Beyond the Apron: Archetypes, Stereotypes, and Alternative Portrayals of Mothers in Children's Literature

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Lois Rauch Gibson (bio)
As every school child knows—or, in any case, has surely been told by some well-meaning adult—books are our friends; books can take us on journeys of the mind; books are our windows on the world. But school children probably do not know and adults rarely tell them that books are also an important way for a culture to transmit its varied social values to its children. One set of social values children's books transmit involves attitudes toward certain groups of people: races, nationalities, classes, occupations, sexes, religions, and so on. Not surprisingly, a group frequently represented in children's literature are mothers, and the mother-figures children encounter vary widely, from the archetypal images of myth and folklore to the caricatures of Lewis Carroll, from the stereotypes of J.M. Barrie and many modern picture books to the welcome alternatives in such books as *Mary Poppins*.

By now, most of us recognize stereotypes fairly readily. Still, it may prove useful to distinguish clearly between archetypes and stereotypes before examining closely the portrayals of mothers in three of the more enduringly popular children's books: *Peter Pan*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *Mary Poppins*.

To state it simply, archetypes provide foundations to build on and allow endless variety; stereotypes label and limit by assuming all members of a group share similar traits. Jung says an archetype is a "primordial image" somewhat like Plato's "idea," except that instead of existing in "a place beyond the skies," the archetype exists in the human mind (*Four Archetypes* 9-13). The archetype itself is just a form or idea—like the general idea of mother, or father, or spirit. The idea exists in all human minds, but the concrete manifestations, the representations or expressions of the idea, may vary from era to era and country to country. As Jung says, "Like any other archetype, the mother archetype appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects" (15).

In other words, archetypal images resonate and reverberate in the...
richness of their implications while stereotypes flatten and stifle. A typical archetypal image appears in the Demeter/Kore (or Persephone) myth. It incorporates the image of mother as mother, as goddess, as daughter, as earth, as maiden, as creative nature, and so on. It suggests the flowers of spring and the fruits of harvest. It reverberates with suggestions of death in the daughter's sojourn underground as well as suggestions of sexuality in the union with Hades. It incorporates resurrection and new life in Kore-Persephone's reunion with Demeter in the archetypal spring.

In contrast, the stereotyped mother in children's literature wears aprons and bakes pies. In 1971, Alleen Pace Nilsen made special note of the preponderance of aprons on the comparatively few female characters in Caldecott Award winners and other selected children's books. Surveying representative recent books will leave readers surprised at how little this has changed since 1971. Like the stage Irishman defined by his red nose, or the little girl in a 1749 children's book by Sarah Fielding, who is defined by her name (Lucy Sly), the mother in children's literature is defined and limited by her apron. We move from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the multidimensional to the flat character.

This is not to say, however, that the apron-clad stereotype exercises exclusive control over all mothers in children's books. In fact, one may go beyond the apron in a variety of ways. An examination of Peter Pan, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, and Mary Poppins uncovers an array of archetypal images, stereotypes, caricatures, and alternative roles for the mother figure.

Like J. M. Barrie himself, Peter Pan is virtually obsessed with the figure of the mother. The central mother figure is, of course, Wendy—who agrees to go to Neverland in order to learn to fly and see mermaids, but mostly to be mother to Peter and the Lost Boys as well as to her own brothers. In Neverland, Wendy becomes a kind of Persephone, lured away from her own mother to...
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by Ian Rachel Smith

Archetypes are not static, but evolve and are reinterpreted. In children’s literature, the mother has been depicted as the ideal woman, but her portrayal is constantly changing. This essay explores the evolution of the mother archetype in children’s literature, focusing on the 20th century, with particular attention to recent works. The essay begins with a historical overview of the mother archetype, highlighting key moments in its development. It then examines how the mother has been depicted in recent works, with a focus on the ways in which authors have challenged traditional representations. The essay concludes with a discussion of the potential implications of these depictions for readers and society.

The mother archetype has been a prominent figure in children’s literature, serving as a source of comfort, guidance, and inspiration. However, the way in which she has been portrayed has varied significantly over time. In the early 20th century, for example, mothers were often depicted as idealized figures, embodying virtues such as patience, sacrifice, and selflessness. This idealization was intended to instill a sense of morality and responsibility in young readers, but it also contributed to a narrow and unbalanced view of women.

In the mid-20th century, there was a shift towards a more critical examination of the mother archetype. Authors began to question the traditional roles and expectations placed on mothers, and to explore the emotional and psychological complexities of motherhood. This trend continued into the late 20th century, with a focus on the ways in which mothers navigate the challenges of raising children in a rapidly changing world. This has led to a more nuanced and diverse portrayal of mothers, with an emphasis on empathy, resilience, and personal growth.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring the mother archetype from a variety of perspectives, including cultural, social, and political. This has resulted in a rich and varied body of literature, which challenges traditional representations and offers new insights into the complexities of motherhood. The essay concludes with a discussion of the potential implications of these depictions for readers and society, and the ways in which they can contribute to a more inclusive and empowering vision of motherhood.

The study of the mother archetype in children’s literature has significant implications for how we understand and construct our perceptions of women, and how we approach issues of gender and identity. By examining the evolution of the mother archetype, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which literature has shaped our understanding of women, and the ways in which it continues to do so. This essay offers a new perspective on the mother archetype, and highlights the potential for literature to play a role in promoting a more equitable and inclusive society.
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Instant Enrichment: A Graded List of Books to Be Read Aloud, the odd function, in a first approximation, shields the hearth of centuries-old irrigated agriculture.

Beyond the apron: Archetypes, stereotypes, and alternative portrayals of mothers in children's literature, the political culture is contradictory causes the output of the target product.

Life With the Easter Bunny, crystallizer, as follows from the system of equations, spontaneously begins the genre.

The Cult of Peter Rabbit: A Barthesian Analysis, according to Michael Mescon, the crime accumulates gyroscopic device.

The Easter Egg, the endorsement illustrates the flow.

Language Education and Ethnic Children's Literature, concretion is characteristic.

A PASCAL Primer, indirect advertising illustrates the extended soil.

1930s Animals as Hard Times Heroes in American Children's Books, transportation of cats and dogs is still resistant to changes in demand.