee is free when she is able to see Jazzi as another lost, grieving child. Maybe this idea is what makes Pete write at the end of *Helicopter Man* that he will stay with his father no matter what. This love and understanding in the cracks between people pushed Mattie to leave her status quo life, not only for herself, but for a dead woman, Grace, who could no longer speak. *I/You* relationships form when the child sees the other as part of her/himself, something that can't be removed if one is to live, like a pancreas. It is the opposite of letting go, and yet, both things can occur in some stories at the same time. The child leaves the past behind and practices *parrhesia* in the context of the *I/You* relationship.

In the next section of this chapter I tie together the meta-plot analysis from chapter four and the analysis of the categories of childhood I discussed in this chapter. One set of findings will inform the other.

The Failed Home: Child as Object

Barring the outliers, in this text set the child's original home is failed. By failed, I mean a home where the child doesn't feel safe, loved, or free to be herself. This can be summarized as the child as an object of something or someone. The failure of the home seems to rest on this objectification of the child. The child protagonist as object is without agency. As I wrote in chapter four, agency is the ability to imagine the new possibilities of a different and better life. This is a life where the meaning is given by the child, not to

the child. If what Frankl (1959) says is true, that the way to make sense of a less than perfect world it to find your own meaning, the meaning given to the child in her capacity as an object of something does not work as the child must make her own meaning. The failure of the home is the failure of meaningful living on the part of the adults and the children.

The most obvious cases of the child-as-object occur in *Dragon Keeper* and *Crispin*. Both Ping and Crispin begin their stories not knowing that they have a name, certainly the first step in a quest for agency. Ping is a slave, an object of her master, and Crispin is the object of the feudal lord in his medieval village. In *Just In Case*, Justin is an object of Fate. Fate renders him unable to imagine a life with any possibilities.

Tamar is not the object of someone but something. She is supposed to serve as her step-grandfather's redemption for the mistakes he made in his life. William sees Tamar as a possibility for himself, for finding meaning in the murder he committed, but this leaves no room for Tamar to find her own meaning. In *Millions*, Damien is also the object of something, in this case the pursuit of excellence. He is so busy trying to please his father and ensure that he will meet his mother in heaven that he has no space for himself.

Mattie, in *A Gathering Light*, is the object of the promises she made to her dying mother and to the murdered hotel guest, Grace Brown. She has glimpses of possibilities as she writes and gets herself a scholarship to go to college, but at the beginning of the story the hold of her promises to the dead is too strong to allow for more than glimpses. The meaning for Mattie is given, the work of caring for her family. This is not her meaning and serves as a catalyst for her home to fail.

Dallas and Florida, in *Ruby Holler*, are the objects of all the adults in their lives who abused them, neglected them, and told them they didn't deserve a family. The only possibility they can imagine throughout most of the book, is the idea of running away from the idea of ever having a family to care for them. Lucky, too, is the object of the adults in her life that disappointed her, in this case her dead mother and absent father. She, too, sees the only possibility in her life as running away.

Despereaux is the object of adult expectations that cannot include any room for difference. When he breaks the mouse rules his father turns him in to the mouse council and his mother just considers his death sentence another disappointment. In both novels, *Beeing Bee* and *Rain May and Captain Daniel*, the child protagonists are objects of their own rigid concepts of an ideal family. For Bee, this means living without a woman to replace her mother and for Rain, this means living with both her mother and father.

What all the novels have in common is the child protagonists' lack of agency. The home is failed because the children are not able to find their own meaning, or at least attempt it. Obstacles to this can be found in the categories of *children with parents*, *morality*, *child roles*, and *secrets*. In Despereaux, his lack of agency can be directly traced to his parents' actions. In the other novels the cause of the objectification is more nuanced and less odious.

The homes the children are living in are postmodern. There is a disconnect between the child and parent, what Kincheloe (1997) calls parent/child alienation, found in the familial relationships discussed in the above category *children with parents*. A telling example of this disconnect can be found in *Just In Case*. Justin is depressed and

his father worries that his son may be a “poof” while his mother is looking in his mouth for a tongue piercing. Rain, in *Rain May and Captain Daniel*, writes her mother a poem about how bereft she is about leaving the only home she has known. Her mother’s answer is completely her own poem about *her* joy in being back in *her* mother’s house. The end of the poem signifies this disconnect when Rain’s mother seems to give up trying to communicate with her daughter. She ends the poem by giving a directive, “Oh Crap. Have a Bath” (p. 24).

In some books, *Crispin*, *Dragon Keeper*, and *Despereaux* the child is an object of abandonment. When Crispin’s mother dies he is entirely friendless and on his own. Ping, in *Dragon Keeper*, a slave who was sold by her parents, has a rat for a companion. Despereaux’s parents abandon him quite consciously when his father turns him in to the mouse council and his mother, at his sentencing can only say “*Adieu*.”

The children in many of these novels are socially isolated. It is an anomaly to find stories in this text set where the child has friends. In fact, out of the fifteen novels, in just six novels: *Just In Case*, *Tamar*, *A Gathering Light*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, *Criss Cross*, *Rain May and Captain Daniel*, the child has a child friend during the story. By friend I mean a peer with whom the child shares ideas and feelings.

The examples included in the categories of *children with parents*, *morality*, and *secrets* speak to the child’s responsibility of having to sort out the complexities and ambiguities of the adult-made world (Chappell, 2008). They also address Coats’ (2001) assessment of the child who is put in the middle of amoral adult behavior and multiple truths, and is expected to find her way out.

In *parents with children* we find fathers who can't or won't put their children's needs before their own. This childification of adults is seen in many of the novels. In *Helicopter Man* Pete's father is rendered a child by his mental illness. Mattie's father in *A Gathering Light* is too unhappy and fearful of abandonment to allow Mattie's needs to come before his own.

Mothers can be found crossing the child/adult boundary as shown in *Rain May and Captain Daniel* when Maggie, the mother, after her difficult divorce, feels the need to be called by her name and not Mum and to return to the safety of *her* mother's house, even though it means pulling her daughter out of school and taking her to a place that is strange to her. In *Tamar*, the mother, after her husband disappears, turns over most of the care of Tamar to her in-laws in order to devote more of her time to the married man she is seeing.

Tamar's mother's affair also speaks to the Coats' (2001) idea of the child being put in the middle of amoral places with multiple truths and trying to figure it all out. Tamar's mother is having an affair with a married man yet doesn't want Tamar to go on her journey with an older, male friend called Yoyo. I think this postmodern issue is addressed in the subcategory of *child-as-moral-compass* and the category *morality*. In the book *Rain May*, Rain is not protected by her mother from her father's philandering behaviors. When Rain is reminiscing about a family trip Maggie has to mention that her father was running late because he was busy with his girlfriend in the hotel. In *Millions*, the father acts in an amoral way when he decides to spend the stolen money to make up for the Christmas presents that were stolen from his family. In fact, in this novel, the only

"good" person is Damien. Part of his problem is that he must serve as the moral compass in a world gone awry with greed. Even the Catholic Saints he encounters are petty and jealous of each other.

Lucky puts herself in the middle of amoral situations and multiple truths when she spies on the 12-step programs. In these meetings she hears adults talk about the mistakes they made, how they hit rock bottom, and how they are in recovery. What she misses in her spying is how the adults found their Higher Power. This Higher Power for her is her ticket through the confusing maze given to her by adults. She has to make sense of a father who won't care for her and a Guardian who doesn't think to tell her she is planning to adopt her but is more than willing to disclose that Lucky's father is a foolish man who never sends enough money.

Yet, the same adults who are happy to provide details about their own failures and hurts are loathe to provide the child protagonists with the space and tools to find their own truths. In order for the child to find her own meaning, her own truth, she must leave this failed home, literally or figuratively.

The Journey from Innocence to Experience

The child begins the journey as the object of someone or something else. This renders the child innocent insofar she is unaware of the possibilities life has to offer. Justin, in *Just In Case*, is so much under the spell of Fate that his journey involves reinventing himself as much as possible. He is innocent as he can't consider the possibility that Fate may find him and may not. This is something that his baby brother has to tell him. The same goes for Mattie in *A Gathering Light*. She is so afraid of the

dead, of breaking promises to the dead, that she can barely see the opportunities life has to offer her.

What happens on the journey is the child gains knowledge and this knowledge allows for agency. I argued in chapter four that part of this journey, what renders it important and not aimless wandering, is the child's attempts at *parrhesia*. This is the climax, when the reader is aware that the child has left her state of innocence in order to reach a place of subjectivity.

Pete in *Helicopter Man* is an example of this change par excellence. His journal entries at the beginning of the novel are hopeless. He cannot see any possibilities in his life other than day-to-day survival. "I'm exhausted. Just how long do we have to keep going like this? I know Dad needs me, but my head hurts so much doing so much worrying and thinking" (p. 28). Less than twenty pages later Pete is starting to see a way out of this situation. "Am trying to figure out the danger. Could help if I knew" (p. 44). He is beginning to realize he will not get the information he needs from his father and will have to find it himself. Pete continues in this no-man's-land until his father is remanded to a mental hospital. As I have discussed earlier, this is where the climax of Pete's journey happens. He has a chance to help his father escape, but he doesn't. This act of *parrhesia*, acknowledging that his father needs help and that he, Pete, must take care of himself without his father is where Pete breaks free from his object position vis-à-vis his father's mental illness. This act of defiance of parental authority pushes Pete to find out the truth about why his mother left him without saying goodbye. After he discovers the truth, that his mother meant to send for him and left him a letter explaining

her disappearance. Pete becomes a subject who sees himself as a whole person, a child who was loved by his mother.

Tamar is a fitting contrast to Pete's journey. She is the object of her step-grandfather, William's, bid for redemption. Tamar starts life saddled with her name, the name of the man whose murder William orchestrated. When William posthumously leaves her the box with maps and money, Tamar is sent on a journey to redeem William. She is being used as an object. Through the journey she, against her mother's wishes, falls in love with her traveling companion, Yoyo. This is an act of defiance, Tamar's first instance of rebellion. Her crisis occurs when she finds her father and learns the truth of his disappearance and of William's terrible secret. She is able to break away from her role of *child-as-secret-keeper* and *child-as-moral compass* and find her way out of the messy, confusing, and amoral lives given to her by her family.

In all of the novels in the text set that have a meta-plot this journey is one of gaining knowledge by losing innocence. These two activities have an inverse relationship in children's literature (Nodelman & Reimer, 2000, Nikolajeva, 2005). The more the child knows the less innocent she must be. Innocence in this case equals remaining in the object position because of ignorance of other options. As the child learns more, she begins to see her choices and gains the experience and knowledge to make informed decision.

Examples of this gaining knowledge are shown in the *parents and children*, *morality*, and *secrets* categories in this chapter. Damien in *Millions*, learns through talking with his dead mother, a meeting that may have been rendered possible by his

journey of the soul (she doesn't speak with her other son, Anthony), that he is a miracle; he is what made his mother a Saint in Heaven. This is the knowledge that Damien requires to lose his innocence, his object status to his exhaustive quest to be "good." The Twins in *Rudy Holler* learn that they are worthy people by taking chances and testing Sairy and Tiller at every opportunity. This taken-for-granted feeling of being deserving of a family required Dallas and Florida to lose their innocence in order to gain the knowledge that they are, in fact, good children, who have been surrounded by a world of bad adults. Lucky's journey proceeds from not knowing who will take care of her, to forcing Brigitte to declare her intentions by running away and waiting to see if she will be rescued.

Despereaux follows a less nuanced route to claiming his subjectivity by rescuing the love of his life, Princess Pea, all by himself. His knowledge comes from the fairy tales he secretly reads instead of eating the pages. Crispin also follows a fairly straight path from one of not knowing who is he is, including his name and his father, to a place where he forages information from his captor/mentor/foster father, Bear. Crispin, like Despereaux, does this fearlessly in the face of death.

Bee and Rain go from self-imposed places of innocence, the need to have things remain the same, to a space where they are able to accept the changes given them. The subjectivity they seek is gained by accepting their new lives on their own terms. For Bee this involves finding common ground with Jazzi and working to cement the connections she finds. For Rain, this is the difficult step of acknowledging her father's amoral behavior and finding her way through it by her own moral compass.

Ping, in *Dragon Keeper*, is also thrust into a postmodern world, this time in ancient China, which speaks to the author writing with her time and space no matter the setting of the story. She is the slave to unscrupulous master who won't tell her her name or how she came to be a slave. From there she goes on a journey where by listening, observing, and acting, she is able to learn that she is a subject, a special person who is a dragon keeper. For Ping, the meaning she finds in her life, for herself, is this role. Long Danzi discourages her by leaving Ping behind. But she catches up to him and saves the day and herself.

The New Home: Constructed with Agency and Freedom

This "new home" is found in the category, *freedom*. This speaking truth to freedom at personal risk is where the child claims her subjectivity by breaking the bonds of objectification. This category could be seen as another instance of postmodern childhood as the child demonstrates that there is no developmental end in these books (Chappell, 2008). The books themselves do not have a definitive end leaving the reader able to use her imagination to come up with all kinds of possibilities for the child protagonist. The children come to end of these books after making their way out of the maze of amoral adult behavior and multiple truths in order to create their own life with their own meanings (Coats, 2001).

In *Just In Case*, Justin finds the freedom to go on living in spite of Fate. He sees the opportunities for something good or bad to happen. This is accomplished by his repositioning himself with his baby brother. By seeing Charlie as a You, Justin is able to see himself as responsible for living to continue to be Charlie's brother. This creates a

new family for Justin, one comprised of himself and his brother. The meaning he finds is in this role. The lines on the last page illustrate this and the idea that there is no end to the story or to Justin's development as a human. "And a great number of things happened to Justin. Hundreds of millions of ordinary, unexpected, and occasionally quite astonishing things. And that was his fate" (p. 245).

For *Tamar*, we learn from her of the new family she created with her traveling companion, Yoyo. She goes back to William's homeland, Holland, the site of his misdeed. This could be seen as finding her way out of the messy, amoral lives of her family, by going back to the place where the mess started, or perhaps she is looking to be in the place where her ancestors lived *before* the crime took place, when her grandfather, Tamar, and her grandmother, Marijke, were in love.

When Tamar discovers the truth about her family, she is freed from the bondage of serving as an object of redemption. She has the knowledge to break free of the secrets and lies. Tamar accomplishes this by repositioning herself out of the relationship she has with her parents. She fills the empty slot with Yoyo, the person of her choosing. The reader leaves the story with the now grown-up Tamar still developing. "The past is a dark house, and we have only torches with dying batteries. It's probably best not to spend too much time there in case the rotten floor gives way beneath our feet, like it did for dad. Like it nearly did for me" (p. 423). Nearly is the word to focus on. Tamar managed to escape.

In *Millions*, Damien stays with his original family but the dynamics of this family and his self-realized role within his family is reconstructed. His conversation with his

dead mother helps Damien to reposition himself in terms of his father. She tells Damien that it is his job to sort his family out. This makes Damien a prerequisite for his father's existence. He has become his father's moral keeper and this role saves Damien from perhaps taking his own life by giving him meaning to go on. Again, the reader is left with the idea that Damien's development has no ending. "Sometimes money can leave your hand and fall like water from a pipe onto the hot ground, and the dusty earth swallows it up and bursts into food and flowers for miles and miles around. And all the seeds and roots and lives that were lying dead in the ground spring all the way back to life" (p. 247). Damien and his family, like the roots and seeds, are springing back to life after their hibernation caused by the death of the mother.

The other novels have the same sorts of endings. Mattie makes her way through the mess left by her mother and chooses to go on to New York City to construct a new life, if not a new family. The novel ends with her riding off on the train and the reader can imagine all of the wonderful and not so wonderful things that will befall her. The reader sees the Twins in *Ruby Holler* slowly making their way back to their new home and constructing a family with Sairy and Tiller. Lucky *is* lucky as her story ends with Brigitte telling her she is planning to adopt her and Lucky can create a new family with her once Guardian and now Mother.

Despereaux cannot reconnect with his original family but fashions his own with Princess Pea. There is no "happily ever after" for the couple remain friends, but the narrator promises they have many adventures. Despereaux was able to break free of the ropes of the status quo and become the fairy tale hero he chose to be. Crispin also

fashions a new family with Bear. Through his journey and adventures Crispin learns to see the joy in life and constructs a home with the radical/heretical/smart/funny Bear.

Bee and Rain construct their new families with the people who are given them. Like other protagonists, they change their roles in the family by repositioning themselves as subjects in an I/You relationship with their respective families. Bee does this by learning to see Jazzi as another wounded child who needs her in order to heal. This puts Bee on even footing with her new step-mother. Bee finds meaning in helping to heal Jazzi. Rain finds her meaning in learning to accept the fact that her parents will not reconcile. She frees herself from the chore of trying to make this happen through action and wishing. Once she is free of this, Rain is can refashion her relationship with her family, especially her father, by speaking with him frankly about what she needs. For the reader, the girls' lives and their respective stories, are not ending, but are, in fact, beginning.

Dragon Keeper and *Helicopter Man* have a similar ending. In both cases the child protagonist chooses to shoulder responsibility as a way to find meaning in their lives. Pete, at the end of the novel, is planning to go back with his father once he is released form the hospital. This is an informed decision, Pete has the knowledge that his father may relapse and things may never be entirely "normal." But this is his choice. Ping accepts the responsibility of caring for the newly hatched dragon and assuming her role as dragon keeper. This is the meaning she makes for her life and, like Pete, it is an informed decision as she has had the entire story to learn the reality of doing this job.

Both children chose to leave cushy situations, for Pete an upper middle class foster home, and for Ping being the emperor's best friend, for their "callings."

Discussion

The analysis of the meta-plot, combined with the categories in this chapter, which are informed by Foucault and Buber, made these readings of this text set complex and fruitful. I traced the child protagonists' trajectories and I found myself back to where I started with this chapter, questioning the concept of the postmodern child. I discovered many elements of a postmodern childhood in this analysis of the meta-plot (Coats, 2001). The failed family portion relies on the child/parent alienation (Kincheloe, 1997) and sometimes abandonment that I found in the category, *children with parents*. This is what causes the family to fail. The roles the child assumes in these novels speak to the adultification of childhood. Children serve as saviors, secret keepers, quasi-spouses, and moral compasses to fill in for the parents who are absent or who are crossing their own boundaries back to childhood. The childhood in these novels does not encapsulate the carefree, play time that our society says it is composed of (Coontz, 1992). There is no safe, "Father Knows Best" patriarchal family in these failed homes (Clark, 2001).

What these homes do have is competing truths and amoral behaviors for the child to sort out (Chappell, 2008). This mess may be nuanced as it is in *The Higher Power of Lucky*. Brigitte, the Guardian, is a fairly straightforward modern figure. But the people around Lucky are decidedly postmodern. There is Miles, with a mother in jail who he believes is working in Florida, the many recovering addicts, and Lucky's own father, who can't or won't take care of her. These characters are confusing and messy and do not give

Lucky a traditional, nostalgic community. In books like *Tamar*, the messes the child must sort out hit the reader like a ton of bricks. And yet, in all the books with a meta-plot, the child is able through her own might, to get out and find the information/experience/knowledge necessary to create a better place for herself (Bullen & Parson, 2007).

These children do not use magic, but they do use the practice of *parrhesia* and the idea of repositioning themselves more evenly with the adult, going from the Buberian "It" to "You" space. By doing this the child is able to claim her agency, to use her freedom to make measured choices that give meaning to her own life.

While the milieu the child is in is postmodern, a place where the boundaries between adulthood and childhood are murky and the adults in the child's life are messy complicated people leading messy complicated lives, the child is a modern creation. The child protagonist is *given* these situations. The messy, complicated lives the child is a part of were not created by the child. The child's job in these novels is to change her milieu from postmodern to modern. This job requires the child to be resilient in the face of the obstacles set out by adults (Bullen & Parson, 2007). In other words, the child's role is to create, for herself, a more loving, meaningful, and moral universe (Latham, 2002).

The child's role speaks to adult's need for a simpler, sentimental, and imagined time that is nostalgized in hit television shows like "Hannah Montana" and "The Suite Life on Deck." Peter Hunt (2004) argues that this imagined childhood versus real childhood tension is present in children's literature because children's literature is a site for the power struggle between adults and children. He sums up his thoughts, stating:

"Given the facts that adults write and prescribe, and children read, it can be argued that it is impossible--even undesirable--to have a children's book that does not try in some way to manipulate its audience" (p. 40).

Nelson (2006) speaks to this adult manipulative (re)creation of childhood through children's literature. She sees children's literature the site where the relationships between fictional childhood and realistic childhood are addressed.

> Thus children's literature, a term tinged with irony by the elided gap between the producer and consumer, is both mimetic and descriptive. It traces a history of childhood that is simultaneously a history of adult wishes about childhood—or, in this case, about childhood reading. (p. 223)

Nikolajeva (2005) speaks to the adult (re)creation of childhood in terms of the reactionary ideologies that are omnipresent in children's literature. These ideologies are what help children's texts to support the old social systems/structures/frameworks. The novels in this study set up a more "realistic," postmodern space that the adult inhabits, one which child must break free of. This is why the parents are such obstacles to the children. The child's roles, in these novels, are to allow the story to tell the readers, "What their childhood should be like, rather than what it is" (Nikolajeva, 2005, p.xi). The "should" part is represented by the child and the "is" part is represented by the adult in the books in this text set that follow the meta-plot.

In many ways the child is constructed in these novels in the absence of the postmodern adult who is too busy trying to sort out the messes they have made to help the child construct herself. This is seen many times in my analysis of the novels. The

child may be abandoned by one or both parents leaving this chasm. In other cases the child and parent are so isolated that they simply cannot communicate well enough for the transfer to occur (Kincheloe, 1997). The children in these novels must work alone in the context of learning and then knowing that life is not a fairy tale and only by accepting reality they are able to grow (Cairns, 2008). An example of this can be seen in *Rain May and Captain Daniel*. It is only when Rain lets go of her parents' "happily ever after" ending that she is able to reconstruct her relationship to her not-so-evil-stepmother.

This "acceptance" can be positive as children are given the opportunities in this text set to see and examine the complexities of being a child and an adult (Latham, 2002). These opportunities are seen clearly in the novel, *Helicopter Man.* Pete, through taking care of his mentally ill father and closely observing him, realizes the confusing and difficult nature of assuming adult roles and of being a grown-up. Pete is also able to tell the reader how complex his own childhood is. Pete crosses the border between both states of being and comes out with the knowledge and experience to make his own decisions.

Discussion in Regards to Power

Pete, like all the child protagonists in novels in this text set with a meta-plot, does make his own decisions. But these decisions forward an adult normative, power laden ideological agenda. The child's role is to achieve agency but to the end of adult expectations of what childhood should be, rather than what childhood actually is. It seems in these novels the postmodern milieu the child is thrust in is more representative of modern life, while the child's *role* is one that represents the past (or the imagined

past). This past is Romantic and Modern and the child is a Romantic, Modern creation of a postmodern environment.

The child protagonist and the intended child reader are the recipients of tacit theories of what childhood should be. Similar to what Agee (1993) and Cook (1985) found in their analyses, the books I looked at had the child do the right thing in the end. This right thing is adult sanctioned. What is different in my text set is the complex postmodern environment the child must perform within/without.

The other sign of the exercise of adult power in these novels is found in the ends of the narratives. The children go through difficult journeys (think of the physical and emotional abuse suffered by the twins in *Ruby Holler)* and yet, they end up okay. If the author doesn't explicitly state it, she implies it in the hopeful ending statements I have included above. Katherine Patterson (1989), an award-winning author herself, writes that children need hopeful endings in their books. "Hope for us cannot simply be wishful thinking, nor can it be only the desire to grow up and take control of our own lives. Hope is a yearning rooted in reality that pulls us toward the radical biblical vision of the world remade" (p. 185).

The children in this text set do remake their worlds. But they do so against such bleak backgrounds that surely emerging unscathed is "wishful thinking." This kind of thinking is what Hollindale (1997), Hunt (2004), and Tatar (1992) criticize when they examine children's literature as a site for the power struggles between children and adults to play out. So far, it appears as if the adults are still winning.

The text set carries with it fifteen examples of fifteen different constructions of childhood. Keeping in mind Coats (2001) words, “There is no such thing as a pure discourse of childhood, anymore than there is a pure discourse of adulthood” (p. 142), what is found in each novel can only be generalized and speak for this particular text set. The commonalties of the construction of childhood found in this text set will be discussed in the following section.

How is Childhood Constructed in This Text Set?

Childhood is constructed in many thematic ways in this text set. The themes I believe speak most closely to the meta-plot and the ideas I excavated in my analysis are discussed below.

Child as “Is” versus Child as Becoming

Childhood is constructed in this text set as a time of growth and learning and development that positions the child as both an “is” and as a “becoming” (Chappell, 2008). “Is” refers to the child’s stable identity and “becoming” speaks to the fluidity of the growing child. The children in this text set go on journeys of discovery wherein they learn and experience what they need to know in order to break their roles in the failed families from which they originated. This developmental process is a time of “becoming.” During these journeys the child also holds an “is” position. This “is” can be seen when the child protagonists practice *parrhesiatic* acts that require the speaker of truth to *know* her truth (Foucault, 1983, 2001). The child must stop becoming and form a personage to know this truth. During her Buberian repositioning in the adult/child hierarchy from an “It” to a “You” the child is also in an “is” position. She must reinvent

her connections to other adults in a static form. The endings of the stories, after the child has constructed her own home, are a time of "becoming" once again. As I discussed earlier, the books leave the readers with this sense by not wrapping up the story in a neatly decorated package. The reader is aware that as Mattie leaves her failed home bound for New York City her development as a person will continue in earnest.

Childhood as a Time of Resilience

Childhood in these novels is constructed as a time of resilience (Bullen & Parson, 2007). Resilience in this case refers to the idea of the child protagonist gaining the qualities necessary to triumph over adversity. This is the opposite of the child constructed a helpless (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). The children in these novels, through their own means, acquire the different kinds of overlapping knowledge and experiences that enable them to meet obstacles squarely (Bullen & Parson, 2007).

The child protagonists demonstrate this resilience in both their *parrhesian* acts and their repositioning within their relationships with adults. By attending to both of these acts the children risk their well being, physically or emotionally. As demonstrated in my analysis, the children successfully perform both these tasks and indeed triumph over adversity due to their acquired, overlapping knowledges.

An example of this resilience in childhood is seen clearly in Ping, the protagonist in *Dragon Keeper*. Ping starts the story with nothing. She is an uneducated, half-starved, and friendless slave. Through her travels with Long Danzi (the dragon) she listens to what he says closely and, more important, remembers his wisdom. Ping applies her new

knowledge to get herself and the dragon out of perilous scrapes. Ping observes the people around her and through trial and error learns who to trust and who to mistrust.

Ping also shows her resilience by allowing herself to try new things, to risk failing in order to eventually succeed. Long Danzi tells Ping about *Qi* (spiritual energy) and slowly she works and learns how to make her *Qi* stronger. Through these endeavors Ping is able to imagine herself being a dragon keeper.

When Ping leaves the safety of the Emperor's patronage in order to find her own meaning as a dragon keeper, she is taking a huge risk. First, she may not prove to Long Danzi that she is a "true" dragon keeper, and second, by leaving the Emperor, Ping has made him her enemy. Ping performs *parrhesia* when she refuses to be an object, but speaks her truth to the world at large that she is a dragon keeper. Not only is she a slave, but Ping would be the first girl dragon keeper ever. These acts show Ping's resilience, her use of knowledges and experiences gained to overcome the many obstacles she begins the story saddled with. By doing this *parrhesian* act, Ping is able to reposition herself as a "You" in the Buberian *I/You* relationship. Long Danzi sees Ping as literally the precondition for his existence as well as the existence of his race. When Ping takes on the role of dragon keeping the newly hatched dragon, she has proved to the world, to Long Danzi, and to herself, that she is resilient enough to perform this almost impossible job.

Childhood as a Time of Difficult Decisions

Like Friedman and Cataldo (2002) found in their research in Newbery Award winning novels, I too, discovered that childhood in my text set of award winning novels is constructed as a time in which the child protagonists must make difficult decisions.

The *parrhesiatic* acts the child protagonists engage in are difficult decisions to make in every case as they carry such dire consequences. These decisions are rendered more difficult because they are often contrary to adult normativity. For example, when Pete decides to not help his father escape from the mental hospital he is risking becoming a long term foster child with an uncertain future among strangers. He is also risking not listening to his father. Something that Pete has, up until this point, done without fail.

Tamar is also confronted with an incredibly difficult decision to make when she finds her father and decides to extricate herself from his life. She is risking destroying any chance of having a relationship with her father. Tamar is also going against the powers of adult normativity and tradition that dictate the child should stand by her family no matter what.

It is interesting that children, who are considered irrational and needy (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003) do not display these traits even at relatively young ages. When 10-year-old Lucky runs away from home, something that could be viewed as a typical childish act in which to engage, she is not running irrationally. Lucky is running away as a carefully orchestrated way to force her Guardian to decide her role in Lucky's life. Damien, in *Millions*, at 11-years-old, is grappling with decisions such as whether to end his life. While the idea of suicide may be viewed as irrational, in Damien's case it could be argued that the needy and amoral adults in his life are giving him no other options.

Childhood is a time for carefully thought out and risk laden decisions to be made by younger people who aren't considered in our country old enough to vote, to drive, or

to drink alcohol. These children are able to puzzle their way through complex conundrums given them by adults and come out victorious.

Conclusions

Childhood is this text set is a time for many things: to be brave, to take risks, to assume both adult and child roles, to be resilient, and to gain agency. What also must be discussed is how childhood in this text set is *not* constructed. Childhood is not a time to be joyful, to play, to be helpless, and to be needy.

This can be explained (at least in part) by the postmodern influence in these novels that position the child as the hope that will lead us, the readers and adults, to a better place. The child is simply too busy for childish pursuits. She must serve too many roles given her in the vacuum created by adult abandonment and adult/child alienation. The child is the modern figure, the scientific, rational, and reactionary figure who must pick her way through a field of cacti without being cut by the thorns of amorality and needy adults.

This final analysis is one where the child protagonist is used by the story to transmit nostalgic and traditional ideas of right and wrong. It seems that no matter what happens in these stories, no matter how much agency is gained by the child protagonist, no matter how much power and freedom the child claims, adult structures are not dismantled (Chappell, 2008, Nodelman, 2009, Hunt, 2004). The *parrhesian* acts and the Buberian reconfiguring of power hierarchy allows the child to be victorious in her quest to serve modern ideologies. Mattie is going off to New York City to be her own person and Tamar makes a life for herself in Amsterdam in the reactionary way of “pulling

yourself up by your own bootstraps." Pete's insistence on staying with his father no matter what and Justin's new commitment to his brother Charlie speak to the modern sensibilities of "sticking with your family no matter what."

The children in this text set do reposition themselves in terms of adults in the role of doing what is right by righting the adult's wrongs. This is a tried and true way of constructing childhood, as an object of hope (Marcus, 2008). The books may serve to secure adult normativity but they do offer readers a view of childhood that is as nuanced and complex as any portrayal of adultness in adult literature.

Chapter six begins with a short summary of the research purposes, theoretical frameworks, and methodology. The findings are discussed more deeply in terms of categories and meta-plot. The chapter ends with an implications section. In this section the research is applied to the fields of teacher and child education, critical literature studies, and postmodern childhood studies. Ideas for further study are outlined as a way to conceptualize this study as the beginning answer to many more questions concerning the intersections between childhood and children's literature.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Research Purpose

This study explored the connections between childhood and children's literature. In this connection there is an inherent tension between writing and reading "real" childhood, as it is being lived by children now, and an adult produced/reconstructed childhood that may or may not have existed in the past.

The purpose of this study was to address this tension by analyzing recently published children's literature in order to explore how present-day childhood is constructed within texts. Fifteen award-winning books from three countries, The United Kingdom, The United States, and Australia, were examined for constructions of childhood.

Theoretical Frameworks

I used two main theoretical frameworks for this study, postmodern childhood studies and critical children's literature studies. Postmodern childhood studies is positioned differently from traditional early childhood studies in that this theory posits that childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon and that there is no such thing as a universal child/childhood (Hollindale, 1997). Individual children are viewed as competent social actors who are worthy of being studied (Kozol, 1995).

Fortifying this framework are Foucault's (1983) work on *parrhesia* and Buber's (1923) relationship concept known as "*I/You*" (formerly translated as *I/Thou*). *Parrhesia* is the concept of speaking truth to power with a strong chance of personal risk. This informed how children in the text sets were able to gain a sense of agency. Agency in this case means the ability "to imagine the world differently and then act differently" (Chappell, 2008, p. 282). Buber's *I/You* relationship configuration also spoke to childhood agency as it involves the more powerful person, in this case the adult, seeing the less powerful person, in this case the child, as a precondition for her existence. Children in these text sets were able to gain agency by positioning themselves in the "You" category.

Critical children's literature studies are comprised of scholars who research children's literature with the focus of the study being the exploration and discussion of how power, ideology, and history intersect within children's books. Some issues these studies explore are censorship, gender, values, morals, and politics in and around children's books (Lehr, 1995). While many children's literature scholars look at the text as a way to do something else (teach content areas, teach reading, teach writing), critical scholars explore the texts themselves as ways to approach understandings about ourselves and our worlds.

Methodology

In order to explore the connections between childhood and children's literature I analyzed fifteen award-winning books that were published between the years 2003 and 2007. There were five books in each country's text set. From the United Kingdom I

looked at books that had won the Carnegie Medal, the United States' books were winners of the Newbery Award, and the texts from Australia had won the Children's Book Council of Australia award in the category called "younger readers."

For analysis I used the hybrid methodology called critical content analysis, a combination of content analysis and critical discourse analysis. Content analysis is a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of society (White & Marsh, 2006). The content of text data are interpreted through a process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Krippendorff, 2003). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a research stance that informs the connections between power and language. It is a "critical" stance as its goal is to make transparent the connections between things. In other words, it is used to bring covert discourses to the surface as well as the related ideology lodged in the language of the texts (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Critical content analysis then is a "close reading of small amounts of text that are interpreted by the analyst and then contextualized in new narratives" (Beach, et al, 2009, pp. 2-3), a definition that represents a hermeneutic, reader response oriented research approach that can be critical as well. "What makes the study 'critical' is not the methodology but the framework used to think within, through, and beyond the text" (Beach, et al, 2009, pp. 2-3). The frameworks used in my study are critical in that they are concerned with making power visible.

Findings

The findings of this study are organized below into four strands: demographics, meta-plots, themes of childhood, and postmodern childhood/postmodern children. In the main body of the paper the categories were fluid and each informed the other three.

Demographics

The demographics of the US text set (see Chapter Three) matched similar studies concerning Newbery Award winning novels (Cook, 1985; Parravano, 1989). The majority of the child protagonists in the text set are white, close to puberty, and heterosexual. The differences I found in this newer collection of books are the greater prevalence of city settings, the greater class diversity among the child protagonists, and the overrepresentation of girl characters (Sampson, 2000).

Meta-Plot

The first anomaly encountered in the analysis of the text set was a deviation from the "typical plot" of children's literature (Nodelman, 2008; Clark, 2001; Bates, 2007). This plot can be described as the child leaving a happy home to go off on a journey filled with adventures and some danger. The child returns at the end of the story to the original home. The plot encountered in this study was something different—a meta-plot.

Meta-plot can be defined by first defining the prefix "meta" and then the root word, "plot." Meta, as defined in the Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary, is used to signify a new but related discipline designed to deal critically with the original one. In this case the thing being dealt with is plot, or the actions of characters in a story. Meta-

plot, for this study, is a critical and new look at the “typical” plot discussed, or ignored, in previous scholarship.

The meta-plots found in twelve of the fifteen books in the text set followed a different formula. The child protagonist originates from a place she doesn’t (or can’t) consider home and pursues a journey, psychological or literal, to a new home that the child has constructs.

The child must leave the home because it no longer working or is dysfunctional; in other words it is a failed home. This failure may be decided by the adult or by the child. Regardless, the child must act to change residences, real or imagined. This action is usually accomplished alone and involves extraordinary mettle on the part of the child. This mettle may be called bravery, cunning, or resilience. This action is a form of *parrhesia*, the Foucauldian concept of speaking truth to power with the knowledge that this speech involves a certain amount of risk on the speaker’s part (Pearson, 1985).

In the meta-plot the *parrhesiatic* acts play a major role in the child protagonist’s journey; it is the *raison d’être* for the journey. By speaking truth to power the child is able to get to a point where she can construct a new home. It is by facing fears and challenging adult normativity at great risk that the character to achieve the agency to imagine the new possibilities of a different and better life. This is a life where the meaning is given *by* the child not *to* the child (Frankl, 1959). In order to have this meaning the child must change the tenor of the relationship she has with the important adults in her life. This change was analyzed in terms of Buber’s (1923) ideas about connection between human beings.

When the story ends, the child is home (again). But this home is not a place the child comes to but a place the child creates. This home itself is a metaphor for the safety, love, and acceptance the child constructs (Clark, 2001). Sometimes this new home is the original one, but the relationships within the home are now on the child's terms. At other times the child leaves all she knows to go somewhere totally new to lead the life she wants to.

The child's relationship in this created/constructed home can be explained more deeply by using Buber's (1923) ideas about relationship. In each of these novels the child is, in the beginning, an object of the adult, in what Buber calls an I/It relationship. The child is something for the adult to deal with, an obstruction, and a problem. Conversely, adults, for children, are often seen as obstacles to the child meeting her needs. The adult, however, as the person in power, always inhabits the "I' position.

At the end of the journey, when the child has constructed her new home, she has also constructed a new relationship with the adults in her life. The adult and child are connected in an I/You relationship. This relationship is non-hierarchical in that it allows both the adult and child subjectivity. The child to the adult and the adult to the child are viewed as necessary for each other's survival.

This meta-plot speaks to the idea that childhood is not constructed as an idyllic time. The home the child protagonist comes from may have been safe at one time but the safety disappears. Children in these stories can't go home again because their home isn't where they want or are able to dwell. Home isn't a place of refuge or comfort. Childhood

is constructed as a time to set out alone and make sense of the past in order to construct a better home.

Themes of Childhood

The themes that spoke to the construction of childhood in the text set books were children with parents, children's roles, do the right thing: morality, keeping secrets, and freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose. The theme, children with parents, was divided into two sub-themes, father doesn't know best, and mothers: alive and dead. The children's roles' theme had four sub-themes: child-as-savior, child-as-secret-keeper, child-as-quasi spouse, and child-as-moral-compass.

Children with parents: Father doesn't know best. Childhood in this text set is constructed as a place bereft of fathers. In general, the fathers portrayed in the text set are failed parents. In four of the fifteen novels fathers are completely absent. In the eleven novels where the father is in the child protagonist's life, he is not the mythical "father knows best" dad. The father as a failed parent is hardly a new literary trope in children's stories, but can be traced back at least to the *Hansel and Gretel* fairy tale (Knoepflmacher, 2005; Clark, 2001). *Hansel and Gretel* also serves as a guide for the child protagonists in this study to explain their fathers. Fathers found in this category are essentially weak characters who require a "strong and good woman" to enable them to parent. Children forgive their fathers for their weaknesses and sometimes see their job as caring for their father (Bates, 2007). Fathers are seen by their children as almost peers, persons who have power over them but who, at the same time, are in cahoots with them as the father and children are ultimately at the mercy of the mother.

In the fifteen novels, there are only two where the father plays a large part in the narrative. In the rest of the books the father is mostly absent, physically or emotionally. Childhood, in these books, is a place where fathers don't play a large role, or, in many cases, a role at all. This is because both the child and the father don't choose to (or don't know how to) communicate their needs to each other. In families where the mother is dead, the child is the mother/wife by proxy, as she has to care for the father. In the books where there is a mother, the father is just there, not contributing too much. In all the books that have fathers, the father doesn't notice what is going on with his child(ren). This is because the child doesn't share and the father doesn't ask.

Children with parents: Mothers—Dead and alive. In the text set there were only two books where the mother isn't mentioned at all. Mothers play a more pivotal role in the child protagonist's construction than do fathers. When the mother is dead, she seems to be more of a major character, a greater influence on the plot, than when she is alive in the novel.

Children with parents: Alive mothers---The bitch in the house. The mothers who are living in the novels are the bitches in the house. They are the parents who serve as a greater obstacle to the child's need fulfillment (Nikolajeva, 2005). The mothers may need to be more domineering as the fathers are not there enough, physically or emotionally, to co-parent. The mother is the "grown up" when the father sides with the children or is child-like himself. It is interesting to note that in all the novels analyzed, only two mothers physically leave their children. They may be bitches, but they remain. The only reason mothers in this text set leave is because they die.

Children with parents: Guardian angels---The dead mothers. Like the weak father, the dead mother motif has a long history in children's literature. From *Cinderella* to *Nancy Drew*, children's literature has been rife with motherless children. In this study a total of eight books, the majority, were stories without living mothers. These mothers are powerful characters from the grave.

The overarching theme of this section was that the child protagonist cannot continue to grow with the dead. The dead mothers keep the child protagonists in a space where they are rendered unable to construct a new life. It is only when they can let go, let the dead stay buried, that they are able to make a life for themselves.

Mothers, in general, in this text set, are obstacles to their children's growth. Fathers, also obstacles, are more road bumps in smaller, day-to-day ways. Mothers, on the other hand, hold the true power in the family, and the child must negotiate a new relationship with her/his mother, living or dead, in order to construct her own life.

Children's roles: Children-as-saviors. Childhood in this text set is partially constructed by the variety of roles the child protagonists take on in the novels. The unifying theme of these roles is that they place the adult in the position of being cared for, a position that seems counterintuitive when discussing children.

Children in this role help save adults, not other children. This saving may include saving adults from the despair of the growing old, saving adults from themselves, and saving adults from harm—body, spiritual, emotional, or financial.

Children's roles: Children-as-secret-keepers. This section deals with the child protagonist being responsible for keeping adult secrets. While much of children's

literature is concerned with keeping children from the truth, in some of the novels in the text set, adults use children as confidantes in order to keep the truth from other adults (Mills, 2000). In a complex system, secrets are both withheld from and given to children. This speaks to the construction of children as being too innocent to make sense of some truth or too "wise" to give away important confidences (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003).

Children's roles: Child-as-quasi-spouse. The roles the children are expected to assume in many of these texts are those of a quasi-spouse. This term refers to the care the child protagonist must provide to younger siblings, but mostly to the single parent she lives with. This is not care of a sexual kind, but it may be physical labor or difficult emotional work.

Children's roles: Child-as-moral compass. This role consists of the child protagonist, despite being surrounded by amoral behaviors by adults, doing the right thing eventually in the story (Kincheloe, 1997).

Do the right thing: Morality. The milieu of the child protagonist has elements that are morally elastic. However, each novel also has a clear moral meta-message that involves the child protagonist making the correct choice, doing the right thing (Ringrose, 2006; Tatar, 1992). This structure, however, can be muddied by the postmodern nature of the child protagonists in this particular text set (Chappell, 2008). These children must make the adult normative decision in the midst of the ambiguities and complexities of the adult-made world where the bad guys aren't always bad and the good girls aren't always good (Chappell, 2008; Coats, 2001).

The child protagonists in these situations serve a complex role; they are to make sense of situations that reflect judgment far beyond their years and still maintain the status quo, the modern version of morality, where there still are clear-cut rights and wrongs (Friedman & Cataldo, 2002).

Of course the children in these books aren't always good. They break rules and do things behind their parents' backs, but they always, in the end, serve to ensure the book has the proper moral message. Despite the postmodern milieu these children exist in, the moral thrust of children's novels has remained the same over time. The child is constructed as the maintainer of a reactionary social order. In other words the child reproduces the past.

Keeping secrets. In this category children are constructed as buffers for adults between what is real and what should be real. Nikolajeva (2005) makes this case when she writes, "Children's authors tend to tell their readers what their childhood should be like, rather than what it is" (p. xi). It is in this disconnect where the secrets pop up. By withholding the truth from the child protagonist the adult (author or character) is trying to show childhood as an idealized state, which requires lies and secrets. We learn from this text set that childhood, as constructed in these novels, is never as halcyon as producers of child culture would have us believe (Steinberg, 1997).

Adults control the child's experiences by withholding information, knowledge, and by keeping secrets (Mills, 2000). These withheld things are what give children the tools to make informed decisions or true freedom (Dewey, 1938). Both the structure of the novels as well as the adult characters serve the purpose of ensuring children are given

information at the time the adult deems the child is ready or deserving (Nodelman, 2009). This is a normative move as it ensures child protagonists, substituting for "real" children, have their doses of reality carefully compounded and administered by adults and only adults. Children in these books do not learn the truth from other children but must seek it out from grown-ups who give it to them when they deem the time is right, which is not always the time that is most appropriate for the child characters.

Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose. The ideology of childhood that rests in twelve of these books, is one in which the child cannot be free until she has lost the past. This "losing" means letting go of the past, the anger, the grief, the insecurity; childhood, in essence, and constructing something new, a future (Kristofferson & Foster, 1969). "Losing" in most of these books does not mean literally walking away from home or family, but rather the child protagonist repositioning herself and her thinking to be able to have nothing left. It seems that it is in this absence where the child's true growth can be found. True freedom can found within the text when the child protagonist is given the time, space, and information needed to make an informed choice.

Postmodern Childhood/Postmodern Children

There are many elements of postmodern childhood construction in this analysis of the meta-plot (Coats, 2001). The failed family portion relies on the child/parent alienation (Kincheloe, 1997) and sometimes abandonment. The roles the child assumes in these novels speak to the adultification of childhood as children must serve in order to fill in for the parents who are absent or who are crossing their own boundaries back to childhood.

The childhood constructed in these novels does not encapsulate the carefree playtime that our society says it is composed of (Coontz, 1992).

What these homes do have is competing truths and amoral behaviors for the child to sort out (Chappell, 2008). And yet, in all the books with a meta-plot, the child is able through her own might to get out and find the information/experience/knowledge necessary to create a better place for herself (Bullen & Parson, 2007). This is a child-as-resilient construction.

These children do not use magic, but they do use the practice of *parrhesia* and the idea of repositioning themselves more evenly, going from the Buberian "It" to the Buberian "You". By doing this the child is able to claim her agency, to use her freedom to make measured choices that give meaning to her own life. She constructs herself as a subject with agency.

While the milieu the child is in is postmodern, a place where the boundaries between adulthood and childhood are murky, and the adults in the child's life are messy, complicated people leading messy, complicated lives, the child is a modern construction (Coats, 2001). The child protagonist is *given* these situations. The child's job in these novels is to change her milieu from postmodern to modern. This job requires the child to be resilient in the face of the obstacles set out by adults (Bullen & Parson, 2007). In other words, the child's role is to create, for herself, a more loving, meaningful, and moral universe (Latham, 2002).

Implications

This study has implications in the following fields: literacy education for children and their teachers, postmodern childhood studies, and critical literature studies.

For Literacy Instruction

The findings suggest several potentially useful applications for literacy instruction. Primarily these applications center on using critical content analysis with learners. Christine Jenkins suggests that critical content can be used by librarians to "help young readers engage critically with texts, in particular the use of group discussion to encourage children to trust themselves as readers to make meaning from the text and to explore and delve deeper" (Beach, et al, 2009, p. 8). I can see teachers doing this as well with younger and older learners.

This inquiry based, collaborative, meaning making, reader response way of reading would be well situated in the "learning through language" section in Kathy Short's (1997) book, *Literature as Way of Knowing*. Like Short suggests, learning through reading is "a way to learn about life, not to practice reading" (p. 59). This is what people who engage in critical content analysis do; we read to "examine what the book is about" (Beach et al, 2009, p.12). By applying abductive inferences from the texts to other areas of inquiry, for example reading children's literature as a way to examine how childhood is constructed, this methodology could be used in many contexts as part of the inquiry cycle (Short, 1997).

This methodology within an inquiry project could also be modeled and taught in university courses for pre-service teachers in the areas of literacy, reading, and children's

literature. College students could go through the same critical content analysis inquiry cycle as younger students. This would serve as an experience for their own learning through language that could be transferred later into their own classrooms.

This use of critical content analysis with preservice teachers is a way for novice teachers to learn experience critical literacy is a meaningful and personal way before experiencing this with students. Mitzi Lewsion, Amy Seely Flint, and Katie Van Sluys (2002) discuss the difficulty for new teachers to grasp the complexities of critical literacy, from what it means to how to "do" it. Their definition of the doing of critical literacy; "interrogating multiple viewpoints," "focusing on sociopolitical issues," and "disrupting the commonplace," fits well with aims of critical content analysis. For more seasoned critical literacy doers, CCA can deepen the work suggested by Harste, Breau, Leland, Lewison, Ociepka, and Vasquez (2000) by giving a new structure to this kind of "reading."

Vivienne Yenika-Agbaw (in Beach, et al, 2009) makes an excellent argument for using this methodology to teach children how to create "a counter discourse that is embedded within postcolonial criticism to interrogate the story and visual texts" (p. 5). Children can read with this critical lens to challenge negative or inaccurate stereotypes about their own groups and then apply this counter discourse when reading about "the other." By learning not to accept negative images of themselves in children's literature, students can be open to questioning all the negative images they cross in their reading lives.

Critical content analysis is more than a method, it is a way of reading the world. This kind of reading can help children and adults to trust their own interpretations in order to read critically. This kind of reading can be used for inquiry into the world and into oneself.

Postmodern Childhood Studies

"Among the most widely read titles in and out of school are books that have won the Newbery Medal" (Friedman & Cataldo, 2002, p. 102). These are books that are read and made sense of by children in the United States. Because they are in the hands of children what they tell children about childhood deserves a place in the field of postmodern childhood studies. Children's literature "is a field of cultural production that is highly responsive to social change…and crucially implicated in shaping the values of children and young people" (Bradford, Mallan, Stephens, & McCallum, 2008, p. 2). It is a field that has not been examined enough in terms of postmodern childhood studies (Lenzer, 2001; Coats, 2001; Nodelman, 2009).

As I discovered in my study the childhood created in this text set is one that constructs the child's role of reconstructing the past. The child protagonist is in a postmodern environment, one where there are competing truths, but the child's job, as evidenced through the meta-plot, is to return to a more "modern" time. This is time that is less confusing and more moral (Coats, 2001).

Children's literature also is a space where adult norms about childhood are embedded as these books serve to "trace a history of childhood that is simultaneously a history of adult wishes about childhood" (Nelson, 2006, p. 223). These wishes are

fulfilled by the child creating a new home that is more orderly, more moral, and more like the homes we (adults) remember or wish we could remember (Hollindale, 1988; Hunt, 1992).

Conversely (as Nodelman, 2009 points out all of children's literature is dichotomous), my findings suggest a childhood wherein the children are able to practice *parrhesia* and reposition themselves into a "You" position in terms of Buber's "I/You" configuration. Both these feats require the child to claim/discover/learn about a sense of agency and subjectivity. While the children are used to recreate reactionary homes they are also allowed to become free enough to do this of their own volition.

The roles the children take on in this text set can also be used to position children into two spaces. The first space, *becoming*, speaks to the child as developing, learning, and changing, which was demonstrated during the "journey portion" of the meta-plot. The second space, *being*, which speaks to the idea that children are people in their own rights, not just adults-in-waiting (Cannella, 2002), can be seen when the child is formed enough to do the aforementioned difficult feats of *parrhesia* and jockeying for a "You" position. The endings of the novels that were analyzed speak again to the idea that ultimately child development is a never ending process (Chappell, 2008).

The findings from this study inform postmodern childhood studies' concerns with adult/child power inequalities (Kehily, 2004; Mills & Mills, 2000; Vinson & Ross, 2003), critiques of developmental psychology (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997; Walkerdine, 2004) and how culture reproduces adult normative childhoods (Cannella, 2002; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1989).

Critical Children's Literature Studies

The findings in this study have direct implications for critical children's literature studies. The child's role I found as creators of reactionary, adult normative homes *and* of children achieving agency and power, speaks directly to Tatar's (1992) vision of two different and sometimes competing interpretive communities to which children's literature speaks: a community of adults and a community of children. This study buttresses Tatar's argument that the needs of the more powerful adult group win out, causing books to take the side of the adult and because of this hierarchy, children's books, she argues, will forever be the province of adult wishes and hoped-for-outcomes.

In my final analysis of the text set, I found books where the child protagonist is used by the story to transmit nostalgic and traditional ideas of right and wrong. There was considerable evidence that no matter how much agency the child protagonists gained, adult structures were not dismantled (Chappell, 2008; Nodelman, 2009; Hunt, 2004). The *parrhesian* acts and the Buberian reconfiguring of power hierarchies allowed the child to be victorious in her quest that served modern, adult normative ideologies.

These findings also support Peter Hunt's (1994) ideas about children's literature serving as a kind of disciplinary measure through which children are offered the narratives adults believe are correct. In this case the "correct narratives" are shown by the decision the child protagonist made in the end of the books. Hunt sees children's literature as adults' attempts to (re)construct an ideal childhood, one that may not and may never have exist(ed). It could be argued that in the final analysis of the text set, the child characters were tools used by adults to re(construct) this "ideal" childhood.

This study also adds to Peter Hollindale's (1997) quest for the signs of childness, the body of feelings and beliefs regarding childhood, and Perry Nodelman's similar idea that children's literature is the product of an author's imagination as well as the world the author inhabits. By looking at a newer text set I was able to supplement the data and findings regarding how childhood is constructed by the culture and time period in which the author is living. What I discovered was that Anglo Saxon culture of the (mostly) white, English-speaking characters and authors represented was constant through the three continents my book set traversed. I also interpreted the novels as speaking for the time in which they were published, a postmodern time that reflects the uncertainty of adults in a world where cultural, racial, religious, and gender wars, both literally and figuratively, are raging (Kincheloe, 1997). This was evidenced in the behaviors (or lack of behaviors) by the adult characters in relation to their roles as parents.

My findings challenge some of Nodelman's (2009) in *The Hidden Adult*. The only discrepancy that is glaring enough to discuss is his "typical plot" and my meta-plot. The books Nodelman looks at are different then my text set as his are written by Canadian authors and are older. This could account for some of the differences as authors write within their cultures and their time periods (Nodelman, 2009). I wonder if this is also an outcome of the methodology I used, one that sees texts as having multiple meanings depending on the individual reader's experiences (Krippendorff, 2006). Nodelman's experiences are different than mine; he is a male, older, and a Canadian who has been researching children's literature for decades (Nodelman, 2009). I am a woman, younger, and American, and this is my first major research project. Varied interpretations also

speak to the purpose of and for the reading (Krippendorff, 2006). Nodelman's (2009) purpose was to define children's literature while mine was to examine constructions of childhood.

The meta-plot was also an outcome of using Foucault's idea of *parrhesia* and Buber's philosophy of "*I/You.*" While I have read studies in the field of critical children's literature that used Foucault's many ideas as a tool for analysis I have not found a study yet that uses his idea of *parrhesia*. This may be because Foucault wrote so much early in his career and his lectures on *parrhesia* were not given until soon before his death, rendering them a newer idea in this field. I discovered after an exhaustive search that while Buber's ideas of "I/You" are well known, they have not been (as far I can tell) applied before to children's literature. This speaks to education's marginalization of Buber. This is evidenced by there being no Buber SIG in AERA; after perusing the last four years' AERA national conference Programs, Buber was absent as demonstrated during a keyword search. It may be that *parrhesia* and Buber's ideas of "I/You" are generative for the kind of analysis that could unearth the meta-plot I discovered.

I think that it would be a generative endeavor to (re)introduce *parrhesia* and "I/You" as tools for other critical content analysts to use. These frameworks served me well as they helped to identify and qualify childhood in terms of power and powerlessness, a central preoccupation for scholars in the field of critical children's literature studies.

Further Study

I envision this research as the beginning for the following agenda: further examination of the connections between Martin Buber's philosophy and education, replicating my study within an interpretive community of children, replicating this study with different books, and continuing to define the methodology of critical content analysis.

Buber and Education

As I wrote in the previous section, Buberian thought seems to be ignored or forgotten in the field of education. I would like to change this, at least in the field of literacy education and children's literature studies, by repeating Nodelman's (2009) study to (re)analyze his text set though the lens of Buber. I envision this as an article that may be published in a children's literature journal (*The Lion and the Unicorn*, for example) or a literacy journal (*Language Arts*, for example). This project would also give me a chance to see if my interpretations of a meta-plot are situated within a certain text set or are a (partial) result of using Buber's framework.

I am also planning to start a Buber SIG at AERA this year as a way to stimulate interest in Buber and to find a community of learners to work and think with. Buber's ideas about relationship speak to many other subfields in education: gender studies, postcolonial studies, international studies, queer studies, and multicultural studies (among others). Any sub-branch of education that is concerned with power imbalances, social justice, and "otherness" could benefit by using Buber as a source for theory.

While Buber has not been included in professional literature about education his ideas mesh very well with some well-known educational theorists, Lisa S. Goldstein (1997) and Nell Noddings (1984). Both of these scholars are concerned with the idea of caring in the classroom. This caring is an interaction between the "the one-caring and the cared-for" (Goldstein, 1997, p. 14). The concept of caring can be defined as, "stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into another's (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). This conceptualization of caring fits very well with Buber's (1923) ideas of positioning the other as a precondition to your own existence. Both ways of looking at connecting ask the adult to empathize and regard the child as something deserving of time and energy. Both ideas are ways of bringing the ethics of caring and love into education.

Replicating my Study Within an Interpretive Community of Children

Like Nodelman (2009), I was "the hidden adult" in this study. While I believe my findings spoke to my interpretations, I would like to read some of the same Newbery books with an interpretive community of children who are the target audience of these books, which are marketed to "middle readers," a designation that usually refers to children eight to twelve years of age. I will limit the study to Newbery books as these are the titles that are written by Americans and are thus books that will speak more closely to American children's culture (Nodelman, 2009).

I will try and do this at my new University's (University of Texas at San Antonio) reading laboratory where children and adults come together to experience literacy after school. This setting will also provide an excellent chance to work with CCA as a way to "help young readers engage critically with texts, in particular the use of group discussion

to encourage children to trust themselves as readers to make meaning from the text and to explore and delve deeper" (Beach, et al, 2009, p. 8). I supplement the work of the other teachers who are teaching children to read the word, and help children discover new ways to read the world.

The majority of learners in this laboratory are of Latino descent and because the books in the Newbery text set are all white (barring *Kira-Kira*), Vivienne Yenika-Agbaw's (2009) excellent argument for using this methodology to teach children how to create "a counter discourse that is embedded within postcolonial criticism to interrogate the story and visual texts" (p. 5) may be appropriate in these instances. I will start the study with a text set composed of a variety of children's picture books that feature Latino characters. We will first examine these using critical content analysis before tackling the issues of "the other" in the award-winning books.

Replicating this Study with Different Books

Another way to look at the central question of how childhood is constructed in children's literature is to do a similar study with different text sets. These sets could be comprised of books that are popular with children. These novels could be sampled from "The New York Times'" children's books' bestseller lists or from the "Children's Choice Awards." While children do read the books in this study, these are books that have been recognized by adults. Comparing these books with texts that have been lauded by children themselves may prove to further complicate and problematize the tensions between the competing implied readership of adults and children by comparing and

contrasting the childhoods found in adult-sanctioned books versus the childhood found in kid-popular fiction.

This study did not find significantly different childhoods between the three country's text sets. This could be explained, in part, by the historical, cultural, and linguistic similarities of the three nations: the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. What is important to keep in mind is that although all three countries are rich in a plurality of cultures; white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture, was written about in twelve of the fifteen novels. A way to further explore the cultural conceptions of childhood would be to do a similar study using Batchelder Award-winning novels. This award is given by the American Library Association for the best *translated* children's book of the year. The books come mostly from Europe but include other locations as well and give researchers a way to access books that were written for different cultures in different languages, providing a more international focus.

Continuing to Define the Methodology of Critical Content Analysis

As was discussed in Beach et al's (2009) about critical content analysis is the dearth of studies that define and "show" how to do this methodology. I believe my study sheds some more light on the doing and on the definition. I sent in proposals to AERA for the 2010 national conference to present on the methodology as well as the findings garnered through this method. Dr Short and her colleagues have been invited back to the upcoming NRC conference to (re)present on critical content analysis. I will be a part of this presentation and hope to learn and share more about this methodology.

In my new position at UTSA I am slated to teach two sections of literacy methods this fall; part of my syllabus for both classes will include a critical content analysis inquiry project. I will keep notes and, in spring, 2010, I will write up my reflections of these projects as a teacher researcher for publication as another route to making this method more transparent and known.

Conclusions

> "Is it for children?" Richard Johnson wrote in *The Horn Book*, "is perhaps the decade's [1960s] commonest, knottiest question. No child ever asks it, however. 'Too violent,' too abstract,' 'too suggestive' are perhaps the commonest criticisms—but who besides adults is critical of books for such reasons? Children find other reasons for liking or not liking books. And publishers can only guess at those reasons, for we are less certain than we were ten years ago about what being young or growing up means." (Marcus, 2008, p. 248)

I end the study with this quote because it sums up how this adult feels, less certain than I ever was about what being young or growing up means. What I encountered in my study were constructions of childhood that spoke to this particular text set that surprised me and challenged my own nostalgia about the childhood I lived or imagined I lived. Childhood in these text sets is an isolated place of a variety of roles that must be assumed in the absence of parents. The adults in these books are obstacles to the child's growth and create an atmosphere for the child that is messy and confusing.

Childhood is this analysis is, conversely, a more powerful and free time than I remember or would have guessed I would have encountered. These texts positioned the

child characters in dichotomous ways that surely speak to our ambivalence as adults about what this state called childhood is. Maybe, like the characters in the books, we, too, left behind our past in order to create the future in which we are now living.

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