# HOLIDAYS IN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FROM 1823 TO THE PRESENT

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 2016

Major Subject: English

ABSTRACT

Observing the curious gap between the prominence of holiday texts within the children's literature corpus and the absence of literary scholarship on such texts, this dissertation explores holiday literature for American children since 1823, the year in which "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas" was published as the most influential piece of holiday writing to date. The project aims to provide the first extended study of holidays in children's literature, as well as to draw conclusions about the close relationship between children's literature and holidays. Ultimately, I argue that holidays and children's literature have a symbiotic relationship. Children's literature has offered the medium through which holidays have been recast from marginalized disruptions into staples of popular culture; at the same time, making note of the holiday material in children's literature provides new ways of understanding that literature because of the preloaded cultural significance affixed to holidays. In short, holiday settings alert us to the fundamental conflicts in a work of literature.

In order to meet the goals of this project, I take a cultural historical approach to children's literature, drawing on a wide range of genres and historical periods to survey the evolution of holiday material. I also contextualize the project through sociological and anthropological studies of holidays, which read them as moments of confrontation that magnify the struggles inherent in everyday life such as those to define selfhood, social values, national identities, family, friendships, and history. Children's literature extends these tensions to the processes of individuating, maturing, and acculturating, and the holiday settings in children's literature force child protagonists and/or readers into

moments of crisis where the stakes are the child's ability to acculturate and mature successfully or deviate purposefully. Each of the five major chapters considers how holiday literature presents external forces—those of peer relationships (birthdays); community (Valentine's Day); educational, economic, and domestic institutions (Halloween); nation (Fourth of July); and adulthood (Christmas)—in relation to the child's ability to experience, express, and determine selfhood.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the assistance provided by the staffs of the Forsyth County Public Library, the Greenville County Public Library, and the Brazos County Public Library, and especially for the exceptional distance learning support from the library staff of Texas A&M University. I would also like to thank my chair, Claudia Nelson, for her patient encouragement from this project's inception to its completion. The other members of my committee, Lucia Hodgson, Alfred Bendixen, and John Lenihan, also have my gratitude for their generous feedback on this project and its possibilities for the future.

Many friends have offered assistance of all kinds. In particular, I would like to thank Christine Brown and Deanna Koretsky, who were always ready to talk through problem passages. Finally, I am thankful for my parents and sisters and for their unfailing belief in my work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT ..... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... iv

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION ..... 1

Status of the Topic ..... 3
Structure ..... 10

CHAPTER II BIRTHDAYS: THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ..... 20

The Nineteenth-Century Didactic Birthday ..... 23
The Child-Centric Twentieth-Century Birthday ..... 43
Anxiety and Exceptionalism in Late Twentieth- and Early Twenty-First-Century Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature ..... 58
Conclusion ..... 66

CHAPTER III VALENTINE'S DAY: LEARNING COMMUNITY, CHARITY, AND THE PROBLEM OF GENDER ..... 71

Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Valentine's Day Frenzy ..... 74
The Gender Problem in Children's Valentine's Day Literature ..... 83
The Enduring Lesson of Community-Mindedness and Charitable Spirit ..... 101
Conclusion ..... 106

CHAPTER IV HALLOWEEN: INSTITUTIONAL CONTROL VERSUS CHILDHOOD FREEDOM IN CHILDREN'S HALLOWEEN COSTUME PLAY ..... 112

The Early Twentieth-Century Halloween Celebration in *Mary Jane's Kindergarten* ..... 114
The Mid-Twentieth Century Halloween Celebration in *Ramona the Pest* ..... 124
The Halloween Celebration for Older Children in *Blubber* ..... 136
Conclusion ..... 150

CHAPTER V THE FOURTH OF JULY: REFASHIONING FOURTH OF JULY TRADITIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ..... 156

Dominant Culture Fourth of July Literature in the Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century ..... 158

Page

Fourth of July Literature from the Marginal Perspective ..... 169
Diverse Representations in Contemporary Fourth of July Literature ..... 182
Conclusion ..... 190

CHAPTER VI CHRISTMAS: SANTA CLAUS, PATERNAL POWER, AND CONSTRUCTING THE CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS CANON ..... 196

"An Account"'s Expansion on and Departure from Tradition ..... 198
Imaging Santa Claus through the Civil War: Nast's Illustrations and Alcott's *Little Women* ..... 207
"Yes, Virginia": Anticipating the Christmas Spirit of the Twentieth Century ..... 217
Failure and Redemption in the Twentieth-Century Christmas Canon ..... 221
A Deeper Redemption Still: Twentieth-Century Christmas and the Grinch's Transformation ..... 234
Pitying the Father: *The Polar Express* and the Child as Christmas Authority ..... 238
Conclusion ..... 241

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION ..... 248

REFERENCES ..... 259

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 1983 film *A Christmas Story*, the young protagonist, Ralphie, and his peers stare eagerly into a Christmas window display as the voiceover proclaims the holiday to be the one day "upon which the entire kid year revolved." In the foreword to James Baker's *Thanksgiving: The Biography of an American Holiday*, Peter Gomes makes a similar observation about the prominence of holidays in the structure of children's lives when he notes, "Hardly a schoolroom in America can get through the month of November without some depiction of the Pilgrims and their Indian neighbors feasting and playing together in the New England autumn" (x). Writers, publishers, educators, parents, entertainment outlets, and advertisers have deemed holidays important educational and profitable recreational material for children, and as such, holiday works have taken a central place in the core body of literature for children. Children, too, have come to anticipate the days with the same ardor that adults demonstrate when producing holiday material.

Holidays fall under the category of "invented traditions," a term frequently borrowed from Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* to refer to "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm 1). How closely children's holiday literature models this definition varies; however, the literature

consistently models Hobsbawm's point that invented traditions are "deliberate" in their construction (1-2). Through the steady promotion of holiday material, including literature, adults deliberately teach children to be excited about a holiday's arrival. In his essay on Father Christmas, Claude Lévi-Strauss engages with the question of adult construction of holiday when he argues that we should not ask why children like Father Christmas. That answer is obvious. Rather, we should ask "why adults invented him in the first place" (39). This question has been asked in anthropological, sociological, and historical contexts. This dissertation broaches the question through the field of children's literature, and it extends the question broadly to consider why adults so persistently and vehemently create and recreate, tell and retell all manner of holiday stories for children.

Observing the curious gap between the prominence of holiday texts within the children's literature corpus and the absence of literary scholarship on such texts, this dissertation explores holiday literature for American children since 1823, the year in which "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas" was published as the most influential piece of holiday writing to date, a point I argue in the Christmas chapter. Chronology and genre choices are intentionally broad in order to capture the range of material available for children, and chapters approach holidays with different emphases in mind. The Valentine's Day chapter focuses on gender, for instance, while the Fourth of July chapter considers marginalized perspectives of race and immigrant experience. However, I consistently employ what Anne Scott MacLeod terms a "cultural historical approach to children's literature," in which the study "begin[s] not with a hypothesis about what, exactly the literature will tell [the researcher] but only with the belief that it

will illuminate some aspects of the society of its time" (MacLeod ix). The approach aims to "hear what the books say." Furthermore, I contextualize the project at large through the work of scholars such as Amitai Etzioni, Jared Bloom, Elizabeth Pleck, Stephen Nissenbaum, Len Travers, Leigh Eric Schmidt, Adam Kuper, Ellen Litwicki, and Gary Cross who read holidays as moments in which the struggles inherent in everyday life—struggles to define selfhood, social values, national identities, fantasy, family, friendships, and history, for example—become magnified. Children's literature extends these tensions to the processes of individuating, maturing, and acculturating. I observe how the holiday settings in children's literature force the child protagonist and/or readers into moments of crisis where the stakes are the child's ability to acculturate and mature successfully or deviate purposefully. In doing so, I hope not only to provide a study of a large and under-examined body of literature, but also to add to the understanding of attitudes toward the place of children in society, education, the ideal of individuality, national imagination, authorship, genre, and the functions, production, and dissemination of literature for children.

**Status of the Topic**

While holidays have yet to receive sustained examination in the field of children's literature, historians and social scientists have rigorously studied the function and value of holiday through various lenses, including those of politics, economics, religion, gender, and market/consumer culture. Early work in sociology lumped holidays under Émile Durkheim's larger investigation of religion and ritual. In the seminal study

*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim focuses on the collective power of ceremony and ritual, arguing that such events "are an essential and permanent aspect of humanity" (2). Furthermore, Durkheim contends that rituals must be intuited by individuals in order for them to function as members of society. More recent studies in the theorization of holidays, however, have tended to point to the inherent conflict in holiday celebrations, focusing on moments of change, exclusion, creation, evolution, and loss.[1]

One of the most ambitious and comprehensive studies to appear in the theorization of holidays is Etzioni and Bloom's edited collection *We Are What We Celebrate: Understanding Holidays and Rituals*. In the first chapter, Etzioni, a sociologist, identifies the book's aim as "contributing to the development of a theory of holidays" (6). Etzioni acknowledges Durkheim's well-studied contributions, but he argues that Durkheim's work "need[s] to be extensively modified in order to develop a more comprehensive theory" (7). Etzioni goes on to argue that his book "raises theoretical issues not directly addressed by Durkheim." Among these are issues of dissent and protest. Etzioni contends, "Durkheim basically treats all rituals (holidays included) as if they are of one kind, in the sense that they all fulfill one societal 'function': fostering integration by reinforcing shared beliefs." Etzioni and Bloom include essays that shift attention from the integrative function of holidays to moments of disruption as they are seen in, exacerbated by, and created through holidays at multiple levels of social organization; individual essays deal with the family (John Gillis, Mary Whiteside), ethnicity and assimilation (Anna Day Wilde, Ellen M. Litwicki), and

holidays and public protest (Francesca Polletta). While mindful of the disciplinary differences between sociological, anthropological, historical, and literary investigations, I have developed my approach to holidays in literature based on Etzioni and Bloom's premise that holidays provide unique opportunity to explore confrontation.

Furthermore, I use Etzioni and Bloom's volume to clarify some of the terminology—such as "recommitment holiday" and "tension management holiday"—that are important in my project. In the volume introduction, Etzioni observes,

> [T]here is no agreed-upon typology of holidays to draw on, let alone one based on the societal roles fulfilled by various holidays. Some scholars have arranged holidays by the seasons they mark; others have called attention to each holiday's role in the lives of the individuals involved (rather than to the societal roles of holidays); still others see holidays as largely rooted in history. I attempt here to provide a typology based on the varying societal roles fulfilled by different holidays. ("Holidays and Rituals" 10)

For such a typology, Etzioni claims that it is important to distinguish between holidays "that use narratives, drama, and ceremonies to directly enforce commitments to shared beliefs—which I shall refer to as recommitment holidays—and those that fulfill this role indirectly by releasing tensions that result from the close adherence to beliefs, which I term tension management holidays" (11). Etzioni contends that these are not mutually exclusive terms, and that one holiday may encompass aspects of both recommitment and tension management, but he claims that each holiday tends to favor one function over

another. Moreover, he concedes that a holiday's dominant classification may change over time. In the context of this dissertation, that observation would apply to a holiday such as the Fourth of July as it is represented in children's literature. Throughout this project, it is my contention that holidays in American children's literature always require characters and child readers to confront the social world and their place within it; therefore, Etzioni's typology is a useful frame to depart from.

In addition to focusing on the conflicts around holidays, current research also demonstrates the tendency to read holidays with an eye toward nationalism, nation building, national identity, and citizenship. Some studies such as Matthew Dennis's *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days: An American Calendar* read holidays through the nation because they "perform critical cultural and political work" specific to the nation (28). Others such as Schmidt's *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* use the nation as a qualifier to define the scope of an argument. Both uses of the nation are valuable for my project. For some chapters, I use authorial nationality and place of publication chiefly as practical limitations for the pool of primary texts. Many of the trends that I discuss in the birthday and Christmas chapters, for instance, can find supporting examples in British texts such as in Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* (1874) and J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter (1997-2007, for birthdays) and in J. R. R. Tolkien's Father Christmas letters (1920-1943, for Christmas). This is not to suggest that nation is of no consequence in these texts, but rather the transatlantic continuities reinforce the markedly widespread circulation of children's literature and international constructions of "the child" (Nelson and Morris 1). In the Fourth of July chapter,

however, I look at how children's holiday literature incorporates national history and asks children to realize (or meaningfully reject) their place within the nation.

One of the less explored topics in holiday research is the link between holidays and children's culture. Cross, a cultural historian, has perhaps given the most extensive critical attention to the relationship between children and holidays through his investigations into the nineteenth- and twentieth- century shifts towards the child-centered holiday. *We Are What We Celebrate* includes his chapter "Just for Kids: How Holidays Became Child Centered," which is a condensed version of a chapter from Cross's book *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture*. In these chapters, Cross argues "that holidays and pilgrimages, manifestations of deep communal needs, were metamorphosed into celebrations of wondrous innocence in the last 150 years. This transformation coincided with both new attitudes toward the young and the rise of consumerism" ("Just for Kids" 61). Cross builds his argument around Christmas and Halloween (though he also mentions birthdays), emphasizing that at a certain point in history each holiday was infantilized—that is, "bowdlerized when adults passed [it] on to young children in gentle, 'cute' forms"—in order to quell social conflicts (*The Cute and the Cool* 103). In addition to tracing the infantilization of holidays, Cross also considers the challenges presented by shifts to the child-centered holiday. With regards to Christmas, for instance, Cross posits that the most notable among these new conflicts has been "the child's delightful response to the gifts of adults, a ritual relationship that, because of its one-sidedness and the fact that it leads to satiation and to desires not controlled by adults, has become

perpetually problematic" (70). My project focuses on these kinds of new tensions, which arose alongside the child-centered holiday. I explore children's interactions with changing identity, with their peers, with their parents and other adults, and with their place in the American nation and its social institutions.

As far as my research has shown, Cross's work is the only one that lists the study of the child-centered holiday as a central aim. Other studies have looked at holiday commercialization (Schmidt) or nationalization (Dennis), but Cross seems to be unique in his focus on infantilization. Cross does, however, draw on the work of Nissenbaum, whose investigation *The Battle for Christmas: A Cultural History of America's Most Cherished Holiday* includes information about how children became a separate and distinct social category, an important issue that Cross only glosses. Nissenbaum also explains that his inquiries into the history of Christmas led to unexpected but rich discoveries about the "creation" of the child, the child's position in American culture, and the complexities that arise from shifting holiday focus onto children. His work goes so far as to assert that the nineteenth-century "domestication of Christmas was thus related (as both effect and cause) to the creation of domesticity and of 'childhood' itself, even to the novel idea that the central purpose of the family was to provide not simply for the instruction of its children but for their happiness as well" (110). According to Nissenbaum, then, understanding the Christmas holiday is crucial to understanding attitudes towards children and childhood. This dissertation emphasizes that Nissenbaum's contention may readily be applied to other holidays as well.

Nissenbaum's work is also useful to my project because it establishes a clear link between the attitudes and practices associated with Christmas and the influence of print media. Included in the literature considered in Nissenbaum's study are Washington Irving's Bracebridge Hall stories (1822), "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (1823), Elizabeth Dwight Sedgwick's "The Christmas Box" (1833), an anonymous Philadelphia author's "The Christmas Tree" (1836), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and *Little Women* (1868-1869). Additionally, Nissenbaum references the intellectual work of literary figures such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Bronson Alcott, and he includes explorations of several additional poems, stories, and newspaper features throughout *The Battle for Christmas*. Other historians including Penne L. Restad, Joseph Illick, and Litwicki also use literary texts as primary sources to support assertions about life and culture at a certain moment in relation to holiday. Such histories are valuable in foregrounding the connection between literature and holidays. For instance, in *America's Public Holidays, 1865-1920*, Litwicki observes that literature in publications aimed at domestic audiences provided the "best window on public holidays in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (5). Such scholarship establishes a precedent for understanding the connection between holidays and literature. Though I move the investigation into the field of literary study, examining both how children's literature elucidates holidays as well as how holidays elucidate children's literature, these historical connections between holiday and literature provide a valuable basis for my work.

**Structure**

This dissertation includes five major chapters, each focusing on one holiday: the child's birthday, Valentine's Day, Halloween, the Fourth of July, and Christmas. I order the chapters according to the increasingly public and/or authoritative nature of the external influences with which the literature engages on a particular holiday. Birthday literature encourages children to realize their unique individuality while also asking them to adopt burgeoning social identities when among peers. Valentine's Day literature emphasizes public expressions of affection, kindness, and charity between peers and within the community at large, simultaneously positioning gender as the one bar to social interaction. Halloween texts explore the child's creative possibilities in relation to domestic, economic, and educational institutions. The Fourth of July chapter considers children's literature in relation to nation. Finally, the Christmas chapter examines the complex prevalence of paternal authority in the children's holiday canon.

In the first major chapter, I explore the birthday celebration, and in particular, the conflict that arises between the individual person and social identity on that day. Birthdays are often described as important and exciting events in children's literature, but the excitement and novelty of the day bring challenges for characters. As the literature emphasizes, children are suddenly given new roles, new responsibilities, and even new identities on their birthdays. Furthermore, children marking their birthdays are encouraged to celebrate themselves as unique and independent individuals, evidenced in the possessive language used in party manuals (e.g., Florence Hamsher's *The Complete Book of Children's Parties* [1949]), nonfiction studies (e.g., Ralph and Adelin Linton's

*The Lore of Birthdays* [1953] and Lila Perl's *Candles, Cakes and Donkey Tales: Birthday Symbols and Celebrations* [1984]), and children's fiction (e.g., Dr. Seuss's *Happy Birthday to You!* [1959]).While children are encouraged to consider their uniqueness, they are simultaneously asked to make their forays into the social world through interaction with peers at the birthday party. Negotiation between the personal and the public often proves difficult, and the result—at least as it is presented in children's literature—may be greedy or bickering children, anxiety about identity, and the need for a clearly didactic message. The anxieties of the birthday are further manifested through, and solicited by, emphasis on aging and confrontation with the maturation process.

The chapter looks at nineteenth-century didactic literature, twentieth-century picture books, and contemporary middle grade and young adult novels as they trace the rhetoric of the birthday and the dynamic relationship between individual identity and responsibility to society. Nineteenth-century texts include Elizabeth Prentiss's *Little Susy's Six Birthdays* (1853) and Oliver Optic's *The Birthday Party: A Story for Little Folks* (1862), both of which use the birthday to highlight the importance of an individual's sense of moral rectitude and social responsibility, even as Optic's text begins to usher in the tradition of the self-indulgent, child-centric birthday party. Twentieth-century picture books often expand the license to indulge, encouraging the birthday child to celebrate his/her special and unique individuality through self-centric language in party guides and children's fiction. However, in the literature, such revelry often overwhelms the celebrating child and provokes jealousy in peers, leading to

misbehavior, squabbling, and selfishness, all of which twentieth-century literature presents, and even tolerates, as normal expressions during childhood birthday celebrations. Texts in this section include Bernard Waber's *Lyle and the Birthday Party* (1966), Russell Hoban's *A Birthday for Frances* (1968), and Stan and Jan Bernstein's *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Birthday* (1986). Finally, the chapter considers contemporary literature for older children such as Jerry Spinelli's *Wringer* (1997) and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), which shift the messages on special and unique individuality, away from their universal applications to the more selective conclusion that being special also means bearing special, and often difficult, social responsibility. I suggest that this trend is, perhaps, a critique of the texts that heap praise on all birthday children, which have persisted from the twentieth century into the twenty-first.

The second major chapter examines Valentine's Day and the complications that arise when children are asked to participate in and identify interpersonal relationships. Like birthday texts, Valentine's Day literature often features children who must navigate the social space of peer interaction. In birthday texts, children confront social relationships while simultaneously realizing an individual identity. Valentine's Day texts extend the role of those social relationships further by presenting children who have to work out different kinds of relationships, so that children are not only asked to participate in relationships with peers, but also are required to define those relationships as friendly, romantic, and/or antagonistic. Furthermore, participation in the holiday forces children to confront issues of gender, sexuality, and intimacy, and the holiday requires them to perform what Schmidt describes as the "ritualized" expression of

sentiment ("Fashioning of a Modern Holiday" 243). While some of these expressions prove to be affectionate, there are also instances of teasing and rejection. In addition to presenting the complicated interactions of peers, the literature also looks at sentimental expressions in other types of relationships. Eileen Spinelli's *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* (1991), for example, considers a sort of communal, charitable love. As a whole, the literature identifies this day as one of the first opportunities children have to consider a broad range of relationships and their place within a collective community.

This chapter contrasts the emphasis on charity and community-mindedness with the ready acceptance of gender as inhibiting peer friendships between boys and girls. As literature presents gender as increasingly troublesome throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, many texts have also become more dependent on the directives of adult characters, portraying children as reluctant holiday celebrants and adults as those who drum up excitement. Late nineteenth-century Valentine's Day material frequently depicts child characters as eager participants in the holiday who need little guidance from adults (e.g., Margaret Spencer Delano's "Valentine Frolics" [1895]). Even alongside these harmonious scenes, though, the literature includes anxiety about interaction with others, especially about teasing over opposite-gender interactions. Anna North's "The Mission of Mabel's Valentine" (1883) provides an early example of this anxiety. The chapter follows these anxieties through twentieth-century texts such as Carol Ryrie Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935) to their contemporary instantiations in books such as Barbara Cohen's *213 Valentines* (1991) and Abby Klein's *Ready, Freddy! Super-Secret Valentine* (2007), both of which feature gender as a particular source of

trouble and the only permissible barrier to friendship. As the literature has progressed from the nineteenth century to contemporary texts, the lessons on charity and community-mindedness have persisted as a common holiday feature. What have changed, however, are the presentations of the child's excitement over the holiday, dwindling since the nineteenth century, and the increasingly frequent use of gender as a permissible problem in children's interactions.

The third major chapter covers Halloween, and it focuses particularly on costuming traditions in children's literature. Drawing on historical trends in Halloween costuming practices as well as critical approaches to masking (e.g., Bakhtin, Tuleja, Belk) and to holiday domestication (e.g., Cross, di Leonardo, Pleck), the chapter considers how children's literature actively alters the holiday, first to tame it and then to permit children certain authority over it. As the child's authority over the holiday has expanded, the literature has also permitted challenges to those institutions (domestic, economic, and educational) that had previously sought to exercise total control over the child's Halloween. I observe that the act of dressing up has transformed from a holiday tradition dictated by authoritative institutions to a process of playing and practicing identity in which children select their outfits to communicate a certain identity to themselves, their peers, and adults. By the later decades of the twentieth century, literature presents the costume not as a tool to stifle or control the wearer's identity, but instead as an opportunity to express, more liberally than usual, intentions, humors, attitudes, desires, and fantasies.

Halloween, like Christmas, has its origins in ancient ritual, but it was not adopted into mainstream American culture until the mid-nineteenth century, facilitated by the historical sketches, short stories, poems and party/activity guides cropping up in domestic periodicals in the 1870s, including those written for children (Bannatyne 101). This literature did not regularly feature dressing up as an integral part of children's celebrations until the twentieth century. As a result, this chapter's discussion centers on three representative twentieth-century texts: the Halloween chapters from Clara Ingram Judson's *Mary Jane's Kindergarten* (1918) and Beverly Cleary's *Ramona the Pest* (1968), as well as Judy Blume's *Blubber* (1974). Taken together, these three texts, each produced by a female author respected for her sensitivity to the experience of the "average" American child, both reflect and revise what the typical child's Halloween experience should be as it grew into a cultural staple for American children. Judson's text casts the child as a "blank slate" holiday celebrant, entirely unaware of Halloween and its subversive past. Children in her text receive their costumes and all instruction about the holiday from the safe institutions of home, school, and market. Cleary's and Blume's texts, however, readily offer children the liberty to express their own creativity in their Halloween costumes and in their behaviors while in costume, even as their celebrations bring trouble, discomfort, or fear.

Next, the Fourth of July chapter extends the exploration of the child's public identity. Like birthday and Valentine's Day texts, Fourth of July literature often requires the child to assume a place within a collective group. In *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic*, Travers contends

that the holiday offers Americans "flexibility to redefine the significance of their collective past" as well as the opportunity for annual self-discovery (6-7). In early celebrations of the new holiday, however, this flexibility "often bred serious tensions among the celebrants" as people disagreed over the values, history, and traditions that they wanted to perpetuate. Furthermore, "the ritualized celebrations of the Fourth of July helped to mask disturbing ambiguities and contradictions in the new republic, overlaying real social and political conflict with a conceptual veneer of shared ideology and elemental harmony" (7). Travers suggests that the holiday reveals the difficulties of creating a national identity, and I explore how Fourth of July literature for children communicates national identity and history, as well as the challenges for those who find themselves outside of that history.

The chapter features nineteenth-century texts written for children of the dominant group (white, Christian, and middle/upper class) and then transitions to nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century texts that engage diverse and marginalized perspectives. In the discussion of texts for dominant group children (e.g., "Juvenile Celebration of Independence" [1836], *A Story for the Fourth of July: An Epitome of American History, Adapted to Infant Minds* [1840], and the Fourth of July chapter in Josephine Baker's *Round Top and Square Top; or, The Gates Twins* [1887]), I observe strategies used to construct national identity, including the tendency to situate nation as family, the lionization of national history, and the presentation of ideal citizenship against negative models of identity. I indicate that such strategies have continued into contemporary children's Fourth of July literature, but also discuss the literature's

expansion to include alternate perspectives of the holiday as confusing, exclusionary, and dehumanizing. That section begins with Louise-Clarke Pyrnelle's 1882 *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot, or Plantation Child-Life* and ends with Walter Dean Myers's *Monster* (1999). Finally, the chapter considers contemporary children's literature, which has sought to reconcile the problems raised by texts from a marginal perspective. These texts include harmonious presentations of a diverse nation unified by noble ideals (e.g., Karma Wilson's *How to Bake an American Pie* [2007]), or more complicatedly, they shift the holiday's focus away from nation, a threatening force, and onto family (e.g., Janet Wong's *Apple Pie 4th of July* and Diane Gonzales Bertrand's *Uncle Chente's Picnic*, both from 2002).

Finally, the last major chapter, "Christmas: Santa Claus, Paternal Power, and Constructing the Children's Christmas Canon," foregrounds the adult's investment in the Christmas holiday. While several other chapters consider the adult/child relationship, both real and fictional, this final chapter's central argument is that Christmas children's literature serves adults, particularly those in paternal positions (broadly defined), by providing the fantasy literary form and the fictional figure (Santa Claus) through which the adult may explore power, stumble, and find redemption. Beginning with "An Account of the Visit from St. Nicholas" (1823), adult male characters have been associated with the child-oriented Christmas, but as the child/childhood ideal has strengthened, the literature has correspondingly complicated and weakened those adult characters. Thus, I suggest the child's Christmas canon gives adults license to explore anxieties, desires, and shortcomings—sometimes minor shortcomings, sometimes grave

moral shortcomings—revealing children's literature to be not only a medium for children to grapple with their identities and their places in the world, but a venue for adults to do so as well.

I observe that the pattern of the child's increasing power alongside the adult's weakening has developed throughout the primary texts of the Christmas canon including "An Account," Alcott's *Little Women,* Frank Church's "Yes, Virginia" editorial, Robert L. May's *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1939), Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957), and Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express* (1985). I argue that "An Account" has so successfully established the dynamic of adult, child, and Santa Claus figure that subsequent texts must almost always engage with its tradition in order to join the canon (or critique it meaningfully as in the case of *Little Women*). Those texts that cannot satisfactorily incorporate "An Account"'s tradition fail to earn status as a Christmas classic (e.g., L. Frank Baum's *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* [1902]).

While each chapter will focus on an individual holiday, the conclusion includes brief exploration of two additional texts, Eleanor Estes's *The Witch Family* (1960) and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999), both of which feature scenes from multiple holidays. Though these texts exclude some of the holidays in my dissertation and include others, I use them as case studies to demonstrate the ubiquity of holiday material in children's literature across genre, audience, and time and to enforce this dissertation's overarching argument: observing holiday material in children's literature and contextualizing its literary history can lead us to new ways of understanding and

approaching a text. Additionally, the conclusion reflects on the possibilities for future research in children's holiday literature.

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Notes

[1] There are some exceptions to this trend, however. One example is Anthony F. Aveni's *The Book of the Year: A Brief History of Our Seasonal Holidays*. While Aveni does consider the cultural evolution of holidays, he is less concerned with the link between holidays and social forces than he is with using holidays to explain deep and fundamental human needs and desires, such as the impulse to understand and master nature and time, making his study somewhat reminiscent of the Durkheim school of thought.

# CHAPTER II

## BIRTHDAYS: THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

*I am I! / Me! / I am I!*
- Dr. Seuss, *Happy Birthday to You!*

This chapter, though the first major one of this project, stands out from the others, which may seem to make it a curious way of beginning. Birthdays are not holidays in the strictly theoretical or definitional sense. In *The Book of the Year: A Brief History of Our Seasonal Holidays*, for example, Anthony Aveni identifies holidays as "points of collective recognition in the cycle of seasons that distinguish who we are as a culture" (xiii). Birthdays are not linked to the ebb and flow of seasons, nor do they operate as moments of collective cultural recognition since the birthday is not celebrated within the community at large or nationally, but rather intimately within one's circle of acquaintances. Nevertheless, birthdays operate as annual markers, a point of return for the individual each year on which the celebrant can evaluate and rededicate his or her life, and though the event does not fall on the same day of the year for each person, when a birthday does occur it is marked by recognizable traditions. As several critics (Pleck, Cross, Aveni) have noted, the birthday works as a sort of personal New Year's Day. In this respect, the birthday foregrounds the cyclical nature of holidays, displaying the repetitive quality that drives and orders holidays out of a human impulse to control the chaotic march of time. "The roots of our system of reckoning holidays," Aveni contends, "are deeply immersed in the struggle over retaining one's own identity in the

face of change" (5). This issue of maintaining a sense of self is especially relevant to the personal holiday of the birthday on which the celebrant is tasked with reconciling past and present identities as well as assuming new social roles; however, the overt focus on movement ahead in time sets birthdays apart from other holidays (except New Year's Day). As Adam Kuper points out in "The English Christmas and the Family: Time Out and Alternative Realities," many recommitment holidays in fact negate the passage of time. For example, Christmas, Kuper asserts, refutes death because the ritual that constitutes the Christmas period "tends to freeze history, to associate this Christmas with Christmas past. The fact that Christmastime is associated with the family induces a denial of changes inherent in the domestic cycle, including, most poignantly, the changes brought by death" (169). He continues, "Christmas is a period for remembering the dead, but for including them; and ghosts walk on Christmas too" (169). While such recommitment holidays, and in particular those that focus on the family, work to collapse time, birthdays highlight it.

The birthday celebration exists to mark progress through time, and implicit within the emphasized passage of time are the ideas of change, growth, and loss, all of which have become important subject matters in birthday literature for American children. Thus, the excitement of new possibilities is tempered by conflicts that may arise from increased responsibilities and changing social dynamics as children mature. In children's literature, the birthday often becomes a confrontational event in which the child must consider competing pairings such as past/future, life/death, progress/loss, and individuality/social identity. Children's birthday literature from the past two centuries

has addressed these tensions in varying degrees. In nineteenth-century birthday texts, much of the literature, even that which permits excessive indulgence, maintains a strong didactic voice aimed at shaping the child protagonists and readers into morally sound young adults with keen senses of religious, domestic, moral, and social responsibility. However, the literature of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, especially that for young children reading picture books, has been more tolerant of—even encouraging of—the self-centered birthday and the behavioral problems that come with it, namely bickering, greed, and jealousy, as natural, albeit unpraiseworthy, characteristics of childhood.

This literature has often used language meant to elevate the child as a special and unique individual, undoubtedly a positive position in the affirmation of the child's sense of worth and, politically speaking, personhood. At the same time, this literature creates, reflects, and responds to challenges arising from this position such as the difficulty of negotiating social identity and responsibility when so much emphasis is placed on individuality. Middle grade and young adult literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that feature birthdays prominently has offered an alternative to the indulgent exceptionalism touted in young children's birthday books. In works such as Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) and Jerry Spinelli's *Wringer* (1997) characters dread growing older because of the new social roles they will take on with new ages, and they demonstrate that exceptionalism only comes with great personal sacrifice, rather than by simple virtue of being born and having a birthday. The trend in twentieth-century birthday picture books to highlight the special individuality of every child and tolerate

selfish, greedy, jealous birthday misbehavior as a normal part of childhood has certainly persisted into the twenty-first century; however, that trend is bookended by the didactic birthday literature of the nineteenth century and the self-sacrificing birthday presentations in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century books for older readers, both of which have emphasized that responsibility to society is greater than individual wants and desires.

**The Nineteenth-Century Didactic Birthday**

In *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Ritual,* Elizabeth Pleck observes that children's birthday parties, largely an import from the celebratory culture of Victorian England,[1] did not "become common [in American households] even among the wealthy until the late 1830s, or about a decade after the domestic Christmas had emerged" (143). Even then, celebrations were predominantly parent-directed, specifically mother-directed, affairs, intimate occasions meant both to celebrate the child, who was now being seen as special and deserving of celebration, and to introduce children to social conventions and their own increasing social responsibilities. It was not until between 1870 and 1920 that parents began to give children some authority over birthday celebrations, making them a peer-culture event that "fused the older concept of the child as an innocent being with the evolving concept of the child as consumer capable of making choices among goods or games" (Pleck 151).

Among the factors contributing to the increased popularity of celebrating the child's birthday were decreased infant mortality rates, lower birth rates, increased life expectancy, and the influence of Romantic philosophical and educational conceptualizations of the child. All of these factors elevated the child as a unique individual worthy of attention and investment. Additionally, Pleck suggests, as has Aveni, that increased attention to birthdays has to do with the re-organization of how people have viewed time. Pleck notes,

> The growth of industrial society with its proliferation of clocks and wristwatches helped further the new attitude … toward the view of life as having a series of milestones worthy of commemoration. Machines and equipment such as trains and clocks led to a new, more scheduled view of minutes and hours during the daylight hours and into the evening. (147)

Elizabeth Prentiss's *Little Susy's Six Birthdays* (1853) demonstrates this new view of time as an organizing principle, and the text highlights trends among middle- to upper-class celebrations of the child's birthday (where such celebrations were more prevalent than in the lower class), emphasizing growth of social and moral responsibilities over indulgence of the child's individuality and the peer-culture party, which would emerge in later texts. In *Little Susy's Six Birthdays*, Prentiss confronts the growth process by recording Susy's birthdays from her first through her sixth; she uses time and the birthday to structure the book, matching the number of chapters dedicated to a birthday to the age Susy is turning so that the first birthday gets one chapter, the second two chapters, and so on.

Prentiss, who writes under the pen name "Aunt Susan," opens the book with a foreword attending to the needs of her audience by indicating, "This book was written on purpose for you. While I was writing it, I often said to myself, I hope this will please Mally and Willie! I wonder how Sarah and Louisa will like it?" (v). Along with these appeals to young readers, though, comes the didactic message so common in mid-nineteenth-century fiction for young readers. At the end of the short introductory letter, Prentiss gently implores child readers to enjoy the stories of Susy's birthdays, advising, "Wherein she was good, I hope you are all like her; and then your birthdays will be happy ones" (iv). Prentiss follows this message with a grim reminder of why children should follow models of good behavior: "Sometimes little children don't live to spend six birthdays in this world. They go to heaven and spend them there: and they are better and happier days than any little Susy ever knew" (iv). The reference to death not only serves as an incentive to espouse certain behavioral prescriptions; it also reminds readers that the birthday marks the passage of time—a unidirectional movement away from birth/beginning to death/ending. As such, birthdays are happy occasions to celebrate the individual and her growth and achievements, but they also work under the shadow of lost time.

In Prentiss's text, Susy's first birthday is a quiet affair, marked with anticipated milestones that have become a staple in children's birthday literature. There is not too much indulgence or revelry, though Susy does get to partake in "good bread and milk" (9), and she is given her first doll and a silver fork. Rather than focusing on a party, the narrative instead emphasizes Susy's growth and the mastery of new abilities. Susy learns

to give her first kiss, and she takes her first steps, an activity that the text narrates, unrealistically perhaps, via an emphasis on her emotions. After playing on the ground for a while, Susy "grew tired of sitting upon the floor and got up, as if she thought of taking a walk. But she did not walk: she only stood there smiling at her mamma. She was afraid to try to walk. She thought she would fall if she tried to walk" (10). Her mother urges her on by "[taking] up a box of seals and [holding] them out towards Susy, and when Susy saw them, she wanted them so very much that she forgot all about her fear of falling, and ran to her mamma as fast as she could" (10-11). Susy's feat, then, is not just a physical accomplishment, but an emotional one as well, in which fear is replaced by want. Susy applies this lesson in bravery later that same day when her mother receives a visit from a woman with a "great black dog" that "*would* [italics in original] come in, though the lady was ashamed to see him trot into the parlor" (12). Bolstered by her brave success in walking, Susy is "not afraid of him" (12).

Susy's second birthday contains similar emotional victories. At the start of the second birthday chapter, readers learn that Susy has become a big sister to two-month-old brother Robbie, and she "never cried when she saw her mamma take baby in her arms and kiss him. She would have liked to take him in her own little arms" (20). Rather than displaying the jealousy of sibling rivalry, Susy demonstrates a budding maternal sentiment, a desirable emotional quality at the time of the book's publication. The chapter records more of Susy's accomplishments and anticipates those that are yet to come. For instance, Susy cannot understand what it means to be two years old when her mother tells her that's how old she is, but she does demonstrate an emerging numerical

literacy and the ability to count when she says, “Robbie! Robbie! You got two eyes!” (20). Susy can now wash and dress herself, and she knows to get her own little chair and sit still while her father reads from the Bible—she even instructs Robbie to do the same (though with the command “Baby, be “till” for she “could not say ‘still’” [22])—but she plays with pins while her father is praying, because “She did not know it was naughty to do so” (22). She shows a burgeoning sense of domesticity by making a baby house, playing with paper babies, having a tea party at the new table that she receives as a gift, and later clearing her table for dinner.

As the second birthday in the sequence, under Prentiss’s pattern Susy’s second birthday is given two chapters, and in the second, Susy goes to a fair. The excursion from the home into a public space again marks Susy’s growth as she begins to take a place in society, though once more, the advancement is tempered with limitations. Susy goes to the fair and enjoys it, but the text makes clear that her behavior must be kept in check because an unregulated and undisciplined child could easily turn into a monster, especially on her birthday. Before Susy goes to the fair, we glimpse the kind of uproar that an overly excited child can produce when Susy “kept running all about the room” (30) until “At last her mamma caught the little witch” (31). As a result, Susy’s liberties are restricted. She returns from the fair with “her hands full of toys, and candy, and cake” (32). Susy immediately “offered all her candy to her papa, who thanked her, and put it in his pocket. He did not like to have Susy eat candy” (32), for such treats would no doubt further excite a girl already so “full of fun that it was hard to hold her. She ran and hid behind the great chair, and crept under the bed, and laughed and shouted, and

clapped her little hands" (32-3). As with many later birthday texts, trouble comes from too much revelry and over-indulgence, and Susy is made to eat bland and sensible food—plain toast, chicken, and potatoes—to calm herself.

The third birthday continues to show Susy's development, and on this birthday, Susy also begins to wield the possessive language of birthdays, which becomes noticeably troublesome in twentieth-century texts. While she is playing with the animals of the Noah's ark that she has received as a gift, she tells them "it was her birthday, and asked them if they didn't wish it was their birthday too. And she told them every now and then, "I'm going to have a party! I'm going to have a party!" (39). This party turns out to be a very small one, with guests consisting only of the birthday girl, Robbie, and all the dolls. Robbie and the dolls are on their best behavior at the party, and Susy thinks the event "a very nice affair" (47). While Susy's proclamation that she is to have a party indicates an awareness of the birthday as a day to celebrate the self, there is still very little self-centeredness by twentieth- and twenty-first century standards and little interaction beyond the immediate family unit at this point in Susy's life, though she does begin to anticipate celebrations with a broader social circle.

The fourth birthday starts the same way that the others do. Susy receives her birthday kisses—this year four because she is now four years old. Also, as is the case on all the birthdays, there is prayer. This time, the text has Susy accompany her mother who "thanked God very much for giving her such a dear little girl, and for letting her live four years; and asked Him, if he pleased, to let her live another year, and to make her His own little lamb" (54-55). Susy's spiritual growth is evident in the scene. No longer a

two-year-old who fidgets during her father's prayers, Susy now comprehends the prayer. The narrator notes that she "was very happy to think she had been called God's own little lamb, and she kissed her mamma, and said she loved Jesus, and meant to be a good girl, because He was so good" (55). The fourth birthday chapters also stress Susy's continued emotional development. For her birthday, Susy receives blocks (and also a book, which she liked "best" [59]), but when Robbie destroys the tower she builds, their father explains that she needs to forgive him because he is only a little boy. Taking her father's advice, Susy builds several castles for Robbie to knock down, and she "was happy all day because she had given up her own pleasure, just to gratify him" (60). The self-sacrifice is meant to be seen by young readers as a great virtue and sign of increased inner maturity in the character.

This year, Susy will also have a party with "real" guests, and the progression from the birthday party including only dolls and her baby brother to one with peers indicates the expansion of Susy's social world as she grows older. For this party, Susy has sent invitations to her cousins Frank and Charlie, as well as to Hatty Linton, a friend who is visiting Frank and Charlie. As critics Linda Rannells Lewis and Adeline and Ralph Linton have noted, the birthday celebration frequently serves as one of the first opportunities that children have to interact with peers beyond their siblings, and that interaction frequently brings anxiety. In this case, both Susy and Hatty turn shy upon their meeting, with Susy "holding fast to her mamma's hand" and Hatty "squeezing up as close to her aunt as possible" (63). The children are able to abate the fear by coining

the term "cousin-in-law" as a way of relating Susy and Hatty, using the language of family to bridge a strange relationship.

Throughout the party, Susy "felt like a little queen," a comparison made frequently in children's birthday literature; we learn that "every body [sic] was so kind to her, and the children kept saying, 'Let's do as Susy says: it's her birthday'" (67). However, because this text emphasizes growth and has established through earlier birthdays that Susy is not being overindulged, the birthday-child centered language does not devolve into greedy bickering as it does in texts from the twentieth century onward. Instead, these children, even the outsider Hatty, play together without incident, and rather than commanding the day as a "queen," Susy cedes control over party activities to her cousin Frank, who is six. The children's deference to Frank, the oldest, reinforces the significance of age as a marker of ability and a fundamental component of identity. In texts such as *Susy's Six Birthdays*, which focus on the process of aging and on the new achievements that come with each additional year, age works as a structuring principle and central fulcrum of the child's life. At this fourth birthday party, the children admire Frank's knowledge of games such as "hide the handkerchief" (something of an everyday Easter egg hunt) and "a great many other things" (68). The emphasis here on growth and achievement eclipses the competitive, greedy, and bickering-filled parties of many later texts; rather, these children "were all gentle, good [. . .] and so happy and pleasant that even a little bird might have played safely with them" (69). Even during the party's little feast, consisting of only those treats that would be "safe to eat" instead of a gluttony of

"sweet-things," Susy "kept all the largest grapes for Robbie, and offered the big pieces of cake to her cousins, though they were too polite to take them" (76-77).

Susy's fifth birthday is the first birthday that she anticipates; on the morning of her fourth birthday, the text tells us, "She had forgotten all about birthdays, it was so long since she had one" (56), but on her fifth birthday, "Susy knew she was going to be five years old, and she talked about it a great deal, and said her birthday never would come. But at last it did come, and she awoke very early" (90). The family too is engaged in more elaborate preparations than they have been in the past. The father is preoccupied making a "great baby-house" (89), the mother visits several shops to purchase furniture for the dollhouse, the nurse fashions clothes for the people who will live in the house, and even little Robbie has a new outfit to wear and a book to give Susy in order to surprise her. Alongside the festive preparations, though, the text foregrounds the issue of moral and religious development that threads throughout the first four birthdays. On previous birthdays, for instance, Susy's emerging religious conscience is encouraged by her mother and father who read to her from the Bible and engage in prayer with her. On this day, Susy takes her own initiative: "After breakfast, Susy went and whispered something to her mamma and they went together into that same little room, and prayed and thanked God: and after her mamma had gone away, Susy knelt down and prayed all by herself" (93-94). Despite this early display of piety, Susy proves to still be in the process of growing into a moral ideal. The family cook, Sarah, has prepared a pie for Susy's birthday, and when Susy sees the treat in the kitchen, she impetuously "caught it up with both hands, but let it drop quickly, for it was very hot" (102). Burned badly,

Susy is immediately ashamed of her careless behavior and her greed. While Susy's mother does not scold the girl for her impetuousness, and, in fact, tries to make Susy feel better and laugh with whimsical songs about fingers and toes, she does later in the day offer a moment for moral growth, which when read in conjunction with the pie scene constitutes a comment on the need to encourage self-improvement in children, especially on birthdays. The moment comes when Susy's mother has taken Susy and Robbie to a bookstore where she purchases a book for "a sick child whom they were going to see" (120). The mother explains that "the little girl for whom I bought this book was born on the very day you were, so this is her birthday too. And I thought I would send her a present because she is sick, and poor too" (123). Susy asks how much the book costs, and upon finding out that it costs as much money as Susy has of her very own, Susy asks, "mayn't I pay for this book, and send it to the little girl?" (124). Robbie chimes in too and offers to send his orange, and "the little sick child, who had been lying still all day, in bed, with no birthday presents […] was made very happy by means of Susy and Robbie" (125). Not only does Susy engage in the much desired act of charity here, but she also shares her birthday, a day that, in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, is guarded possessively as the child's very own, a day on which other fictional children suspend expected mores and behaviors to indulge in solipsistic revelry.

After Susy and Robbie make their gift to the poor, sick girl, they hear a story about an angel with golden curls and white hands and wings "as white as snow" (132). The children in the story are so enraptured with the angel that they vow to be "kind and pleasant" (133) so that the angel will stay with them, and one of the children even hopes,

"When he [the angel] goes home, I wish he would let me go with him!" (134) Susy and Robbie too are drawn to the angel, and Susy proclaims, "I wish I could go now!" (136), while their mother "prayed, in her heart that they might be holy, happy children on earth, and angels in heaven when they came to die" (137). Instead of emphasizing indulgent celebration of the individual on the natal day, in short, Prentiss's mid-nineteenth-century text encourages selflessness, piety, domesticity, morality, and responsibility, and it contains a constant reminder that each passing birthday brings the child closer to death. The aging process, even as it leads to death, in this text is not met with the anxiety that appears in later birthday literature, but rather is welcomed as part of the Christian life.

Finally, on Susy's sixth birthday, she wakes while it is still dark and cold out, to greet her day. In an immediate signal of her growth, we are told that she knows it is unwise to get out of bed before the fire has started, and so she remains in the nursery to read, which she can do "very well now" (140). This nod to her fluent literacy marks another milestone in her intellectual growth. Susy says her prayers on her own this time without any involvement from her mother or father, and she "asked God to forgive her for every naughty thing she had ever done in her life and to help her be good all that day" (141), a prayer that makes a conscious acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Just as Susy knows that her behavior has not been perfect, she knows that her prayers are not perfect and seeks to extend her abilities because she later asks her mother, "Will God mind it if I do not know how to pray so well as big people?"

On this sixth birthday, the last one included in the volume, Susy learns self-restraint, denial, and the ability to assimilate disappointment. Susy does not want to

leave her mother for her birthday, but her mother sends her anyway so that she can stay at home with a woman who has come to visit (we later find out the woman is there to assist with the delivery of a new baby). Despite the disappointment, Susy does eventually become excited about visiting her grandmother with her brother and cousins. At her grandmother's, she receives a Bible of her very own, and the celebration also includes some increased liberties. The children feast on richer food than they are usually allowed—apple pie and cheese for luncheon (though Susy refuses because her mother does not like her to have cheese), pork (instead of chicken, which the grandmother notes she would have gotten had she known the children were coming), and sweet baked apples and cream (of which they can have as much "as they pleased" [169]). They are allowed to stay out later than they ever have before, so late that when they pass through New York City on their way home, "the lamps in Broadway were all lighted as they rode through it, and the children enjoyed seeing the brilliant shop-windows" (175). On this birthday, Susy, who has been developing into a proper and socially responsible girl with each passing year, gains the liberty to enjoy the public space of the city (though still as a spectator) and is permitted to enjoy some material pleasures because she knows how to do so with restraint.

When the children finally arrive back at Susy's house, their father ushers them in to view a special birthday surprise for Susy. The surprise is a new brother, born while the children were visiting their grandmother. Because the baby shares Susy's birthday, she is allowed to name him, and she decides on Henry after her father. Susy feels no resentment or jealousy over having to share her birthday, and the scene is a joyful one.

However, the arrival of the new child marks Susy's separation from her mother. As noted earlier in the chapter, Susy's mother does not spend the day with her; in the evening, the mother "returned [Susy's] kisses and caresses less heartily than usual" (180); and when it comes time to be sung to sleep, the mother reports that she (understandably) is not feeling well enough, and she asks her husband to take the song she has written from her portfolio and sing it to Susy and Robbie. While every birthday story leading up to this one has ended with a song from the mother, this one concludes with a song from the father; the mother is present only in the margins of this birthday. The implication, then, is that Susy has outgrown her mother (or, more gravely, anticipates the death of the mother), entering instead into outdoor spaces (the late night drive through New York City) and the company of the father, a very gentle and early indicator of her progress toward the goal of marriage and reproduction.

Throughout the text of *Little Susy's Six Birthdays*, age acts as the structuring principle for the child's life. Susy's age determines what she can and cannot do, who her playmates are, and how she spends her time. It is imbedded in and fundamental to identity. On the formal level, age controls the narrative by dictating the number of chapters per birthday, an organizational principle that indicates the age-centric understanding of the child's life and abilities. Prentiss's text, then, works as a guide to childhood aging in its record of several birthdays by touching on emotional, intellectual, and spiritual expectations and ideals for an upper-middle-class little girl in the mid-nineteenth century, and as such, it works to unify Susy's identity over time in an act that orders her life from birth through the early years of girlhood to anticipation of stages

beyond that. Aveni has noted that the passage of time is chaotic and frightening without organizing tools such as birthdays, and in the case of Prentiss's work, the didactic measures of moral, domestic, social, and religious growth, act as controlling forces in life's trajectory.

Just over a decade after this model by Prentiss, Oliver Optic's *The Birthday Party: A Story for Little Folks* (1862) offered a strikingly more opulent approach to the child's birthday celebration than those presented in Prentiss's work, though Optic's text is still an obviously didactic one. [2] In Optic's story, celebration in excess is welcomed into the child's life in a peer birthday party. As the nineteenth century unfolded, emphasis on the child as both a unique individual and a consumer caused birthday celebrations to evolve from intimate family affairs meant to mark growth and espouse moral progress to larger, peer-culture celebrations. Representing "new beliefs honoring the individual, indulging the child as a demonstration of parental affection, and conceptualizing time and age in new ways," the birthday party "emerged at the nexus of an affectionate family and a consumer society" (Pleck 141). Though still operating as domestic and didactic occasions under the control of the parents, birthday parties after the mid-nineteenth century began to emerge as days that afforded individuality and a burgeoning sense of power to the celebrating child. [3]

Optic's story links the child's birthday celebration to American economic ideals and social consciousness, even going so far as to equate liberal participation in one's economy with model citizenship. In the story, the birthday party is for young Flora Lee, a good girl with well-to-do, loving, disciplining parents who have a heavy hand in

organizing and executing her party. For instance, early party preparations show Flora's mother controlling the invitation list. Mrs. Lee asks Flora to "make out a list of all the children whom she wished to invite," but when Flora wants to "invite all the children in Riverdale," Mrs. Lee objects, "Not all of them I think." When Flora insists, Mrs. Lee reminds her that "there are a great many bad boys in town." Because the birthday party marked one of the first forays into the social scene that the child was likely to make in the nineteenth century, a mother would often strictly limit the guest list as a way to control her child's social interactions. Thus, Pleck observes, the parent-approved "invitation-only children's party defined the child's proper peer group. The uninvited were children who did not belong to proper society" (148). In Flora's story, the unwelcome guests happen to be the "bad boys" of the town.

The ensuing exchange between Flora and her mother over the guest list indicates the complex task of negotiating a proper social identity. Flora suggests that the "bad boys" might be reformed if they are treated well and invited to the party, but Mrs. Lee challenges Flora again, asking, "Would you like to have Joe Birch come to the party?" The text does not reveal what it is about Joe Birch that is so undesirable, but it is clear the mother does not approve of him. The question reduces Flora's authority in the list-making to a mere, "I don't know, mother." Mrs. Lee solidifies the point by indicating, "I think you had better invite only those who will enjoy the party, and who will not be likely to spoil the pleasure of others. We will not invite such boys as Joe Birch." Flora defers to the mother's authority with a "just as you think best, mother." Even so, making the distinction between the right kind of boy to invite and the wrong kind of boy to invite

proves difficult. After agreeing to only invite those who "will not spoil the pleasure of others," Flora wonders whether she should invite Tommy Woggs, who "is a very queer fellow," and says to her mother, "You said I had better not ask those who would be likely to spoil the pleasure of others […] I am afraid he would; he is such a queer boy." Flora further explains, "The boys and girls don't like him, he pretends to be such a big man. He knows more than all the rest of the world put together—at least he thinks he does." However, the mother does not seem to care about the children's preference here, and she again trumps Flora's opinion, insisting, "I think you had better ask him." Flora must acquiesce: "Very well, mother," she says. This conversation indicates a girl who demonstrates burgeoning self-identity and conscience. She has opinions, which she voices, but the voice is overshadowed by that of the mother (and later the father). Mrs. Lee is the one to draft the invitations, print them up on gilt-edged paper, and address them. Flora wants to deliver the notes herself, but the mother informs her that "it is not quite the thing for you to carry your own invitations. I will tell you what you may do. You may hire David White to deliver them for you. You must pay him for it; give him half a dollar, which will be a good thing for him." While the text allows Mrs. Lee's dominance over Flora, it also seems to be critical of that dominance. Optic, for example, includes a sample of what the invitations look like so that readers might "know how to write them when you have a birthday party" (and perhaps circumvent an overbearing parent); however, the narrator also emphasizes, "I dare say it would be just as well if you go to your friends and ask them to attend," which is what Flora wants to do until her mother tables the idea. While Flora here demonstrates some of the individuality and

independence that would later be celebrated in birthday children of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the story still presents the child and her birthday celebration as existing under the control of parents.

The text continues to distinguish between Flora's idea of the birthday and her parents' when she questions the ethics of indulging herself at the party. She asks her mother whether "it is very wicked […] for rich folks to have parties, when the money they cost will do so much good to the poor." Indeed, Flora's party will be an expensive affair with music by the Riverdale Band (at the price of twenty dollars), a tent erected in the garden, and a supper with "ice cream, cake jellies, and other luxuries […] a supply of strawberries and cream, and all the nice things of the season," which will cost another twenty dollars. Flora is racked with guilt over the forty dollars that will go to support just "a few hours' pleasure" without doing "any real good." She knows that this amount could "pay Mrs. White's rent for a whole year; it would clothe her family and feed them nearly all the next winter. It appeared to her like a shameful waste; and these thoughts promised to take away a great deal from the pleasure of the occasion," so she tells her mother that she would rather do without the band and have a simple spread of bread, butter, and seed cakes.

Flora's father offsets these concerns with entrepreneurial and capitalist vigor by reminding Flora of all the people who are helped by his employment, including those he has employed to work at the party. When Flora continues to protest the twenty dollars for music because "It don't [*sic*] do any good," her father corrects her with a lesson in American capitalism, defending spending, luxury, and even art. "Yes, it does," the father

insists. “Music improves our minds and hearts. It makes us happy. I have engaged six men to play. They are musicians only at such times as they can get a job. They are shoemakers, also, and poor men; and the money which I shall pay them will help support their families and educate them.” He makes the same point with regard to the money spent on food, insisting, “The confectioner and those whom he employs depend upon their work for the means of supporting themselves and their families.” Flora proclaims herself “a fool” after hearing her father’s lesson, and concludes that “when you have a party, you are really doing good to the poor.” In a political dig, her father assures her that “a great many older and wiser persons than yourself have thought just what you think.”

The father solidifies his point with one more example, posing to Flora the question, “Suppose you had only a dollar, and that it had been given you to purchase a story book. Then, suppose Mrs. White and her children were suffering from want of fuel and clothing. What would you do with your dollar?” Before Flora can decide, her father interrupts to remind her, “When you buy a book, you pay the printer, the paper maker, the bookseller, the type founder, the miner who dug the lead and the iron from the earth, the machinist who make the press, and a great many other persons whose labor enters into the making of a book—you pay these men for their labor; you give them money to take care of their wives and children, their fathers and mothers. You help all these men when you buy a book.” Though Flora decides that she would still rather give the dollar to Mrs. White, and the father approves, he sums up, “I only wanted you to understand that, when you bought a book,--even a book which was only to amuse you,--the money

is not thrown away. Riches are given to men for a purpose: and they ought to use their wealth for the benefit of others, as well as for their own pleasure. If they spend money, even for things that are of no real use to them. It helps the poor, for it feeds, and clothes them." This attitude makes material enjoyment at the birthday party (and in everyday life) possible, and even couples it with social responsibility. Flora may consume heartily at her party because she is aware of the economic and social benefits of such extravagance. Though the lesson is one encouraging and legitimizing self-indulgence, it is a lesson nonetheless; thus the text presents an interesting combination of lavish indulgence alongside strong didacticism.

After his defense of economic spending, Mr. Lee also heavily influences the events on the day of the party. He suggests that the children play at a marching game and that they select leaders for the march using an electoral committee and a voting system. Young Flora serves on the committee and campaigns to get her choice for leader (David White) elected successfully. Meanwhile, she proves right in her feeling that the other children would not enjoy Tommy Woggs's company much. Tommy feels that he is the natural choice for leader, but as the text points out, "People do not often think much of those who think a great deal of themselves." After orchestrating this game, Mr. Lee allows his wife to take over leading the activities, only to return later in the guise of an old man who entertains the children with fiddle playing and storytelling. When he challenges the children to a race, the children realize, much to their delight, that his get-up is only a disguise and that he is really Mr. Lee. In the midst of a party, then, which allows for ample material pleasure as well as childish fun, the text mixes enjoyment with

lessons on American civic duties, and throughout the story, Flora receives instruction on social responsibility, proper ways to expand one's social circle and engage in peer interaction, and economic consumption. Moreover, after the text of *The Birthday Party: A Story for Little Folks*, Optic includes a poem entitled "Lizzie," in which a child views her sister's body and learns that she is dead and to be buried. The mother in the poem reminds the child, "Some time we, too, shall fall asleep, / To wake in heaven above." As in Prentiss's text, the presence of death alongside the celebration of the birthday in Optic's story reminds readers that the birthday is not simply a moment for unbridled personal celebration, but rather should be the marker of another year's worth of progress and preparedness in a Christian life.

Overall, Flora's party demonstrates many of the trends that would come to characterize the child's birthday text in the second half of the twentieth century: a celebration indicative of the parents' wealth and social stature, parental control over the guest list and activities, and a peer party that allows indulgence on the part of the children. While enjoying her party, the birthday child learns lessons from her parents and displays a desirable sense of responsibility in the world. Compared to Susy's birthdays, Flora's party is more self-indulgent and more child-centric, even with the strong parental direction. These differences likely stem in part from the age differences: Flora is school-aged, while Susy begins her story at age one and ends it at age six. However, these differences also demonstrate shifting attitudes towards children and child-rearing in America, and the indulgent, child-focused environment in Optic's text anticipates literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that lavishes attention on the

birthday child, emphasizing that child's specialness and uniqueness. While in Optic's text the opulent celebration and burgeoning sense of individuality are underscored by a still-strong didactic tone that provides a moral dimension, from an ethical standpoint they become potentially more disturbing in the literature written over the next 150 years.

**The Child-Centric Twentieth-Century Birthday**

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the culture of the peer-birthday party and the recognizable staples of cakes, candles, parlor games, the birthday song,[4] and hats had evolved into lavish attention on the birthday celebrant. Contributing to and reflective of these trends, the child's birthday has become a central event in children's literature, and books for and about birthdays have been churned out as energetically as books about collective holidays, if not even more enthusiastically. Child characters such as Ramona Quimby and Freddy (from the Ready, Freddy! series discussed in this dissertation's Valentine's Day chapter) group their birthdays with the year's holidays, and many children anticipate the birthday more than even child-oriented holidays such as Christmas and Halloween.

Much of this excitement likely builds on the child-centered and self-centered nature of the birthday, which has been reflected in the literature of birthdays beginning in the nineteenth century and expanding in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The language instructs the child to recognize and celebrate herself as an individual, and it often, at least initially, gives the child leave to make decisions and indulge in favorite activities and foods, which might normally be prohibited. Such rhetoric abounds in party

manuals, for example. Florence Hamsher writes in her guide on organizing and executing parties entitled *The Complete Book of Children's Parties* (1949), "No other day of the year—not even Christmas—means so much to a child as his birthday. Long before he begins to understand what a holiday is, he has learned that his birthday is a very special occasion to celebrate him" (15). Lila Perl also stresses the attention on the birthday child in *Candles, Cakes and Donkey Tales: Birthday Symbols and Celebrations* (1984) when she asserts to her young readers, "Even if other people you know were born on the same day, it is still the one day that belongs in a particular way to you. It is personal. It is your very own" (5). This language has extended into many popular stories and books for children including Dr. Seuss's *Happy Birthday to You!* (1959), which features the birthday bird of Katroo, who, "whether your name is Pete, Polly or Paul" or "whether your name is Nate, Nelly or Ned," comes "To you. Just to you!" on the child's birthday. And when the bird arrives, he laughs and commands, "Today…eat whatever you want. Today no one tells you you cawnt or you shawnt. And today, you don't have to be tidy or neat. If you wish you may eat with both hands and both feet. So get in there and munch. Have a big munch-er-oo! Today is your birthday! *Today you are you!"* This kind of individualistic emphasis and indulgent celebration abounds in the literature, and literary children are often quick to adopt the suspension of rules and wield the possessive language of individuality.

While this emphasis on individuality situates the birthday child as a unique "I," the literature of the mid- to late twentieth century and beyond, especially in the picture book genre, also demonstrates that the child-centered aspects of the day may bring a

sense of exceptionalism, which manifests itself in misbehavior, greed, and the suspension of rules and social propriety. In the literature, these negative qualities surface in both the birthday celebrant who finds him/herself the center of attention, and in the peers at the party who struggle when they are not the ones being lauded as the most special. This clash between the personal and the collective, which may come to a head in the problematic behaviors of greed, jealousy, and bickering, is apparent in such texts as Bernard Waber's *Lyle and the Birthday Party* (1966), a title from Waber's popular picture book series about the crocodile who was discovered living in the house on East 88th Street when the Primms moved in.[5] Over the course of this title, we follow grumpy Lyle as he observes the preparations for Joshua's birthday. At first, Lyle is happy to help because "parties were fun," but as he hangs the streamers, blows up balloons and watches Mrs. Primm decorate a big a cake, "he wished he could have one." And "the more Lyle thought about it, the more he too wanted a birthday party." As the illustrations feature distinctly cross eyebrows and stewing jealousy, Lyle begrudges the attention lavished on Joshua, wondering, "Why shouldn't I have a birthday party? … I was born wasn't I?" And with those thoughts, "Suddenly, like storm clouds coming down upon a lovely day, Lyle was jealous; mean green jealous of Joshua's soon-to-be-celebrated birthday party."

On the day of the party, Lyle is able to "almost" forget his jealousy during the games of musical chairs and pin the tail on the donkey, but when the attention turns to Joshua in the birthday-child-centered moments around the cake and gifts, the "mean jealous feelings began to return." Instead of singing along, an obviously agitated Lyle

imagines himself the center of attention, with the cake positioned in front him. And as all the children gather around Joshua to watch him open the gifts, "it was more than he could bear … how Lyle wished they were his to unwrap." By the time the guests begin to leave, "Lyle was in a dark, dreadful mood. He hardly recognized himself." His jealousy has changed him so much that the Primms and the party guests observe, "This wasn't a bit like the Lyle they knew and loved." And if Lyle's behavior wasn't bad enough at the party, "To make matters worse, that very night Lyle stepped right through a toy drum, a favorite birthday gift of Joshua's. Everyone said it was an accident and Lyle shouldn't feel bad about it. But was it an accident? Lyle went to bed not feeling at all sure."

As has already been alluded to and will be discussed later in this chapter, the troublesome behavior on the part of the birthday child in literature stems from the need to reconcile a sense of the self as an individual, unique "I" as she takes a place in her social environment; at the same time, trouble also arises when other characters must reconcile themselves to the fact that they are not the center of the world, which is the case with Lyle. The birthday, on a small but poignant scale, forces the children (or child-like characters, in Lyle's case) invited to the party to realize that it is not their selfhood that is celebrated but that of the birthday child. Lyle comes to this realization, and the morning after the birthday party, he wakes up "very sad" and "feeling a full measure of shame for his behavior." Lyle, who is anthropomorphized in many ways but cannot speak, is acting so differently that his family concludes that he must be sick, so Mrs. Primm takes him to the hospital. Here he gets personal care and attention from his nurse,

which is what he had longed for during the birthday party. But Lyle gets restless, so he wanders the hospital, helping the other patients, raising their beds, lowering their window shades, filling their water, tuning their televisions, pushing their wheelchairs, and even doing acrobatic tricks to entertain the children. He finds that "Doing for others had made him feel good again, so good in fact, he completely forgot about being jealous." And when Lyle forgets his jealousy, the text finally rewards him with his own party. To mark the third anniversary of the day on which the Primms found Lyle, "There was going to be a party to celebrate. Lyle's party." The didactic resolution at the end of this picture book is far gentler and more subtle than the didacticism driving the nineteenth-century birthday texts by Prentiss and Optic, and instead, much of the story's focus is on Lyle's selfish jealousy, which the text presents as a natural, normal, and understandable way of feeling.

Published just two years after *Lyle and the Birthday Party*, Russell Hoban's *A Birthday for Frances* (1968), part of Hoban's Frances the Badger series, also deals with the jealousy of fictional characters when other characters celebrate birthdays, and this overlap again suggests the ready acceptance by twentieth-century children's literature of these feelings as normal childhood expressions. Despite what the title might suggest, the text focuses not on Frances's birthday but on her younger sister Gloria's. In "Literature as the Content of Reading," Charlotte Huck describes Frances as "mischievous and loveable" (364), though, at least in *A Birthday for Frances*, we might also add that there are notes of the nonsensical, the chaotic, and the skeptical in the little badger's character. When the book begins, Gloria and her mother are making place cards for Gloria's party,

but Frances sits in the broom closet, singing, "Happy Thursday to you, Happy Thursday to you, Happy Thursday, dear Alice, Happy Thursday to you" (5). Mother asks who Alice is, and Frances explains, "Alice is somebody that nobody can see […] And that is why she does not have a birthday. So I am singing Happy Thursday to her" (5). To add to the nonsensical tone of the scene, Frances's mother observes, "Today is Friday." But Frances explains, "It is Thursday for Alice," and even though it is "Happy Thursday for Alice," Frances laments that Alice "will not have h-r-n-d and she will not have g-k-l-s," which are Frances's ways of spelling cake and candy.

Frances's mother suspects, as most adult readers do as well, that Alice is a projection of Frances's feelings of jealousy and loneliness because Gloria, as the birthday child, receives more attention. Indeed, in Lillian Hoban's illustrations, Frances sits alone in the broom closet while her mother and sister sit together at the table to work on the place cards. The mother tries to console Frances by saying, "I am sure that Alice will have cake and candy on her birthday." And when Frances protests that "Alice does not have a birthday," the mother gently insists, "Yes, she does…even if nobody can see her. Alice has one birthday every year, and so do you. Your birthday is two months from now. Then you will be the birthday girl. But tomorrow is Gloria's birthday, and she will be the birthday girl" (7). Even the promise of her own birthday in the future is little consolation to Frances because she turns to Alice to say, "That is how it is, Alice…Your birthday is always the one that is not now" (7). Frances here communicates the frustration that children feel when they must watch as another child receives special attention, liberties, and treatment on the birthday while also indicating the confounding

notion of the passage of time, which, Aveni notes, holidays work so hard to order and which is ordered so effectively in the nineteenth-century birthday texts by Prentiss.

Frances's frustration soon translates to mean-spirited behavior. While Gloria draws rainbows, "happy trees," and "pretty flowers" on her place cards, Frances sings, "A rainbow and a happy tree / Are not for Alice or for me. / I will draw three-legged cats / And caterpillars with ugly hats" (8). Then, she makes up a lie about Gloria, telling her mother that Gloria kicked her under the table. Gloria calls her "Mean Frances," while Frances accuses, "Gloria is mean […] She hid my sand pail and my shovel, and I never got them back" (9). When the mother reminds them that that had happened last year, Frances replies, "When Gloria is mean, it was always last year […] But me and Alice know s-m-f-o" (9). In Frances's made-up language, "s-m-f-o" means better. Frances then reports that she will "be out of town visiting Alice for two weeks" (11), so she takes out her favorite broom and trots around the porch with it, presumably imagining that she is flying to Alice's. The illustration shows Frances's mother looking on from the window and wrapping Gloria's presents while Frances sings another song for Alice: "Everybody makes a fuss / For birthday girls who are not us. / Girls who take your pail away / Eat cake and q-p-m all day" (11).

Frances's subversive behavior throughout the book, underscored by her nonsense language and logic, works to undermine the birthday's organizational power. Her chaotic new language and stalled sense of time counter the birthday's cultural impulse to measure growth and progress and order time. In "When Astronomy, Biology, and Culture Converge: Children's Conceptions about Birthdays," Rama Klavir and David

Leiser explain this relationship between the birthday and time, observing that the birthday is a "cultural construction of time as cyclical … A birthday, with its accompanying change in status, is also a consequence of the biological maturation, growth, and senescence that ties humans to linear time" (240). While adults may use birthdays to order time and the year, this ordering must be learned by the young child, and Frances represents the view of the child situated outside the culturally constructed birthday for whom time—and all rules—become disordered. The chaos is represented in Frances's misuse of spelling, exaggerations, and fabrications. Frances clearly struggles to make sense of the social mores constructed around the celebration of the birthday when the birthday is not her own, and so she tends towards nonsense instead (as also happens in the "Unbirthday" song and scene in the Disney movie version of *Alice in Wonderland*) to reflect her confusion and overwhelming feelings of jealousy.

Frances only begins to feel bad about her mistreatment of Gloria when she sees that "everyone is giving Gloria a present but me" (13). To make up for her naughty attitude, Frances asks for her next two allowances so that she can go to the store with her father and purchase candy—four gumballs and a Chompo bar—for Gloria. On their way home from the store, Frances questions her father about the appropriateness of excess consumption on birthdays in a moment reminiscent of Flora's questioning of her father, though Frances's supposed concern is for health while Flora's is of economic responsibility. Frances asks, "Are you sure that it is all right for Gloria to have a whole Chompo Bar? Maybe she is too young for that kind of candy. Maybe it will make her sick" (15). The father adopts the language and reasoning that so many others have in

birthday literature (Dr. Seuss, Blume, et al.) when he replies, "I do not think it would be good for Gloria to eat Chompo Bars every day. But tomorrow is her birthday, and I think it will be all right for her to eat one" (15). The father thus participates in the indulgent license associated with the celebration of the birthday, and activities that would be considered harmful on any other day are suddenly tolerated on the birthday.

We quickly find out, though, that Frances's question is not motivated by her concern for Gloria's wellbeing. Though Frances claims to worry that the chocolate, nuts, nougat, and caramel of the Chompo bar will be too rich for Gloria, she is really "thinking about the two allowances" she spent on Gloria and how good the bar would taste. While she is thinking, she accidentally pops the bubble-gum balls into her mouth—all four of them. She even makes up a new song, "Chompo bars are nice to get. / Chompo bars are better yet / when they're someone else's," which she sings while squeezing the candy bar (17). When her father hears this song, he asks, "You would not eat Gloria's Chompo Bar, would you?" (17). He is clearly dismayed at her greed, but Albert, a friend who arrives for Gloria's party, understands. Albert has brought a toy truck for Gloria, which he purchased with money that his mother gave him. Frances explains, "I am thinking of giving Gloria a Chompo Bar […] But I am not sure. I might and I might not. I had to spend almost two whole allowances on it" (21). Albert commiserates, "That's how it is when it's your own sister […] I had to spend my allowance money on my little sister when she had a birthday," though Albert reveals that he purchased a yo-yo for his sister knowing that she was too short to play with it properly so that he would get to use it instead. Albert understands Frances's nonsense

spelling easily (when she says, “Little sisters are not much r-v-s-m,” he understands that right away to mean good [21]); the two agree that little sisters do not “deserve a Chompo Bar” on their birthdays, and if they must be given, “You should at least get part of it” (22, 23). The implication, then, is that the birthday is particularly difficult for siblings because not only must they witness another child receive special dispensations and indulgences, but their parents also privilege—or so it seems—another child over them. As a result, Frances lingers on the unfairness of it all, looking for excuses about why Gloria should not be treated specially on this day.

Though Frances’s misbehavior and disorderly interruptions dominate much of the book, *A Birthday for Frances* ultimately ends with proper resolution, as is typically expected of a children’s holiday book. Frances finally hands over the Chompo Bar with one last squeeze after Gloria spends her birthday wish hoping that Frances will be nice and forgive Gloria for hiding her sand pail and shovel the previous year. Frances sings Gloria a proper “Happy Birthday” song and promises her the four gum-balls she owes, and though Gloria offers Frances a bite of the Chompo Bar, Frances declines, insisting, “You can eat it all, because you are the birthday girl” (31). And, indeed, Gloria “ate it all, because she was the birthday girl” (31).

While Lyle’s and Frances’s stories emphasize the negative feelings and misbehaviors of siblings and peers who struggle when special attention is concentrated on another child, birthday literature of the twentieth century has also featured troublesome emotions and behaviors on the part of the child celebrating the birthday. Because of the simultaneous, and sometimes competing, emphases on the young

birthday celebrant's individuality, the social aspect of the peer-celebration, and the movement to a new age with new expectations, the birthday—the personal new year—becomes a paradoxical day much like the January 1 New Year. On that day, Aveni notes the seemingly contradictory behavior in which "On the one hand we solemnly recognize the spirit of the rebirth," (3) engaging in the "self-examination and moral reckoning that underlies making New Year's resolutions" (3). At the same time, however, the burgeoning effort at self-improvement "abruptly interfaces with the reckless revelry, excess, and abandon that comes with taking license, at least momentarily" (3). On the birthday, there is a similar confrontation between indulgence, self-improvement, and social identity. The birthday allows, even invites, self-absorption on the part of the child. Linda Rannells Lewis notes this tendency in *Birthdays: Their Delights, Disappointments, Past and Present, World, Astrological, and Infamous* when she observes, "A birthday gives the child a curtain raiser for his personal drama … [B]y licensing egocentric behavior, a birthday suggests the suspension of limits" (24). As a result, birthday literature often features undesirable qualities such as greed, selfishness, rudeness, and rule-breaking in the celebrating child, as well as in his/her peers. Seuss makes playful reference to these behaviors in *Happy Birthday to You!*, but Stan and Jan Berenstain's *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Birthday* (1986) treats the self-centered and self-indulgent birthday as a matter for concern necessitating a didactic intrusion, with a final focus on social and personal growth as well as increased responsibility.

This tension between celebratory excess and the need for solemn reflection works as the central conflict in *Too Much Birthday*. The plot of *Too Much Birthday* revolves around Sister Bear's sixth birthday party, and it opens, as all the Berenstain Bears titles do, with a moralizing rhyme on the title page, which indicates the controlling message of the installment. The rhyme reads, "At the first big party / We sometimes forget / That the birthday bear / May end up upset." In this case, the text locates the party itself—and, specifically, the first big social party—as the source of trouble. Mama Bear plans to celebrate Sister's birthday with a simple party of a few guests. Papa, Brother, and Sister, however, develop the plans into an elaborate celebration with "lots and lots of guests, oodles of goodies, games, games, games, wall-to-wall decoration, piles of fancy presents, and a fabulous cake." On the day of the party, the cubs "were very excited—especially sister," but as the party progresses, the illustrations depict an increasingly miserable Sister Bear. She is the first one out in the first party game; she is too shy to kiss anyone besides Brother Bear in Spin the Bottle, which leads the other cubs to "laugh and tease"; she gets sick on the pony rides and merry-go-round from overindulging in party treats; her friend Freddy receives a trick flower as a party favor, which he uses to squirt water on her new birthday blouse; and when she does win Pin the Tail on the Donkey, Mama Bear won't let her accept the prize because "it wouldn't be polite." By the time the party gathers around the cake, the final tease—that Sister will grow up to have six cubs because she fails to blow out a single candle on the first try—reduces her to tears. Her first lament is that "It isn't fair!", and she goes on to list all the things that did not go her way at the party. The license to celebrate excessively is no longer

welcome, and though Sister's friends are able to cheer her with presents, it is Mama Bear who gets the final word by stressing the importance of focusing on accomplishments rather than selfish indulgence. Instead of ending with party scenes, then, the text concludes with emphases on Sister's physical growth, her achievements in school, her improvement in painting, and the new privilege of staying up a half-hour later at night. Mama explains that there is "such a thing as too much birthday," and the lesson teaches Sister that the birthday should be a time to appreciate accomplishments and to improve oneself rather than enjoy pleasures in excess.

In addition to the problem of overindulgence, confrontation also significantly comes in *Too Much Birthday* when things do not go Sister's way. Because the birthday and the birthday child are presented as important and deserving of celebration, the assumption is that this day will be perfect for Sister Bear. However, Sister must share with, lose to, and endure the teasing of her guests. The social setting of the party thus indicates that the wants and expectations of the birthday child must compete with those of her peers at the party. So while the party celebrates Sister, she also learns she must reconcile her internal desires with a social identity. This clash between the personal and the collective, felt by the birthday child as well by children/childlike characters who must witness the special treatment of the birthday child, and the resulting misbehaviors are, as the texts examined so far indicate, so common in twentieth-century American children's birthday literature that they appear to be almost as much of a staple in the day as cake and gifts.

Though much of the discussion to this point has focused on picture books or illustrated books, the problems surrounding the birthday are not limited to very young audiences. Instead, they extend to middle grade and young adult literature as well. For example, in the course of Judy Blume's novel *Just As Long As We're Together* (1987), the protagonist, Stephanie Hirsch, celebrates her thirteenth birthday in the midst of a fight with her longtime best friend, Rachel.[6] When Stephanie's mother suggests that she apologize to Rachel on the night of her birthday because "Rachel is suffering," Stephanie responds with the harsh exclamation, "Rachel deserves to suffer!" (261). Mrs. Hirsch notes the difference in Stephanie's attitude on this day: "Stephanie…I'm surprised at you. Where's your compassion?" To which Stephanie fires back, "It's my birthday […] Where's her compassion?" (261). Here, Stephanie employs the possessive language, "It's my birthday," as a justification for suspending her typical behavior, as well for neglecting to follow the mores of ideal social interaction; she refuses to forgive and identifies lack of compassion, a socially desirable trait, as acceptable on this day. Just as the birthday child in Seuss's imaging does not "have to be tidy or neat" and can disregard table manners and instead "eat with both hands and both feet," Stephanie feels free to ignore certain social standards as well.

With this language of exceptionalism, Stephanie's birthday indicates the complex expectations for behavior on the birthday that arise from the clash between the emphasis on the individual with simultaneous emphasis on of situating oneself appropriately amidst peers. Stephanie's birthday happens to take place on the same day as a school dance (it also falls on Groundhog Day, a minor holiday meant to instill some humor in

the story, but a holiday nonetheless, reflective of the importance of the birthday), which works to extend the personal celebration into public space. On the one hand, Blume's choice to stage a major peer-event (this is the only dance in the book) on the same night as Stephanie's birthday attaches centrality to the day and brings a collective recognition that so many children and teens would covet. Stephanie becomes the center of attention when her teacher announces her birthday at the dance, and the whole class sings "Happy Birthday" to her. On the other hand, locating the birthday in the midst of a peer-event serves as a reminder that the birthday is also linked to growing social responsibilities and the need to adopt an identity that conforms to the expectations for a particular age group. Though this task is often difficult and problematic, the literature of the twentieth century repeatedly locates the birthday as an especially appropriate time to negotiate this skill.

The birthday episode in *Just As Long As We're Together* contains many of the other conventions of the birthday found in children's literature. For instance, Stephanie's birthday is riddled with firsts, as many birthdays in children's literature are. She gets her first period, and she has her first kiss. At the same time, though, her birthday entails a sense of loss. This is Stephanie's first birthday without an intact nuclear family (a central conflict in the story is her parents' divorce and her father's relocation to the West Coast), and this is the first year she has not celebrated with Rachel since the start of their friendship. The birthday, then, mixes things gained with things lost, a bittersweet feature in the celebration of this thirteen-year-old's birthday but absent from the party-focused picture books of the twentieth century. New tasks and responsibilities are certainly not excluded from the content of twentieth-century texts for younger children such as the

*The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Birthday* or from nineteenth-century works such as *Little Susy's Six Birthdays*. However, birthday literature for older children in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has frequently coupled birthdays with the anxiety of growing older and adopting new, often unpleasant or self-sacrificial tasks. In a way, this literature offers a critique of and rebuttal to the exceptionalism and indulgent liberties present in birthday picture books by suggesting that new ages demand that individuality subordinate to social identity. Moreover, rather than presenting every child as special, many of these texts indicate that being truly exceptional demands great personal cost.

**Anxiety and Exceptionalism in Late Twentieth- and Early Twenty-First-Century Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature**

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, middle grade and young adult literature featuring birthdays has linked new responsibilities with the child's movement from the guarded and innocent world of young childhood to the crueler world of young adulthood. Such is the case in Jerry Spinelli's *Wringer* (1997). The text begins with the ominous first line, "He did not want to be a wringer" (2). A wringer, we find out, is a boy who must, when he is ten years old, participate in the town of Waymer's yearly hunting event (which, oddly enough, is a fundraiser for the local playground) by gathering the pigeons that have been wounded, but not killed, and breaking their necks. Palmer LaRue dreads the role, wishing it were something he could run from, but he knows that "He would come to it as surely as nine follows eight and ten follows nine. He

would come to it without having to pedal or run or walk or even move a muscle. He would fall smack into the lap of it without doing anything but breathe. In the end he would get there simply by growing one day older" (5). In this way, the tenth birthday becomes the enemy.

After the grim first chapter, which details the haunting anticipation of the tenth birthday and the new role of "wringer," the novel's action begins on Palmer's ninth birthday with his mother prodding him to open the door in the language that has come to be familiar: "Go, go. It's *your* birthday. *You* invited them" (6). But "At the door he turned, suddenly afraid to open it. He did not want to be disappointed. 'You sure it's them?'" We are here reminded of the birthday party's fundamental importance in the child's social world. When children are given free rein to control the guest list and events of the birthday party, they are tasked with the identity-shaping decisions, such as whom to invite into their social circles or which social circles they hope to affix themselves to. It is often the child's first formal opportunity to assert in public space the social identity he/she wants to embrace. At the same time, the freedom to extend invitations brings with it the anxiety of rejection, which is what Palmer fears based on his experience from his last birthday. [7] Palmer had invited the same group of boys to his eighth birthday party, but none arrived, and so his mother, red-eyed from crying, fetched his neighbor, a girl named Dorothy from whom Palmer had been trying to distance himself in order to be accepted by the boys, to sing to him.

Palmer's friends do show up for his birthday, and their arrival means a great deal to him. When he opens the door, "Palmer stayed in the doorway, fighting back tears.

They were tears of relief and joy. He had been sure they would not come. But they did. He wondered if they would give him a nickname. What would it possibly be? But that was asking too much. This was plenty. They were here. With presents! They liked him. He was one of them. At last" (7). But Palmer's initiation into this new companionship comes much at the distaste of his mother, who considers the boys "little hoodlums" (11). Here, the contrast between Palmer's attitude towards the boys and his mother's significantly indicates that Palmer begins to assume an identity separate from that of his family, and most importantly, separate from his mother. He exerts an independent and social identity; he wants to be known as part of this group.

The text makes clear the difference between these boys and Palmer's mother. Upon entering the house, Beans, the presumed leader of the group, goes straight for the cake, plunging his fingers into the icing, and "With the drama of a sword-swallower, he threw back his head and sank his finger into his mouth. When it came out, it was clean. Mutto cackled and did likewise. Henry stared at Palmer's mother, who was glaring at Beans" (7). The narration tells us explicitly that "Palmer's mother did not like Beans. She wasn't crazy about Mutto or Henry either, but she especially did not like Beans. 'He's a sneak and a troublemaker,' she had said. 'He's got a mean streak'" (7). But to the children in Palmer's neighborhood, he is the leader, "at least [of] the ones under ten years old. It had always been that way. Beans was boss as surely and naturally as any king who ever sat upon a throne" (7). To Palmer's mother, Beans is the boss as much as "[her] foot" (7).

The text continues the juxtaposition by contrasting the boys' gifts, poorly wrapped in old newspaper without adornment, with the mother's, which had "ribbons and bows and beautiful paper" (8). The boys give Palmer a rotting apple core, a cigar butt, and an old sock. Palmer's mother presents him with a soccer ball, sneakers, a book, and the board game Monopoly. But Palmer likes the boys' presents just as much as, more even, than his mother's because "they did it themselves. That means something. It means we came into your house. We gave you a cigar butt. You are one of us" (9). When it's time for cake, his mother begins the "Happy Birthday" song, only to be "drowned out by the boys," and when they reach the part of the song that asks for the celebrant's name, the boys present Palmer with the gift he most wants, initiation into their group with a nickname of his very own, "Snots." The new name brings with it the assumption of a new identity, one distinct from the identity assigned to him by his parents. Instead, this is an identity with peers. Though the fear of turning ten and becoming a wringer creeps back into his mind and though there is the suggestion that this new identity is still not entirely a self-determined one (because Beans takes over his wish and blows out the candles when Palmer takes too long), Palmer still revels in the day: "Let Beans blow away, Palmer didn't care. Nothing could blow out the candleglow [sic] he felt inside. Palmer LaRue—Snots—the world's newest nine-year-old was one of the guys" (10).

Palmer's new identity brings with it new challenges, though. First, he must undergo The Treatment, one of the town's many barbaric traditions in which an older boy, Farquar, digs his knuckle so ferociously into the birthday boy's arm that there is a substantial bruise, as well as a temporary loss in mobility. When Palmer's mother

notices the mark, Palmer's father admires it as "a tradition for years around here. On your birthday you get knuckled once for each year old you are" (26), which make The Treatment, like being a wringer and participating in Pigeon Day, one of the town's hallmark rites of passage. Despite the pain, his sense of pride and his admiration for the boys make Palmer "[stand] a little taller" (26), a cap on what he considers to be a "perfect day" (32) with a "New birthday. New friends. New feelings of excitement and pride and belonging. His mother was wrong about the guys never playing with him. He had had a lot to overcome, that was all. Being the youngest, the shortest. And his unusual first name, he took lots of teasing there. But that was all over now […] Life was good" (31). Yet even though it is Palmer's birthday and he has finally earned membership in his peer group, his excitement is tempered by the fear of things to come as he grows older, and he goes to bed "sobbing" and "gasping for breath" with the overwhelming sentiment that he has "*run out of birthdays*" (32, emphasis in original).

The biggest challenge that comes with Palmer's new identity stems from the distinct contrast between Palmer and the boys who have now accepted him. The boys' leader, Beans, is a disturbed child who delights in killing animals and mutilating their corpses. Palmer, however, has been haunted by the events of Pigeon Day since his first experience with it. He recalls the image of injured pigeons trying awkwardly to scurry away from the wringers and the "gray and sour odor of the gunsmoke" (50) that lingers both in the air and on his father's clothes (his father, we find out, won the Pigeon Day shooting contest one year and proudly displays his trophy, a golden pigeon, on the mantel). Though Palmer's birthday is one month before Pigeon Day, he always

associates these recollections with his birthday. “The smell,” for example, “was sure to come on his birthday” so that it “did not feel quite so good as before” (50). These feelings grow more intense when a pigeon finds its way to Palmer’s windowsill. Palmer and the pigeon become fast friends, and the pigeon takes up roost in Palmer’s room. The ensuing year is a difficult one for Palmer as he tries to hide the pigeon, Nipper, from his friends while still pretending to be a “normal” boy eager for the chance to serve as a wringer.

By the time his tenth birthday arrives, Palmer is thinking he “won’t even have a party” (161) because he imagines a torment this year much worse than The Treatment: his friends torturing him for information about Nipper and then forcing him to turn the bird over. However, he agrees to a party because he knows “the guys were already talking about it. They were expecting it” (161). This year, on the birthday he had dreaded for so long (165), the party has been turned over to the boys as Palmer’s mother goes out shopping during the gathering, but rather than revealing in the full transition into the boys’’ club, the celebration quickly turns to the nightmare Palmer has anticipated. The boys tell Palmer that they know he has a pigeon, and he is forced to choose between the bird and the boys. Ultimately, he chooses the bird and rejects the boys, screaming, “No nothing! No Treatment! No wringer! No Snots! My name is Palmer! My name is Palmer!” (179). He bucks the boyhood birthday tradition of The Treatment, and he bucks the tradition of becoming a wringer now that he is ten. In the novel’s final scene, Palmer goes to the shooting field on Pigeon Day to save Nipper, facing off with Beans and the rest of the town to do so. He is successful in saving

Nipper, and as he walks away, "The crowd parted just enough to let him through. He felt the cold stares of the people, he smelled the mustard on their breaths. A hand reached out. He flinched. It was a little hand, a child's hand, touching Nipper's wing, stroking it. A child's voice saying, "'Can I have one too, Daddy?'" (228) There is the sense, then, that Palmer, who emerges as a unique and special boy, has begun to enact some small moral change in the town, but in order to do so, he must give up the company of the other boys and the social acceptance he had wanted for so long. Palmer has Nipper, but it is an otherwise lonely final moment for him. Thus, in Spinelli's text, the birthday is not a day to look forward to but one to dread, and it is not something that makes the child special, but rather an initiation event collapsing Palmer's identity into that of his social peers. To stand out as really special, Palmer must refuse collective traditions, including that of the birthday.

There is similar dreadful buildup to a birthday event in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993). In the dystopian environment that serves as the setting for the novel, one of the ways that individuals are collapsed into the "Community" is through the eradication of birthdays. Instead, all children born within a calendar year are grouped together in the same age category. Thus, every December, all the children born that year become "Ones," and all the children who had been "Ones" become "Twos." This December date, no doubt, is a holdover from both the January 1 celebration of the New Year and the December celebration of Christmas from the societies that had preceded the Community.[8] The child's age grouping drives expectations, possibilities, and identities for him or her. Threes, for example, are expected to meet language acquisition marks,

and Nines get their bicycles. Identity is largely age driven until children become "Twelves" and receive their Assignments, the job they will hold in the Community. The ceremony of the "Twelves" is the one occasion on which "we acknowledge differences. You Elevens have spent all your years till now learning to fit in, to standardize your behavior, to curb any impulse that might set you apart from the group. But today we honor your differences. They have determined your futures" (51-52). Jonas's father remembers, "every December was exciting to me when I was young and it has been for you and Lily, too, I'm sure. Each December brings such changes" (11). However, the impending ceremony of this particular year brings a great deal of apprehension for the main character, Jonas, and Lowry organizes much of the novel's early conflict around the Ceremony of Twelve. When the day finally arrives, Jonas is thanked for his childhood and given the new, unique role of Receiver of Memory. This Assignment makes Jonas special and he does, on this "birthday," become the center of attention, more so than the other Twelves. For characters from earlier twentieth-century picture books such as Lyle and Frances, that type of attention is desirable and comes with a license to indulge in self-centered behavior. On the other hand, for Jonas, being special means being "separate, different," and it comes at tremendous self-sacrifice (65). In his role as Receiver, Jonas becomes the receptacle for all the memories—painful, joyful, terrible, dangerous, pleasurable—of the past, which are kept from the Community to preserve order and sameness. It is, the old Receiver explains, a taxing and lonely job.

Interestingly, one of the memories Jonas receives is that of a birthday party from the past, "with one child singled out and celebrated on his day, so that now he

understood the joy of being individual, special and unique and proud," but in Jonas's Community, those days are long gone, and being special also means bearing special burden (121). Palmer finds that to be true as well, as do many protagonists in middle grade and young adult literature into the twenty-first century. For instance, in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008), the twelfth birthday (homage perhaps to its dystopian predecessor *The Giver*) requires that a child begin to enter the reaping system, the yearly lottery that will determine which children will enter the arena and battle twenty-three other children to death while the country watches the sport. When Katniss wishes to defy the age-oriented tradition of her society to protect her sister, she becomes a special center of attention, but she must also shoulder the great responsibility of an entire revolutionary movement. In texts such as these, the birthday places all emphasis on the process of growing older and the social responsibility as well as the self-sacrifice that comes with that process, which marks a starkly different approach than the celebratory, self-centric birthday picture books of the twentieth century.

**Conclusion**

Even as this age-oriented literature complicates the "you are special" message of twentieth-century literature for young readers, there remains a tenacious cultural hold on that ideal, which continues to appear in birthday literature for very young children of the twenty-first century. In Nancy Tillman's board book *On the Night You Were Born* (2005), for example, young children are told, "On the night you were born, the moon smiled with such wonder that the stars peeked in to see you and the night wind

whispered, 'Life will never be the same.' Because there had never been anyone like you…ever in the world." The pages that follow show wild animals around the world and the night sky rejoicing in song and dance over the arrival of "the one and only ever you." Rhetorically, the book places the child at the center of the text by including direct address to the child. In one moment, for instance, the narrator pauses the text and muses, "I think I'll count to three so you can wiggle your toes for me." Though many reviews indicate that the text is likely to resonate more with the parent readers than the very young child listeners, the language and format, which serve to highlight the individuality of the child and direct all attention of the day to the child, reflect the child-centered language and self-centered behavior that has appeared in books for children throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

In many ways, the ideals motivating this self-centered birthday literature are positive: the desire to give the child a strong sense of confidence and self, admiration for the child's individuality, and acknowledgement of even the youngest members of society as people who deserve protection and respect. At the same time, however, the literature has both contributed to and reflected the difficulty of reconciling a strong sense of individuality and specialness with the need to navigate an increasingly involved social identity. While the parent-directed and didactically driven birthdays in nineteenth-century children's literature leave little room for feelings of selfishness, greed, or jealousy, child-centric birthday literature features those feelings as endemic to the birthday and the childhood experience. As if in response to generations of child characters lavished with praise and material indulgence for being special by simple fact

of achieving a birthday, a literary trend mirrored in real-world social trends that many view as damaging to society, the birthday literature for older readers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries presents birthdays as anxiety-producing occasions, filled with social expectations and demanding, often self-sacrificial responsibilities. These texts are not a return to the overt didacticism of the nineteenth century, nor have they overridden the picture books showering birthday characters and readers with special attention. However, they offer the new message that being special means accepting great social and moral responsibility, and they present the birthday as a pivotal occasion forcing the child to confront the choices that will determine what kind of person he or she will be.

Even as the messages about individuality and social responsibility have shifted over time in children's birthday literature, the positioning of the child as a unique person and also as a member of a broad social world has always featured into the literature in some way. As such, the personal holiday of the birthday operates as an ideal gateway to the other holidays explored in this dissertation. The following chapters extend consideration of how the literature of collective holidays presents external forces—those of community (Valentine's Day), institutions (Halloween), nation (Fourth of July), and adulthood (Christmas)—in relation to the child's ability to experience, express, and determine the "I," which is so central on the birthday.

Notes

[1] During Queen Victoria's reign, birthday parties were adopted into the Anglo-American world from the German tradition of Kinderfesten. The adoption shifted the birthday celebration from "an intimate family practice featuring homemade amusement to the ornate 'juvenile entertainment' that served a broader social purpose" of expanding children's peer groups and interactions beyond the home (Lewis 49). Public birthday parties became important sites of socialization for children, especially middle- and upper-class children who had less access to the public, external world than working-class children whose peer groups would expand through labor and/or school.

[2] Oliver Optic was the pen name of author and educator William Taylor Adams (1822-1897). *The Birthday Party* was originally published as one volume of Optic's twelve-volume collection Riverdale Stories. In 1864, the collection was split into two six-volume series, Riverdale Story Books and Flora Lee Stories, the latter of which included *The Birthday Party*.

[3] Optic's text came out just a few years before the mainstream shift to the child-directed, peer culture party, which began in the 1870s. According to Pleck, this shift "recognized that the parent could no longer exercise complete control over the child's world. Because children were educated with age peers and were entering a world in which they would have to depend on friends as well as relatives, parents in the last third of the nineteenth century began to accept the child's peer culture—his or her own chosen friends—as a necessary adjunct to the private family" (235).

[4] The melody for "Happy Birthday to You" comes from educators Patty and Mildred Hill's song "Good Morning to You," published in 1893. The song has a complicated legal and copyright history, but the Hill family claims that though only the words for "Good Morning to You" were published, the song's lyrics often were adjusted to celebrate several occasions among school children, including birthdays. According to Robert Brauneis's "Copyright and the World's Most Popular Song," the first book to publish both the birthday lyrics and the melody was "The Beginner's Book of Songs," which was published by a piano manufacturing company in 1912 (31).

[5] The Lyle series is just one of many popular children's book series to include a birthday title, a trend that in and of itself speaks to the resonance of the birthday with the audience as well as its marketability. Included in this chapter are titles from Russell Hoban's Frances the Badger series and Stan and Jan Berenstain's Berenstain Bears series. Other series that include birthday books are Barbara Park's Junie B. Jones series (*Junie B. Jones and That Meanie Jim's Birthday*, 1996), Mercer Meyer's Little Critter series and its spin-offs (e.g., *Little Sister's Birthday*, 1988, and *Bun Bun's Birthday*, 1996), Marc Brown's Arthur books (*Arthur's Birthday*, 1989), and Jane O'Connor's Fancy Nancy series (*Fancy Nancy: Bonjour, Butterfly*, 2008). Several of the American Girl characters also have birthday books (e.g., *Happy Birthday, Kirsten!*, 1987; *Happy Birthday, Samantha!*, 1987; *Happy Birthday, Kit!*, 2001). It is typical for many of these series also to feature titles centered on other holidays as well, indicating holidays as a kind of default content for American children.

[6] The birthday is a frequent fixture in Blume's novels. *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970), for example, devotes a chapter to Margaret's birthday, which begins with her sniffing under her armpits the way her mother does because Margaret feels that "I don't think people start to smell bad until they're at least twelve" (1). *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* (1972) begins with the protagonist Peter winning a turtle at his friend Jimmy's birthday party, and it also includes a birthday party for Peter's precocious younger brother, Fudge.

[7] The worry that no one will attend one's birthday party is another common subject in birthday literature (see as another example *Happy Birthday to Me* from Kim Wayans and Kevin Knotts's Amy Hodgepodge series), and the anxiety even becomes a reality in some books such as in Danielle Paige's *Dorothy Must Die* (2014), which opens with a character's memory of no one showing up to her ninth birthday party.

[8] The ambiguous and universal assignment of the "birthday" to December is also a nod to the historical practice of locating births on Christmas, or another holiday or feast day close to the date of birth. This practice was common into the nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries, especially in lower classes,

when temporal literacy was not as common and records were not as meticulously kept. As birth rates and infant mortality rates decreased, along with advancements in recordkeeping, individual birthdates were kept with more accuracy (see Illick, Reinier, Zelizer).

# CHAPTER III

## VALENTINE'S DAY: LEARNING COMMUNITY, CHARITY, AND THE PROBLEM OF GENDER

*For the Valentine's party we were supposed to drop cards in the boxes of all our friends. If you gave one to a girl, though, you had to give one to all the girls. If you gave one to a boy, you had to give one to all the boys. I didn't want to give valentines to boys, so I didn't even give one to Donald, even though he's supposed to be my boyfriend.*

- Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *Alice in Blunderland*

The birthday texts discussed in the previous chapter confront children with the task of realizing individuality while also navigating social identity, especially among peers. Valentine's Day literature extends engagement with social identity, asking that fictional characters communicate sentiments to members of the collective. Since the later decades of the nineteenth century, children, both real and fictional, have been instructed to express their sentiments to friends and family in verbal and/or written form by way of the valentine, and the holiday, thereby, becomes an occasion to teach community-mindedness and charity. The trends in Valentine's literature for children from the nineteenth century on have routinely highlighted inclusion and compassion by encouraging children to celebrate the holiday not only with gestures towards loved ones, but also with gestures towards the less fortunate and the socially ostracized and marginalized. At the same time, however, Valentine's texts have increasingly discouraged certain types of relationships and interactions, especially as the literature moved into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In particular, much of the literature represents gender and cross-gender relationships as sources of comedy, teasing,

embarrassment, and division, even as strict gender stereotypes have broken down in the "real world" and boys' and girls' lives have become increasingly intermingled, or perhaps precisely because of those phenomena. The literature thus reinforces and participates in the creation of the persistent cultural perception that sexuality must not be a comfortable part of a child's vocabulary.[1] Furthermore, the literature espouses a bifurcated world view. On the one hand, children are taught to treat others equally and to include everyone. On the other hand, they receive the message that gender is a permissible—and often the only acceptable—way of organizing and delimiting social interaction. Even in nineteenth-century literature, which is often more tolerant of exclusionary practices than later literature (see the Fourth of July chapter), Valentine's texts indicate that race, class, and culture are not necessarily allowed to discourage friendships, but gender may, though gender is far less worrisome in older texts than it is in newer ones.

Children's literature also tends to present Valentine's Day as a "top-down" holiday, heavily regulated by adults. Didacticism features heavily in the holiday literature, significantly becoming more pronounced throughout the twentieth century when compared to the scenes of juvenile frenzy around the holiday offered in literature written or set in the nineteenth century. Though scholarship often emphasizes the decreased, or at least shifted, role of didacticism in children's literature throughout the twentieth century (e.g., Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult* and Claudia Mills's introduction to *Ethics and Children's Literature*), in the case of Valentine's Day, twentieth-century literature presents a holiday that is increasingly dominated by weighty

adult directives and enthusiasm drummed up by parents and teachers. Valentine's Day prompts less excitement and anticipation from twentieth- and twenty-first-century fictional children than many of the holidays considered in this project, and several characters find Valentine's Day a source of frustration or a nuisance, an interesting reversal from the sentiments around holidays such as Halloween, which become irritants for parents and sources of excitement for children. Bowdlerized, infantilized instantiations of Valentine's Day as they have evolved into the twentieth century rarely bear the imaginative fantasy of Christmas or the carnivalesque overtones of Halloween or birthdays. Instead, this day seems to be an overwhelmingly adult-centered occasion for socializing the child.

Despite a long history and rich literary lineage, Valentine's Day has often been snubbed in academia and even popular culture as a thin, commercial holiday, but the literature surveyed in this chapter suggests that publishers, authors, parents, and educators have been, and continue to be, invested in making sure that Valentine's Day occurs and that it occurs in a particular way.[2] Publishers of print media and other holiday material no doubt maintain an interest in the holiday because they find it profitable, but the literature suggests that other adults (the parents and teachers presented in fiction) seem to promote it as a way of ensuring that children engage with and become invested in the groups and institutions that surround them. Since the nineteenth century, Valentine's literature has taken on an increasingly community-minded air so that children are not permitted to send valentines only to close friends and perhaps a sweetheart; instead, children are instructed to deliver valentines to all members of their

local circles, including all classmates, teachers, relatives, and acquaintances they may know through church, out-of-school activities, or their parents. The assumption appears to be that as a result of connecting (no matter how superficially) with their communities, children will feel some stake in the present and future well-being of those communities. While this message is deemed valuable for children year-round, it seems particularly important on Valentine's Day as a diversion from the lingering sexual undertones in the holiday's history and a redirection to lessons of collective responsibility. [3]

**Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Valentine's Day Frenzy**

Though Valentine's Day has a centuries-old literary history, the holiday went through a period of rejuvenation and reinvention in America in the 1840s, during which time Valentine's Day morphed from "an often forgotten, easily neglected Old World saint's day to an indigenized, not-to-be-missed American holiday" (Schmidt, "Fashioning of a Modern Holiday" 209). Valentine's Day began to take on mainstream visibility in the United States in the middle decades of the nineteenth century when American entrepreneurs and businesses saw how successful British marketers had been in promoting their manufactured valentines and looked to bring the tradition and profit to the domestic market (Schmidt 211).[4] The holiday, therefore, has been linked to commercialism throughout its American history, which, no doubt, has much to do with the perception that Valentine's Day is one of the most contrived of the major modern holidays. While the holiday's commercialism has earned it harsh denunciations and critical oversight, the commercial influence on Valentine's Day has also propelled

changes in its celebrants—extending the target audiences to include children—by diversifying the types of relationships celebrated through the valentine. Leigh Eric Schmidt observes that nineteenth-century marketers played up the inclusive possibilities, and therefore profit potential, of the holiday by pushing the scope of Valentine's Day beyond the intimacy of romantic relationships to include expressions of familial and platonic love. As a result, valentine messages became

> popular tokens of endearment for family and friends. Aunts and uncles presented them to nieces and nephews; mothers gave them to their children; siblings and friends exchanged them …. Merchants wanted to expand St. Valentine's Day to encompass all of the complex webs of social relationships, and by 1860 they had achieved a good measure of success. (228)

In the mid-nineteenth century, the market functioned as a masculine space where "men went to trade and fraternize," so retailers were particularly interested in adjusting the holiday to draw women to the marketplace, which they did by connecting the holiday to women and children. The results of these efforts brought a "feminized, domestic luster" to Valentine's Day and morphed the public space of the market from a masculine forum of buying and selling to a feminine space of shopping and browsing (228). The shifting of Valentine's Day to the target audiences of women and children has certainly been apparent in the Valentine's Day literature that has poured from children's magazines and book publishers since the mid- to late nineteenth century. Moreover, children's authors, publishers, educators, and guardians have seized upon the idea of inclusion as readily as

advertisers did, and the literature often works to incorporate whole communities and all the varied relationships within those communities into children's celebrations.

The majority of nineteenth-century Valentine's Day literature for children came in very short stories, crafts, and histories, pieces that no doubt fed off of and fed into the holiday frenzy that Schmidt describes when he notes, "people spoke of a valentine mania, craze, rage, or epidemic—a 'social disease' that seemed to recrudesce annually with ever heightening interest and anticipation" (209). This description certainly seems to fit the late nineteenth-century scene laid out in Margaret Spencer Delano's sketch "Valentine Frolics," which appeared in *Miss Mary's Valentine and Other Stories* (1895). In Delano's story, the days leading up to the holiday involve "mysterious trips" to the market where celebrants could buy "The 'darlingest girls,' the 'sweetest cupids and doves,' for five cents! 'Reg-u-lar beauties' for seven! And for a cent dear little ones can be bought for Baby Jack, or Emily, or Frank" (21). In the evenings, "Troops of very little men and women flock into the dining room after dinner with lovely paper, ribbons, cards, cupids, heads, and mucilage." Delano continues with depictions of the children's preparations: "Pasting, cutting, planning, and chatting! Such marvels of envelopes, big and little, cut out of white paper! Fringed ribbons, sachet powder, and bunches of violets, made into precious gifts" (21). Following this hard preparatory work, comes the morning when the valentines are finally delivered. Delano describes the valentine deliveries as secretive and exciting events beginning "when the day fairly sets in … [l]ong before breakfast" with doorbells ringing and loud raps at kitchen doors, side-doors, and "at all the porches!" Valentines arrive with "a rushing, scampering and

running!" They are "dropped mysteriously, and one catches a glimpse of blue caps, short jackets, and very tricky boy faces" (21).

While there is no mention of valentine exchanges as a school activity in Delano's story, there is some discussion of the event as a community affair, thus positioning it as an occasion with appeal for both children and adults. Delano situates neighborhood post offices as sites for valentine exchanges with special boxes for the occasion labeled in red and white script and affixed to trees, porches, or gates, or displayed in an open common area so that the boxes are "always easy to find!" (22). During the lunch break and after school, the children in Delano's story approach in pairs or groups to

> slyly drop valentines into the box. They peep and scream and run out from behind lamp-posts, tree-boxes, shrubs and porches. Curls bob up and down. Caps of scarlet, brown and blue pop out from a corner. Long braids of hair, like funny tails, fly past the box. There are merry shrieks of discovery: 'Run, run! I see you, Tom! I know that was Harold!' (22).

Adults also join in the fun of crafting and admiring the letters that children receive: "From early morning until late bed-time this fun goes on. Grandfather senators and society mamas, devoted aunties, and proud uncles find time to direct 'in an unknown hand' the funny, loving messages" (21). After the children "with rosy cheeks" and "very shining eyes" "tumble off to bed," "the bigger men and women look the missives over with great fun and glee" (22). Delano's is a most idyllic scene, puffed with the rhetorical excesses of hyperbole (e.g., the doorbell that rings every minute) and frequent use of exclamation points in both dialogue and narrative description.

Moreover, Delano's story presents a scene of communal harmony, celebration across lines of age and gender, and universal holiday excitement. Conflict has no part in Delano's sketch. There is no teasing, no worry, no exclusion; the children self-generate anticipation for the holiday without adult persuasion, and they maintain their excitement throughout the holiday. Most significantly in relation to later Valentine's Day literature trends, gender is not a source of tension. At one point in the very short narrative, a young boy (his age is not given though we can infer that he is old enough to read) receives a valentine from a girl with a poem reading, "I send a song of love, / Sweet to every line. / Four-and-twenty kisses / In this valentine" (21). The boy displays no trepidation over the valentine, no squeamishness or fear that he will be teased; instead, he shows the valentine with delight to his mother. The unflagging excitement of children and adults and the universal inclusion situates this story in distinct contrast to the valentine fiction that would appear over the next century and even to some of the literature published before or contemporaneously.

Alongside idealized nineteenth-century portraits of Valentine's Day were texts that began to introduce conflict into the holiday, and chief among those anxieties were concerns about popularity among childhood peers and worries over expressing sentiment to members of the opposite gender. While such anxieties became even more predominant in twentieth-century stories, Anna North's "The Mission of Mabel's Valentine" (illus. by Rose Miller), which appeared in the February 1883 issue of *St. Nicholas*, provides an early example of the teasing that could accompany Valentine's Day celebrations. The story centers on the troubles of Placide De Castro, a boy who

differs from his peers. In appearance, Placide "was tall for a boy of twelve, and all arms and legs. His eyes looked large in his thin, sallow face, and his thatch of light hair stood out all around like a door-mat" (293). His unusual appearance is matched by his odd behavior. Whenever Placide enters the schoolroom, for example, he "salute[s]" the teacher "with an elaborate bow, in which he turned out his right foot, drew the other far back, and made a very deep inclination." The habit always provokes an uproar from his classmates, and "[t]he whole school made fun of the poor boy; but he took it all with a pitiful smile. Nobody knew how cruelly it hurt him, nor how he longed to be friendly with his school mates" (293).

Though the narrative suggests that the other children poke fun at Placide every day, Valentine's Day provides an especially ripe opportunity for teasing. When the children in North's story view the market exhibits for the holiday, they encounter the same pleasant and sentimental trinkets "gay with reminders of the approach of the great February holiday" that Delano's characters encounter, but alongside these cheerful offerings in North's story are the "hideous caricature styled comic valentines," which were "considered very funny by the children." Mabel and her schoolmates spend time examining the valentines and notice that "Every trade, occupation, or accomplishment, and every defect of body or mind was illustrated by uncouth figures and doggerel verse. There was something to hurt almost anybody's feelings" (293). The children find one particular valentine that reminds them of Placide in its "ungainly figure" and "accompanying rhyme" (294). They dub the valentine a "Plaster Caster" and purchase it to torment their classmate.

In addition to positioning children as subjects in need of social and moral instruction, this passage engages the characters in a well-established tradition of valentine greetings that lampoon conventional sentimentalism.[5] Like many other valentine customs, the comic valentine gained popularity in British valentine expression and was later adopted in American exchanges. According to Schmidt, "the vogue for caricatures blossomed in the United States in the mid to late 1840s," nearly simultaneously with the sentimental valentine, so that there was never really a time when the American version of the holiday did not include both the sentimental and the mocking (Schmidt 233). By the 1850s, "Satirical valentines had come to rival the sentimental valentines in numbers and popularity" (236). Bringing a carnivalesque atmosphere to an otherwise sentimental celebration of recommitment, these spoofs

> took no prisoners. They lampooned people of all trades and professions; they stereotyped racial and ethnic groups, especially African-Americans and the Irish; they mocked the ugly and the misshapen; they laid into the glutton, the drunkard, and the dandy; they heaped contumely upon the greedy, the overbearing, the hypocritical, and the dimwitted. They also teemed with ribaldry and phallic innuendo. (236-37)

Among the targets of these valentines were women, especially those women who were "intractable, willful, or publicly active" (237). This phenomenon offers a comment on gender hostility in general, but more specifically hints at the masculine backlash over the successful feminization of and feminine control over the holiday. Through these messages, Valentine's Day became a day for "ritual insult that mirrored in modern guise

longstanding communal forms of mockery" (237) in addition to being a day for expressions of affection. While these valentines were popular among adults and some texts hint at their popularity among children as well (e.g. *Caddie Woodlawn*, which will be discussed later in this chapter), children's literature overwhelmingly avoids mention of comic valentines or condemns them if they are mentioned. Rather, Valentine's texts emphasize the day as a time to engage in charitable social behavior and eschew the kind of carnivalesque celebration that may be tolerated, at least in part, in children's texts for other holidays. Such trends in children's Valentine literature suggest the adult impulse to mold the holiday into one that rejects misbehavior along with the holiday's sexual history.

In essence, the comic valentines "provided people with the opportunity to mock 'queer kind of folks,' those who did not conform to expected gender roles, those who were seen as marginal or different" (Schmidt 237). North's Placide clearly fits into the categories of queer, marginal, and different in the opinion of the other children. His mannerisms make him something of the dandy, and his low economic station as well as his status as a boy without a father position him on the fringe of society. Other characters often view him as feminine, especially when he participates in domestic tasks such as helping his mother with the laundry, which serves as the widowed Mrs. De Castro's source of income. Furthermore, Placide is marked as different because of his ethnicity. On his mother's side, Placide is American "but of the most commonplace type" (293). On his father's side, though, Placide is French. Placide's father "had been a little,

broken-down French dancing-master," and many of the mannerisms that his classmates ridicule (such as the bow) are styles picked up from his father.

After the children purchase the "Plaster Caster" valentine, they carry the trinket to school where it is "handed around slyly…and caused great merriment; the boys and the girls thought it the best joke they had ever heard of" (294). Mabel, however, who provided the money for the purchase (because she was the only one with a penny at the store), "gradually grew more and more doubtful as to such a proceeding being quite up to the Lawrence standard" (294). She also begins to feel pangs of guilt when she observes Placide's poor clothing and witnesses the teasing heaped on him by other boys while he assists his mother with her washing. Mabel throws away the "cruel valentine" even though the other children "said it was 'real mean' of her to spoil the fun" (294), and she even goes so far as to invite Placide to a Valentine's Day party that she is throwing for all her friends.[6] The invitation, it turns out, reaches him late, but Placide does, at his mother's urging, come to call on Mabel to extend his regrets. North makes it clear that "there would have been a good deal of teasing about 'Mabel's beau'" when Placide arrives at her home had her father not "shook his head" to prevent the teasing (295). The father, a doctor, finds Placide a delightful boy, citing his politeness as a refreshing quality in a young man. The doctor proclaims, "I would like to see the spirit of [courtesy] in every boy in America" (295). In the end, the doctor offers Placide a job as a helper and errand boy, a position that allows Placide to continue his education and leads him into a stable future. The valentine invitation thus opens the door through which Placide becomes a thriving member of his community. With this conclusion, North casts

aside the comic valentine as well as barriers such as economic status, nationality, and physical appearance as qualities that would preclude friendship among well-behaved children. Instead, she constructs Valentine's Day as an occasion to teach kindness, manners, and respectful inclusion of one's peers.

**The Gender Problem in Children's Valentine's Day Literature**

Even with these lessons and the satisfying end for Placide, "The Mission of Mabel's Valentine" raises issues of gender discomfort and teasing, conflicts that become all the more central in twentieth-century Valentine's Day literature. For example, Carol Ryrie Brink's chapter "The Rose Is Red" in her novel *Caddie Woodlawn*, which was published in 1935 but set in 1864, offers a picture of nineteenth-century Valentine's Day enthusiasm coupled with twentieth-century emphasis on gender difference. Brink features children who shop on their own (without the prodding or assistance of adults) in the days before February 14, and she casts the holiday as, similar to the scene in Delano's story, "full of titters and whisperings" with "mysterious envelopes and scraps of paper [that] kept appearing on desks; children squirmed excitedly in their seats" (100). The children are so eager for the holiday that the teacher, Miss Parker, "resigned herself to keep what order she could. Valentine's Day was a day to be got through as best one might, and she was glad that it came only once a year" (100). Miss Parker's irritation evokes the sentiments of many an adult figure in children's Halloween literature of the latter half of the twentieth century, but her feeling is uncommon among

adults in other Valentine's texts who are shown preparing for, overseeing, and readily celebrating Valentine's Day.

Presenting Valentine's Day unconventionally as a nuisance to the teacher may well hint at Brink's gender agenda to subvert female stereotypes. Miss Parker treats Valentine's Day as silly and bothersome, and she organizes no formal classroom celebrations for the day. She does, however, organize a celebration of Washington's Birthday, a move that aligns her with the thinking of critic Gary S. Cross, who argues that holiday activities in classrooms are valuable instructional tools only if linked to "worthy" holidays.[7] For Cross and for Miss Parker, Washington's Birthday (or its successor, Presidents' Day) is worthy, but Valentine's Day is not. To celebrate Washington's Birthday, Miss Parker "hung up a flag and there were songs," and Caddie is even allowed to hold the flag during one of the songs because her birthday falls on the same day, February 22 (107). In the moment, Caddie feels fiercely American, and she "wished more than ever that she had been a boy" so that she could grow up to be president. The chapter ends on this patriotic, masculine note, usurping attention so entirely from Valentine's Day that readers may readily forget that Valentine's Day had been the focus of much of the chapter.

In addition to this shift at the end of the chapter, *Caddie Woodlawn* works to problematize the holiday by gendering it. Caddie's brother Warren, for instance, evinces the masculine distaste for Valentine's Day that has become increasingly noticeable in twentieth-century children's literature. When the other Woodlawns go to purchase their valentines, Warren refuses to go along, opting instead to "trudge home across the fields"

because he "thought that valentines were silly" (99). Additionally, the text broaches the issue of gender difference, gender anxiety, and teasing around romance and sexuality. For instance, the schoolchildren draw a picture on the chalkboard of Miss Parker and Obediah, the oldest student, who has been known to test Miss Parker's authority in the classroom. The image depicts Obediah and Miss Parker as two "long two-legged creatures with heads like buttons" (101), and it shows them "fighting and around them was a heart" (102). While the teacher never has occasion to view the image, Obediah does, and in reaction to the joke, he "seized the slate in his big hands and broke it into four pieces which he flung into the stove. He glared around the room without saying a word and then stalked outdoors" (101-102). For Obediah, the valentine likely gives offense because it is doubly effeminizing. Firstly, it links Obediah to the public display of sentimental emotion, and secondly, it recalls the classroom lashing he received earlier in the text from Miss Parker.

In a previous chapter, we see a standoff between Miss Parker and Obediah, the "worst" of the "big" boys who "were used to the rough ways and the crude humor of a pioneer life," who could "barely get their knees beneath the desks," and who "came to school, not to learn, but to see what fun they could have baiting the teacher" (63). Caddie wonders why Miss Parker does not "make those Jones boys behave," but Warren points out, "Teacher's scared of Obediah Jones…He's as big as she is and she dassn't lick him" (62). When the classroom erupts in a quarrel among the students, which begins because Obediah puts his legs up on one of the girl's desks and refuses to move them, the children look to Miss Parker to see whether she really will allow Obediah to have his

"own way" in the classroom (63). Rather than back down, slight Miss Parker "caught Obediah by the back of the neck with a suddenness that took him completely off his guard. Down the aisle she marched him to the front of the room. 'Obediah Jones,' she cried, 'I am going to punish you before the whole school. Stand up and take your medicine'" (68). Miss Parker delivers the whipping with her ruler and then orders Obediah out to the woodshed, where he is to consider his actions and decide whether he would like to return to the classroom and obey Miss Parker or go home, never to return to school again. Obediah returns neatened in appearance and with an armful of wood for the classroom wood box. He quietly takes his seat and folds his hands, and the other children know that "Obediah had met his Waterloo, and Teacher was at last the greatest person in her little world" (69). When Miss Parker makes her stand, the narration observes, "something polite and ladylike in Miss Parker snapped" (67), and she becomes more dominant in this moment when she forfeits adherence to feminine propriety. With Miss Parker's rise in dominance, Obediah is emasculated.

The comic slate valentine recalls this episode, reinforcing Obediah's emasculation because it remembers his defeat, links him to romantic love, and locates him in a passive position as the object of a comic valentine (much like Placide). By smashing the valentine to pieces, though, Obediah wins a small reclamation of brawny, masculine identity. In the eyes of the other children, the smashing indicates that "Obediah was tamed, but the children saw with awe that he was still a lion at heart" (102). With the valentine's destruction, Obediah reasserts a part of the physical power that he lost in the episode with Miss Parker, and by severing the sentimental, feminine

symbol of the valentine heart, he replaces himself in the vein of masculine distaste for the holiday that Brink establishes through Warren.

In a quieter, but perhaps more profound moment of gender anxiousness, readers see Caddie contemplating her gender and relationship to boys when she discovers that her brother Tom has given an expensive valentine to Katie Hyman, a shy, frail, dainty girl. Caddie knows that Tom has been working hard sprouting potatoes in order to afford the valentine, and on the holiday, she eagerly waits to see who will receive it. When the valentine appears on Katie's desk, Caddie wonders why Katie rather than Caddie herself has received it. Caddie thinks,

> I do everything with Tom. I'm much more fun than Katie. Why, she's afraid of horses and snakes and she wouldn't cross the river for worlds. I don't believe she's spoken three words to Tom in her life. But she's what you call a little lady, and I'm just a tomboy. Maybe there's something in this lady business after all. (104-105)

Here, Caddie demonstrates jealousy over her brother's choice, and she fears that his preference may well have to do with her gender identity. Her jealousy is short-lived because just after she wonders about Tom's valentine, Warren "caught up with her and said, 'Hey, let's go coasting! All this silly Valentine, sugar-plum stuff!' And she raced away with him, laughing, and eager to be the first one on the hill with her sled" (105). Nevertheless, the valentine holiday marks the first instance in which Caddie begins to consider gender appropriate behavior, though her mother has often prompted her to consider such behavior at earlier points in the text. The episode thus identifies this

particular holiday as the moment in which the child is forced to contemplate gender, her relationship to gender, and her relationship to those of the opposite gender. While Brink's text undermines the gender polarization of the holiday by allowing an alternative holiday and other distractions to eclipse Valentine's Day, the novel nevertheless establishes such polarizations as a hallmark of Valentine's Day and its presentation to children.

In an easy reader published more than one hundred years after North's story and seventy years after Brink's novel, Abby Klein deals with Valentine's Day and issues of gender in the setting of a contemporary first grade classroom. [8] Klein's book *Ready, Freddy! #10: Super-Secret Valentine* (2007) begins by introducing Valentine's Day as somewhat worrisome from the child's perspective when she announces Freddy's trouble in the front matter. In that section, Freddy's first words to the readers are "I have a problem. A really, really, big problem. I want to give Jessie a special valentine for Valentine's Day, but I don't want anyone to know" (7). Immediately, the text identifies Valentine's Day as a holiday that brings anxiety to children, and it associates that anxiety with the complexity of communicating feelings across gender barriers, especially when that communication is visible to other peers. Contrasted with Freddy's front matter is an authorial introductory note. In the message, Klein proclaims Valentine's Day "one of my favorite holidays" (8). She remembers the joys of special presents such as a "huge, stuffed bear" and a "Will you be my valentine?" t-shirt, waiting for her at the breakfast table. Klein wishes upon her audience as much fun reading about the holiday as she had writing about it. When her note is compared with Freddy's anxious first thoughts,

however, the difference is striking, and her message raises the issue of adult oversight and holiday guardianship. Though Freddy does eventually identify Valentine's Day as one of his favorite holidays (no doubt a representation of authorial sentiment), his mother and teacher frequently step in to initiate and regulate holiday activities, and their ideas regularly clash with the children's desires for the day. The impression, then, is one of a holiday controlled by adults and passed on—sometimes forcefully—to children.

With this adult intervention in mind, the reasons behind Freddy's anxiousness become all the more significant because they indicate the adult's need to police gender and sexuality. The text often implies that Freddy "doesn't want anyone to know" about the valentine he intends for Jessie because he is afraid that other children will tease him since Jessie is a girl and he is a boy. Freddy has seen how other children react to boy/girl friendships, and he has previously experienced mocking by peers when he has made a public display of his friendship with Jessie. In one scene, Jessie grabs Freddy's hand and tells him what a good friend he is, which makes his cheeks turn red. When the teacher, Mrs. Wushy, notices Freddy's red cheeks, she asks whether he is feeling all right. A classmate, Max, presented as one of the biggest teasers, chimes in to say, "I think he's turning red because his girlfriend is holding his hand" (37). Flustered, Freddy quickly releases Jessie's hand and insists, "She's not my girlfriend" (38). However, Max persists, singing the familiar "Freddy and Jessie, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" Freddy is humiliated and laments, "I wished I could make myself disappear. I'd never been so embarrassed in my life!'" Freddy, therefore, wants to keep the valentine a secret because he worries that the teasing will escalate if his peers witness a special exchange

between a boy and girl. When we remember that the authorial and adult voice broods over the text from Klein's introductory note, this situation of gendered relationships as central and troublesome brings with it the implication that adult guardians want to ensure that relationships between children are clearly defined and platonic.

Mrs. Wushy's intervention is apropos of this kind of guardianship. In response to Max's teasing, Mrs. Wushy steps in to explain gender relationships. She tells the class, "Just because two people hold hands does not mean they are boyfriend and girlfriend. You all are way too young to have boyfriends and girlfriends anyway. But boys can have girls who are friends, and girls can have boys who are friends" (36). Jessie adds, "And Freddy is my good friend […] Do you have a problem with that?" To which Max replies, "Uh, no […] Just make sure you don't forget to give your little friend a kiss on Valentine's Day" (38). The comment wins Max a visit to the principal's office and prompts Mrs. Wushy to reinforce her point about appropriate and acceptable interaction between boys and girls: "As I said, we are all friends in this class. Boys can play with girls, and girls can play with boys, and there's nothing to be embarrassed about" (39). Oddly enough, it is in this same scene that both Jessie and Freddy express how much they enjoy Valentine's Day. Freddy even says that it is his favorite holiday next to Christmas.[9] Without Mrs. Wushy's intervention, however, the holiday quickly devolves into one of favoritism and teasing. Though adults are presented as intrusive and as obstacles throughout the book,[10] they are also necessary guardians who control the social chaos that simmers without their influence. In this case, the chaos indicated is that of peer-teasing based on gender and cross-gender relationships. The suggestions in Mrs.

Wushy's directive comments are that gender and sexuality must be properly introduced, explained, and regulated by adults.

In an effort to prevent any additional Valentine's Day teasing and feelings of exclusion, Mrs. Wushy lays out what have now become popular rules for children's Valentine's Day celebrations. Most importantly, she mandates that the children must make valentines for all their classmates. Mrs. Wushy announces this rule when she tells the class that they will have "a little party" during which the first graders can "pass out valentines to [their] friends" (18). When one of the students asks how many valentines they need to pass out, Mrs. Wushy clarifies, "You need to make one for everyone in the class" (19). One girl protests, saying, "Not everyone in this class is my friend." Mrs. Wushy corrects her and reinforces the celebration guidelines, reminding the class, "I make the rules, and I say that you have to make a valentine for everyone. You cannot pick and choose." She explains that her rule stands so that "no one will be left out" (20). In this exchange, it becomes evident that Mrs. Wushy, the teacher and the adult, controls the holiday celebration. She passes on what she deems acceptable traditions to the students, and moreover, she uses the holiday as a socializing tool. The children get a lesson on treating everyone equally and valuing all the members of their community, which, as will be reinforced later in this chapter, has come to be the most common message in Valentine's Day literature.[11]

In another moment emphasizing adult instruction, we see Freddy's mother in charge of his valentine productions. Freddy notes, "Usually we buy our valentines at the store, but this year my mom and my sister, Suzie, decided they wanted to make

valentines. My mom had bought red and pink paper, stickers, glitter, markers, stamps, and doilies" (23). Freddy laments that "all this stuff is for girls," but his mom explains, "Well, I thought you could cut out a big red heart, put one of these cool shark stickers on it, and write 'Happy Valentine's Day'" (23). Freddy finds something wrong with this plan too, remarking, "That's going to take forever. Why couldn't we just buy them like we always do?" (24). Freddy's sister and mother are excited about the project and the "beautiful" valentines that they will produce, but Freddy complains, "Beautiful is for girls […] I want mine to look cool" (24). Freddy starts to come around to the idea of making the valentines when his mother shows him the shark stickers she has purchased, but his happiness does not last long. After Freddy finishes cutting out the hearts, he asks his mother what he should do next. She instructs him to write the recipient's name on the top of each valentine, stamp on a "Happy Valentine's Day" message, and then sign his name. Once again, Freddy moans, "That's going to take forever!" (29). But his mother replies, "If you just do it, you'll see it won't take very long, and you'll have fun doing it" (29). So he does, and he concedes, "You were right, Mom. This is a lot of fun." In this scene, Freddy does eventually come to enjoy the holiday plans his mother lays out, but after much cajoling. By the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, fictional children rarely need persuading to show their excitement for holidays such as Halloween and Christmas, but that is not as frequently the case with Valentine's Day. Though Freddy identifies making the valentines as "fun" in this chapter, he continues to vent frustration that he cannot make Jessie's valentine the way he wants to without questions from his sister and mother and without his mother's insistent supervision.

Moreover, despite the oversight provided by Mrs. Wushy and his mother, Freddy continues to worry that he will be mocked in school and at home if anyone finds out about the super-secret valentine he wants to make for Jessie. He knows that his sister Suzie "would never stop teasing" (33) if she saw him making a special valentine for a girl, so he devises a plan to craft the valentine in his room. He needs help working out his plan because his mother—in another moment of adult guardianship—has stored the valentine supplies in a hard to reach cabinet that Freddy cannot access without attracting her attention, so Freddy asks his friend Robbie for advice. Even in this case, though, Freddy worries, "I didn't want him to know I was making a Valentine for Jessie. I would just tell him that I was making a secret valentine for my mom" (33). Robbie never finds out who the valentine is really for, but Suzie does, and she teases Freddy, "smirking, 'It's for your girlfriend'" (63). Freddy gets upset, yells at Suzie, and buys her silence by promising her some of his Valentine's Day candy. When Valentine's Day finally arrives, Freddy gives Jessie the Valentine, and he makes her swear secrecy. When she asks why, Freddy says, "Because…just because" (82). Though Freddy is finally able to give Jessie the kind of valentine he wants her to have, the gender worry in the book is never really resolved because the threat of teasing persists even through the final pages.

The issues of gender anxiety and adult heavy-handedness that are central to Klein's easy reader also operate in Barbara Cohen's *213 Valentines* (1991), a near-contemporary text of Klein's with a publication date sixteen years earlier, but Cohen's novel probes deeper into issues of popularity among peers, likely a feature of the slightly older age of Cohen's protagonist (nine or ten), a stage when the desire to be accepted is

even more pronounced than it is for first graders. The book's title comes from the fourth grade protagonist's plan to send himself 213 valentines at his new school so that he will appear popular. Wade is "a superior student," especially in math, and so he is transferred from Roosevelt School to Kennedy, which has a special program for gifted and talented students (2). Kennedy School, however, presents an environment very different from the one Wade has known. Wade is black and lower middle class, and he has grown up in a non-nuclear family structure. Ever since his parents' divorce, Wade has lived in an apartment in a four-family house with his aunt, who works as an intake secretary at a hospital, and his uncle, an Amtrak conductor. His mother has been "staying with her cousin in Milwaukee while she learned fancy computer stuff" so that she can get a better job (3). There is no mention of Wade's father. Cohen's emphasis on race and class immediately prompts readers to understand that the majority of the children at Kennedy School are from affluent, white families.

On the first day of school, the differences between Wade and the other students is emphasized. When Wade introduces himself, one girl exclaims, "I never knew anyone from Roosevelt School before. Do you live in Woodlawn Park? […] I never knew anyone who lived in Woodlawn Park before […] Are you sure you're in the right room?" (8). Wade is immediately, and understandably, defensive. Later in the day, economic difference is highlighted. One student asks whether the class should complete their homework assignments on their computers. The question prompts another student to point out, "Some people might not have computers" (10).[12] The observation seems to be directed at Wade and Dink (short for Darlene), the only other student selected from

Roosevelt to participate in the district-wide gifted and talented program. Wade obviously feels as though he has nothing in common with his new classmates, and he pits himself against the "snobs," the "rich, snotty creeps," and everything about their dominant culture, including holidays (20).

From the beginning of the book, holidays are linked to an expression of the dominant classroom culture, and Wade's rejection of holidays signifies a larger rejection of all things related to the prevailing culture of his new environment.[13] For example, when Wade's teacher Mr. Peretti asks whether Wade will wear a costume to the Halloween party, Wade responds with a sullen "Costumes are dumb" (13). Mr. Peretti reminds Wade of the social expectation, saying, "We always wear costumes for Halloween at Kennedy School" (13). But Wade resists both the costumes and the assimilation they represent when he informs Mr. Peretti that he is "not at Kennedy School because [he] want[s] to be at Kennedy School." Then he adds, "I'm not wearing a dumb Halloween costume" (14). And he does not. When February rolls around, Mr. Peretti tells Wade that they "always celebrate Valentine's Day" at Kennedy School, and Wade is once again disappointed and reluctant to participate (1). He tells Mr. Peretti that they did not celebrate Valentine's Day at Roosevelt School, and when Mr. Peretti asks Dink whether that is true, she replies, "The girls sent valentines […] [m]ostly the boys didn't" (1). In a comment that again joins holidays and dominant culture, Mr. Peretti tells Wade that "*everyone* sends valentines" at Kennedy School (2). The custom at Kennedy is to put all the students' names in a hat, and then each student picks the name of one classmate to whom he or she must send a valentine. That way, each student

receives at least one valentine. The students also decorate a big box during art class to act as a central mail station for their valentines, but Wade refuses to help. When the art teacher, Mrs. Krause, approaches Wade and tells him that "this is your valentine box too," Wade tells her that he would rather do his math homework (17). Mrs. Krause's assertion about this being Wade's holiday rankles when compared to the illustration that accompanies the scene. The illustration shows white children working with the traditional valentine symbols of hearts and lace while Wade, the only black child in the picture, sits at his desk. The holiday hardly seems to be his.

Though Mrs. Krause allows Wade to sit out from the decorating, Mr. Peretti does not let Wade refrain from drawing a name for his valentine. During the name drawing, it becomes clear that Wade does not want to participate because he worries about receiving the fewest valentines. He calculates how many he might receive, thinking, "He might actually get two, one from whoever picked his name and one from Dink. Unless of course, Dink picked his name. Then it was back to just one. Allison would get fifty-two, at least. Marcus would get thirty-eight. Actually everyone in the room except him and Dink would probably receive piles of valentines" (15). The prospect of not receiving as many valentines as others begins to haunt Wade. In a dream, the mailbox becomes a towering figure as "big as a skyscraper. Only this time it was transparent. He could see that it was full of valentines. He could even read the names on them. In that whole box there wasn't one valentine addressed to him. He sat up in bed and turned on the lamp. 'I don't care,' he said to himself. 'I know I'll get one valentine, maybe two. And I don't

care if I don't get any.' […] There, in the silence and the darkness, he admitted to himself that he did care" (20).

After this dream, Wade hatches the plan to send himself valentines so that his classmates will think he is popular. He arranges to meet Dink at Kmart. Though Wade consistently complains about Dink in his narration,[14] he does not want to make the shopping trip alone, and he cannot ask any of his neighborhood friends to go because he is embarrassed to tell them how unpopular he is at his new school. At Kmart, Wade spends more than thirty dollars of the money he has been saving for a dirt bike. Wade knows that this is a lot of money, but he declares the situation "an emergency" (22). Wade speeds through the selections, grabbing punch-out valentines with no discernment, which prompts Dink to point out that he is "going too fast" (22). She critiques both his spending and his crass attitude toward the holiday when she implores him to "look them over, make sure they're the ones you really want" (23). But Wade critiques Dink's attitude right back. Dink plans to send valentines to her mother, her sister, and Angie, the girl she is friendliest with at Kennedy, and when Wade asks whether she expects to get valentines in return, she admits that she does not. Wade then comments, "If they're not going to send you valentines […] I don't see why you should send them valentines" (25). She tells Wade, "I just want to. It's fun sending valentines. It's fun watching people's faces when they open them" (25). For Wade, the act of exchanging valentines is built on reciprocity. For Dink, the act is an ideal, and she spends more time picking out her few valentines than Wade spends picking out his many.

In a later scene, Cohen once again uses the dynamic between Dink and Wade to highlight Wade's negative attitude towards Valentine's Day and its perceived values. In the passage, Wade fails to stick up for Dink when another student teases her. Dink has offered to help Wade drop his valentines into the class's box a few at a time when no one else is in the room, but Allison catches Dink dropping the valentines, and she asks why Dink is sending so many. When Dink tells her that she simply wants to send more, Allison, in a comment evocative of Wade's criticism, remarks, "I don't see why, since you're only going to get one" (35). Other students come to Dink's defense, however, and suggest that they will be sending valentines to her. When Allison asks Wade whether he is sending Dink one, he avoids the question and simply notes that the bus is waiting. Scenes like this one and the one in Kmart present Dink and her attitude as preferable to Wade and his attitude, suggesting that Wade is in the wrong with his approach to Valentine's Day and to Kennedy School in general.

Wade realizes his mistake and knows that all he had to do to save Dink from teasing was say, "I'm sending Dink a valentine" (37), so when he arrives home, he begins to change his plan. He addresses 50 of the valentines he purchased to Dink, and with this step, he begins to locate himself within the social culture of his school. While Wade is dropping Dink's valentines into the class mailbox, Marcus comes in, and Wade is surprised to find that "Marcus didn't seem to think Wade was doing anything odd" (40). In this moment, Wade abandons his feelings of difference and realizes, "I've got the same kind of brain as everyone else. The same kind of heart too" (40). The action that accompanies his new attitude toward assimilation is, significantly, involvement in a

holiday tradition. Wade continues to work in the holiday tradition by sending valentines to friends from his old school, to all the students in his new school (except Allison), to Mr. Peretti, to his mother, and to his uncle, and he picks out the prettiest card for his Auntie Mae. After that, he still has 54 valentines left, so he decides to send them to children who have been admitted to the hospital where his aunt works. He has seen his aunt's sadness over the need to admit children when she notes one evening, "I admitted three more kids today. That pediatric ward is so stuffed they had to roll in more beds. The grown-ups I can take. After all, they've had a life. But those kids, they really get to me" (44). When Wade makes the valentines for these children, he deepens his participation in the holiday and its traditions, even expanding on the traditions with his own ideas. Instead of using the common reds and pinks that he identifies as boring when he is shopping with Dink,[15] Wade uses his "psychedelic Magic Markers" to draw hearts on the bag containing the hospital valentines. He chooses greens and blues, yellow and purple, and "when he was done, he gazed at the bag with satisfaction. He thought it was really beautiful" (45).

Wade puts a unique spin on Valentine's Day by redefining the colors that he will use to represent the holiday, but at the same time, this scene communicates two messages very typical of Valentine's Day children's literature: he learns the importance of community and the value of charity. When Wade opens himself to the new people in his school community, he finds that they are kinder than he had originally thought. Wade realizes that the barriers of race and class are—in this story at least—false barriers, as they were in North's text, and he releases those barriers to expand his social circle to

include old friends, new friends, family, and friendly adult figures such as teachers.[16] Through valentines, Wade is able to express sentiment to all members of that circle.

Even with Wade's newfound investment in his community, the problem of cross-gender interactions raised in other twentieth and twenty-first-century holiday literature appears. Wade and Marcus build the common ground of their friendship on the backs of girls. In the passage when Marcus finds Wade stuffing valentines into the classroom box, Wade and Marcus discuss Allison's mean-spirited remarks about Wade and Dink. Marcus identifies Allison as a "snob," a word used quite frequently in Wade's speech, thus building a rhetorical connection between the two boys. After remarking that Allison is a snob, Marcus adds, "Mostly, girls really stink," to which Wade "nodded vigorous agreement" (42). Wade then asks Marcus whether he is sending valentines to any girls, and Marcus responds by "look[ing] down at his sneakers as he rubbed one of his toes into the floor. 'Well, yeah. You sort of have to. I mean if you've lived next door to a person your whole life, like I live next door to Ellie…'" Wade commiserates, "I sort of live next door to Dink […] So I'm sending her some valentines. I just didn't want to tell Allison. It's none of her business. Anyway, I think valentines are sort of babyish." Marcus agrees, "Yeah, well maybe next year in fifth grade we won't have to bother with them." When Wade observes that the girls would miss sending them, Marcus suggests, "'Then in fifth grade let the girls send them.' Wade laughed. 'Yeah, let the girls send them'" (42). As earlier interactions with teachers demonstrated, Wade is not allowed to ignore the holiday entirely, but he is allowed to align himself with a masculine distaste for it. After this exchange, Wade announces to Dink that they could start eating lunch

with their new (gender-appropriate) friends—Wade with the boys, Dink with the girls. Previously, Wade and Dink had stuck together at lunch because they were from the same school, but now Wade suggests that Dink sit with Angie and that he sit with Marcus. The text thus establishes gender as a dividing characteristic when it comes to taste and friends, and the book uses the Valentine's Day setting as the opportunity for observing this difference. In a novel about overcoming social obstacles, this tolerance of enforcing gender difference is all the more striking. Throughout the story, Wade finds that race and class, which he had built up as insurmountable blockades, are less important than he has thought. By the end of the book, those concerns of race and economic status stop functioning as the primary obstructions for Wade, and instead, gender comes to be the dividing line in his friendships. While race and class are not acceptable or permissible as social barriers in the book, gender is.

**The Enduring Lesson of Community-Mindedness and Charitable Spirit**

Even as gender arises as a problem in the novel, Wade's experience is similar to that of many fictional Valentine's Day characters in the lesson on community and charity. This is the central message of "The Mission of Mabel's Valentine," as well, and it crops up throughout the twentieth century in texts such as Dorothy Kunhardt's *Happy Valentine* (illus. Garth Williams, 1949), Mariana's (pseudonym of Marian Foster Curtiss) *Miss Flora McFlimsey's Valentine* (1962), and Frank Modell's *One Zillion Valentines* (1981). One of the strongest examples coms in Eileen Spinelli's *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* (1991), a story about a lonely, crusty old man. Spinelli's picture

book ties joy, excitement, and pleasure to interpersonal relationships, using Valentine's Day as a catalyst for those relationships and the setting by which to explore them. At the beginning of the story, Mr. Hatch is presented as a "tall and thin" man who "did not smile," who "'keeps to himself,'" who "was all alone" and "had no friends," and who follows a tedious and regimented schedule. We are meant to understand from illustrator Paul Yalowitz's brown and grey palette that Mr. Hatch's life is drab. And we are meant to understand from Spinelli's words that his life is dreary because there is no one in it. Things change for Mr. Hatch, though, when the postman delivers a big, heart-shaped box of Valentine chocolate to him with an unsigned card, reading, "Somebody loves you." Mr. Hatch had not even realized that it was Valentine's Day before the delivery, but the mysterious chocolates spark an immediate change in his behavior and outlook. When he accepts the package, he thanks the postman though he had "never spoke[n]" to him before, and the postman returns a warm smile. Giddy over the thought of a secret admirer, Mr. Hatch "did something he had never done before: He laughed. He laughed and danced and clapped his hands."

After the exchange with the postman, Mr. Hatch puts effort into his social interactions, and his circle of friends and acquaintances grows quickly. He wears more colorful clothes, he splashes his face with aftershave, he waves hello to people he passes on the street, and he brings the box of candy to share with his workmates rather than eating alone. Instead of just stopping by the newsstand to buy the paper as usual, he also purchases some mints, chats with the stand's owner, finds out that the owner is not feeling well, and offers to watch the stand so that the owner can visit the doctor. Instead

of just making his usual order at the grocery store, he talks with the grocer, discovers that the grocer's little girl is late coming home from school, volunteers to look for her, and finds her by the swings. Though his neighborhood is a bit surprised by the sudden change, they welcome him warmly, and he becomes quite popular, especially with the neighborhood children because of his delicious brownies, his harmonica playing, and the stories he reads aloud. In the days and weeks that follow, "When Mr. Hatch wasn't smiling, he was laughing. And when he wasn't laughing he was helping someone. And when he wasn't helping someone, he was having a party in his yard or on his porch." Mr. Hatch makes such an impression that when the postman reveals the valentine to be a mix-up, the neighborhood rallies to show Mr. Hatch that he really is loved even though the valentine was not for him.

Both Wade and Mr. Hatch learn that their communities are inviting places filled with wonderful people if they are willing to be socially involved, and the texts of both *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* and *213 Valentines* use Valentine's Day as the setting to communicate this message. Valentine's Day becomes an occasion for expanding social identity and representing the fulfillment that comes from many types of relationships. Because these texts reinforce the idea that being part of a community is better than isolating oneself, they reinforce the idea that a powerful message of socialization and community spiritedness has become something of a behavioral mandate in the holiday's literature. This message becomes all the more important if we take to heart the dedication that Spinelli includes in her picture book. Spinelli's dedication "To that little bit of Mr. Hatch in all of us" invests Valentine's Day and its

message of community with special importance. With this dedication, Spinelli suggests to her readers that an uncertainty about how we will be received by others is a normal, innate part of life. If we agree that there is a "little bit of Mr. Hatch in all of us," then a day that promotes socialization and encourages public acknowledgement of all kinds of relationships could not be more vital.

Closely linked to this lesson on community is the message on charity. This message is part of Mabel's "mission" in sending the valentine to Placide, it is part of Mr. Hatch's valentine experience when he offers to help the newsstand owner and the grocer, and it is part of Wade's valentine experience in the attention he shows to the sick children. These acts of charity comprise a common Valentine's Day thread, and in fact, a hospital scene closely related to the one in *213 Valentines* appears in the Valentine's chapter of Henrietta Eliot's *Laura's Holidays* (1898). Though a century stands between the two texts, the lessons learned by Wade and Laura are remarkably parallel when it comes to charity.[17] Laura is more excited about Valentine's Day from the get-go than Wade is, which again reinforces the observation that nineteenth-century literature presents children who are immediately more enthusiastic about Valentine's Day than twentieth-century children are. Laura is eager to construct valentines for all the boys and girls she knows. Her mother, Mrs. Sturges, like Freddy's mother, steps in to direct the valentine making process though Mrs. Sturges is presented as knowledgeable and respected while Freddy's mother is intrusive and something of a nuisance. When Laura enthusiastically asks her mother for permission to send out several valentines, Mrs. Sturges acquiesces and tells Laura, "I think you would enjoy making them yourself […]

I will give you some pretty note-paper, and ever so many little pictures and bits of gilt paper" (17). She spreads all the materials out on the dining room table for Laura and Laura's friend May. Eliot emphasizes the "fun [the girls] had" pasting gilt paper and pictures onto the outside leaves of their valentines. They leave a space blank on the inside leaves so that Mrs. Sturges can write "pretty verses" on each valentine. The girls work hard and happily on their valentines for two days. On the start of the second day, Mrs. Sturges takes the opportunity to communicate the familiar lesson of charity, which comes in sending a valentine to a peer who is either unpopular or disadvantaged in some way. In this case, the peer, a boy named Philip, is in the hospital with a hip disease. Mrs. Sturges suggests that each girl make a special valentine for him so that she can send the notes by mail to the poor boy. Laura and May readily agree, exclaiming, "Oh, how nice! […] we'll make him the very best one of all!" (18).

Even after the valentines are sent, Laura does not forget about Philip. She visits friends to pass out valentines, and she receives her own, but "all the time in the midst of her own pleasure, she kept wondering if poor little Philip in the hospital was enjoying his" (21). Laura goes so far as to wish that a member of her family was a little bit sick so that the doctor would have to come, at which time he could report on how Philip liked his valentines. When the doctor finally comes to the Sturgeses' for a visit (because he is a friend of the family, not because anyone is sick), he invites Laura to the hospital to visit Philip. At the hospital—which Eliot depicts as a comfortable and cozy place rather than a sterile and painful one—Laura sees her valentine pinned to the wall, and in the scene, we are meant to see that both Laura and Philip benefit from the act of charity.

Laura is pleased to see her card hanging on the wall, and Philip is pleased to learn at last who had sent the card. The visit sparks a friendship, and Laura goes to see Philip again, the next time bringing the leftover pictures from her valentine crafts so that she can help Philip make a scrapbook. Readers witness the reward for charitable spirit again on Laura's second visit. Eliot describes "how Philip's eyes danced when they came into his ward!" and "how happy he was when he saw the pretty pictures, the paste, the brushes, and the book!" (24-25). Laura, in return, "felt very proud and happy when she was teaching him" (25). Valentine's Day and its activities thus become the force that provokes their friendship, and charity is shown to be a rewarding and enjoyable activity for young people.[18]

**Conclusion**

The emphasis on community-mindedness, charitable spirit, and social integration that runs throughout Valentine's Day children's literature with atemporal persistence locates the holiday primarily within the class of recommitment holidays. Throughout the literature, there are constant reminders to children that they must operate as part of a group and that being part of the group is far superior to the social isolation that surely comes in life outside of the collective, evidenced in characters such as Mr. Hatch. The interactive elements of the holiday, including making and handing out valentines, encourage children to engage with their peers and social circles, and many Valentine's Day children's texts even offer participatory elements in a formal reflection of the kind of active, involved role the literature encourages children to demonstrate on the

holiday.[19] Interestingly, this impulse to shape children actively as participants of the holiday has featured more didactically in recent holiday literature than in the nineteenth-century literature, though instruction on proper celebration certainly factored in then as well. Recent literature has portrayed the fictional child as dismissive of the holiday, removed from or anxious about his or her social surroundings, and in need of adult-generated enthusiasm and directives.

In addition to demonstrating increased heavy-handedness and enthusiasm from fictional adults and decreased initial excitement from fictional children, recent Valentine's Day literature also raises the issue of gender difference as an inter-personal obstacle, and this issue is not always satisfactorily resolved. While gender difference does not necessarily preclude friendship in nineteenth-century stories such as "Valentine Frolics" and the valentine chapter in *Laura's Holidays*, it grows as a source of tension in *Caddie Woodlawn*, and it is the central conflict in texts such as *Super-Secret Valentine*. Klein's text filters the acceptable parameters of boy/girl relationships through the authoritative and instructive voice of Mrs. Wushy, and the main character, Freddy, never publicly admits that he likes a girl for fear of peer teasing. Instead, he denies his feelings whenever the subject arises among peers or family. Moreover, in his thoughts, Freddy makes it clear that he likes Jessie precisely because she is not "girly." Jessie "never whines or complains. She is one of the toughest kids in the class. In fact, she is one of the few kids who stands up to Max. She isn't afraid of him at all" (18). Additionally, the text emphasizes that Freddy does not become feminized just because he likes a girl. As previously mentioned, when Freddy is perusing the art supplies his mother has

purchased, Freddy protests that all the stuff "for girls" (27), and the valentine he ultimately makes for Jessie is in the shape of a basketball. *213 Valentines* also deals with the trouble of gender by presenting gender as the only category children may use to restrict friendships. Cohen's valentine novel reinforces a cultural perception that children should build friendships primarily, and even exclusively, within their own genders, which is obvious when Wade finally bonds with a male classmate at his new school over jabs against their female peers.

This gender commentary in texts such as *Super-Secret Valentine* and *213 Valentines* seems to contradict much of the other work Valentine's Day literature does for children. On the whole, the literature persistently fosters attitudes of charity, community spirit, and social involvement, arming children with recognizable paradigms by which expressions of sentiment and kindness can be ritualized and practiced. While a charitable community spirit has remained a focus of the literature since the nineteenth century, the literature introduces gender—perhaps for the first time for some characters and readers—as difference, and that difference often constitutes a problem or a division. Along with the strong messages against ostracizing others and against isolating oneself, the fiction intimates that separation according to gender is appropriate, permissible, and even desirable. The holiday literature thus presents gender as an integral part of social identities while also giving gender a troublesome and exclusionary pall. Such a treatment of gender serves to divorce the holiday from its sexualized history, which may well be the conscious or unconscious aim of adults who construct and promote Valentine's Day literature. Nevertheless, in light of the interest that Valentine's fiction has in socializing

the child, providing the child with the language and paradigms by which to communicate interpersonal sentiments, and passing on ideals of altruism and public investment, this presentation of gender division becomes all the more conspicuous. Read in conjunction with nineteenth-century children's literature, more recent Valentine's Day texts serve as a reminder of the cultural silence that society demands with regards to children and sexuality, and of the perceived need for adults to construct and monitor childhood expressions of gender.

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Notes

[1] In "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," Perry Nodelman observes the cultural impulse to present a children's canon that is "almost totally silent on the subject of sexuality, presumably in order to allow ourselves to believe that children truly are as innocent as we claim—that their lives are devoid of sexuality" (30). Nodelman claims that silence on sexuality is problematic because it makes it "difficult for children to speak to us about their sexual concerns: our silence on the subject clearly asserts that we have no wish to hear about it, that we think children with such concerns are abnormal" (30). While the texts surveyed in this chapter are not always silent on the matter of sexuality—many of them do in fact hint at sexuality specifically through their dealings with cross-gender relationships—they color sexuality through the negative accompaniments of anxiety, embarrassment, separation, and teasing.

[2] Though scholarship on Valentine's Day is slim in comparison to many of the other holidays covered in this project, there are a few literary and historical studies that have informed this chapter. Anthony Aveni's chapter "February's Holidays: Prediction, Purification, and Passionate Pursuit" in *The Book of the Year* and Jack Oruch's "St. Valentine, Chaucer, and Spring in February" engage with the history of the holiday and participate in the debates that variously link the modern Valentine's Day's origins to the Roman festival of Lupercalia and Juno the Fructifier, Christian legends of St. Valentine, and the poetry of Chaucer (especially *Parliament of Fowls*) and his literary contemporaries and heirs. Oruch, in particular, traces the literary history of the holiday, examining written representations of the Christian Valentine figure through secular and ecclesiastical accounts, including martyrologies, sacramentaries, and legendaries to "fuller literary treatments" such as the *Legenda aurea*, the *South English Legendary*, and the drama *Saint Valentin*" (549) in order to establish the material that Chaucer would have been familiar with. Vivian R. Pollack's "Emily Dickinson's Valentines" provides a rare exploration of the holiday in nineteenth-century American literature. Pollack notes, "Valentine writing, during the first part of the 19th century, was much more widespread than it had ever been before or has been since" (61). However, Pollack observes, "Valentine poems were never written in any great numbers by established poets" even though "the valentine poem was a respectable literary genre, a minor offshoot of love poetry." By the nineteenth century, "valentine poetry was almost exclusively associated with adolescent amateurs. The great popularity of valentine writing among the young did not serve to elevate the genre in the eyes of literary men. Poe, perhaps because of his special interest in women as the proper subjects for poetry, was virtually

the only American poet to publish a valentine poem once he had achieved any significant professional reputation." At the same time, other literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson decried the merchandising culture promoted by the Valentine holiday in the mid-nineteenth century (see also Aveni 45).

[3] As indicated in the second footnote, history scholars connect the holiday variously to Roman festivals, Christian legend, and Chaucer's poetry, and each of these sources has evolved to carry some link to mating and/or romantic love and courtship. Aveni notes that the Roman Lupercalia was associated with fertility rituals and that the feast of Juno the Fructifier involved a love lottery through which young men and women would be paired for the festival and/or for the upcoming year (39-40). Oruch, however, questions the intellectual rigor and historical accuracy of such accounts and of their influence on the modern Valentine's Day (539). Nevertheless, this ancient history continues to feed into popular narratives of the holiday's history as do accounts of St. Valentine. The legend that has been promoted in popular lore surrounding the holiday most often figures St. Valentine as a young priest in the third century who performed marriages though they had been outlawed by Claudius II because of the need to increase military enlistment. At the time, only unmarried men "were pressed into service" (Aveni 41). According to the lore, Valentine's efforts were so popular that after he was imprisoned for violating Roman law, "young people came to visit him, offering him flowers and slipping him notes expressing shared feelings lauding love over war. These missives were the first 'valentines.' Later someone spiced up the story by suggesting that while in prison Valentine…fell in love with or had an affair with the jailer's daughter and sent her messages, including a farewell note before his death, signed 'From your Valentine.'" These histories connect Valentine to love and marriage, but many of the symbols now associated with Valentine's Day had no connection to the holiday until Chaucer, whom Oruch credits with the creation of a poetic tradition that linked springtime imagery and romantic courtship with the February 14 holiday.

[4] In the first chapter of *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture,* Barry Shank examines the "intersection of the material and the sentimental in nineteenth-century valentines" (22). Shank's study provides information on the practical material and industrial advancements (such as those in paper production) that have facilitated the spread of Valentine's Day cards. Shank also references Esther Howland (1828-1904) who is often referred to as the "Mother of the American Valentine" for her role in transforming the European-style valentine card into an American-made commodity. As Shank observes, the story of Howland's business success, set in the manufacturing town of Worcester, MA, has evolved both to typify the burgeoning commercial culture of the mid-nineteenth century and to act as "a fantasy of redeemed manual labor, of the survival of artisanal relations into the era of mass production" (62). For more on Howland, see Nancy Rosin's "Mother of the American Valentine" in *American History* 40.1 (April 2005, 62–64) and the American Antiquarian Society's webpage "Making Valentines: A Tradition in America."

[5] These comic and rude valentines are mentioned in *Caddie Woodlawn* as well, though Caddie thinks of them as more fun than hurtful.

[6] The text gives only a short description of the party, but we are told that it was "a fine affair, with scalloped oysters, frosted cakes, and many other enjoyable features," details that give some insight into the scope of the celebrations (294).

[7] Cross, whose thoughtful treatment of certain holidays contributes to other chapters of this dissertation, not only excludes a thorough examination of Valentine's Day from his study, but also dismisses it entirely as a holiday meriting investigation. Cross mentions Valentine's Day briefly—and derogatorily—in his discussion of the ways that holidays were integrated into American classrooms in the early twentieth century. "By the end of the nineteenth century," Cross observes, "American educators advocated passing 'ancient' holiday traditions on to children" in hopes of "preserving 'traditional' celebrations that were disappearing from an increasingly urbanized and mobile society" (100). According to Cross, these activities might be touted as "noble and educational" if associated with the themes around holidays such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and presidential birthdays, "but teachers also taught children to celebrate the seemingly frivolous Valentine's Day" (100-101). Cross is especially critical of advice books such as Dorothy Spicer's *Parties for Young Americans* (1940), which "turned Valentine's Day, a minor holiday celebrating love between adult sweethearts, into a child's 'bridge luncheon,' with Jack Horner pie centerpieces and a game involving the selection of hearts on a tree that innocently matched boys and girls.

This latter bit of romantic silliness was certain to embarrass the children, especially the boys" (100-101). Not only does Cross snub the holiday here, but he also genders it and dismisses it in part because of that gender. Cross's attitude and his reasons for rejecting Valentine's Day resemble those of many fictional boys, who dismiss the holiday as one "for girls."

[8] Several books featuring teasing or confusion over cross-gender peer interactions appeared in the interim, including many that engage the issue through the "secret admirer" convention of Valentine's Day. Examples include Pamela Bianco's *The Valentine Party* (1954), Marc Brown's *Arthur's Valentine* (1980), Barbara Williams's *A Valentine for Cousin Archie* (illus. Kay Chorao, 1981).

[9] Many fictional children identify Christmas and their birthdays as their favorite days of the year. Halloween is the most common third choice. In the research for this project, Freddy turns up as the only fictional character to specify Valentine's Day as his favorite holiday after Christmas.

[10] Freddy's mother, for example, is an obstacle that Freddy must negotiate. In order to make his super-secret valentine, Freddy has to sneak the crafts from the top shelf of a tall cabinet and then smuggle them up to his room. His mother interrupts Freddy several times while he is collecting the crafts and knocks on his door often while he is working on the project. Freddy must insist to his mother several times that he is old enough to be responsible and do things on his own.

[11] This lesson is also communicated in Mabel's behavior towards Placide and in Tom Woodlawn's treatment of Katie, who is so shy that she is often ignored until she receives Tom's valentine.

[12] After telling his aunt and uncle about this comment, Wade does receive a computer for Christmas. Though he would have rather had a dirt bike, he thanks his aunt and uncle for the gift because "He knew it hadn't been an easy thing for them to buy" (14).

[13] I explore this relationship between holidays and dominant culture further in the Fourth of July chapter.

[14] In one of his first descriptions of Dink, for instance, Wade comments, "She's not only a girl, she's a nerd. There's nothing worse than a lady nerd" (11).

[15] In Kmart, Wade characterizes the valentines as "all the same, a lot of red hearts and dumb sayings" (23).

[16] Maud Hart Lovelace's *The Valentine Box* (1966) provides a similar message of comfort regarding race. The book's main character, Janice, is black while the other students at her new school are white. This detail is evident only through the illustrations, not through the text, which reinforces the Valentine message that race should not be any sort of obstacle in peer interactions. Janice misses her old friends, but the Valentine's Day holiday offers the perfect opportunity for her to make new friends.

[17] The children in Freddy's classroom provide an obvious contrast to Laura, who we know from the birthday chapter of her text is also six. At the start of the chapter, Laura herself asks if she may send valentines to "all the little boys and girls I know" (17) while Freddy and his classmates must be reminded of both the holiday and their obligation to send valentines to all members of their first grade class.

[18] Though Laura and Philip develop a friendship, their interaction is clearly defined along gender lines—Laura acts as a caretaker to Philip while he is in the hospital—which silences any suggestion of inappropriate and premature romantic or sexual interest.

[19] Texts and magazine features for many holidays include crafts and games to involve children in holiday culture; however, this tradition is particularly strong in Valentine's Day materials. In the nineteenth century, markets offered, alongside pre-made cards and trinkets, valentine writers such as *The Ladies' and Gentlemen's New and Original Valentine Writer* (published by J. M. Fletcher in 1856) and Peter Quizumall's *The New Quizzical Valentine Writer* (published in 1823). According to the American Antiquarian Society, which holds a rare collection of some of these texts, valentine writers "were booklets devoted to assist in writing verses for use in handmade or purchased valentines" (http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Valentines/early.htm). These guides offered tips for crafting simple verse alongside poetry tricks such as acrostics that valentine senders could use in their homemade missives or add to the blank spaces of store-bought cards. Valentine writers thus distributed creative authority and holiday production to any literate person—including children. Many of the texts discussed in the chapter demonstrate the perpetuation of this trend by engaging characters in the making of valentine cards and valentine delivery boxes, and some texts such as Klein's *Super-Secret Valentine* offer interactive elements, including a recipe for "valentine happy-face waffles" and a "super-secret valentine word search."

# CHAPTER IV

## HALLOWEEN: INSTITUTIONAL CONTROL VERSUS CHILDHOOD FREEDOM IN CHILDREN'S HALLOWEEN COSTUME PLAY

*"You can be whatever you want," my mother said…*
- Judy Blume, *Blubber*

Halloween scholars consider the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain one of the principal predecessors to the American Halloween. For the pre-Christian Celts, Samhain, which fell on November 1, marked both the first day of the new year and the first day of winter. As a result, the day was—as Jack Satino puts it in the introduction to *Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life*—"a point of transition in the annual calendar" (xv). Celts believed that, on this transitional day, "The gates that separated the worlds of the living and the dead, of this world and the world of spirits, were opened, the barriers between this world and the next were down, and the souls of those who had died during the year were allowed entry to the otherworld" (xv). Stuart Schneider, who has compiled one of the most comprehensive guides of Halloween paraphernalia, likens the separation between life and death to a veil that was thought to be "at its thinnest" on the eve of Samhain because past, present, and future intersected on that day (5). As a result, "The spirits could easily cross over and join the living" (5). This idea of slippage between the world of the dead and the world of the living permeated nineteenth- and twentieth-century Halloween celebrations in America, but these celebrations also revealed cracks in other borders. Throughout its American history, Halloween has tested the divides of generation, class, religion, consumption/production, and race/ethnicity/immigration.

Indeed, even the individual seems to become malleable on Halloween. Juvenile behaviors not normally permitted are suddenly tolerated, children are given leave to mask and manipulate their external appearances, and children can adopt or practice a new identity through the Halloween costume.

Though several Halloween traditions will factor into the discussion in this chapter, its focus is Halloween costumes—and fictional children's behavior in those costumes—as they have been presented in children's literature throughout the twentieth century. In particular, this chapter examines the work of three female authors, Clara Ingram Judson, Beverly Cleary, and Judy Blume, as representative of the costume trends in Halloween literature.[1] Judson, Cleary, and Blume have all been celebrated for their dedicated contributions to literature for the ordinary American child, and thus a discussion of the three together considers the changing treatments of Halloween costuming traditions and influences that the average American child would typically be exposed to. The Halloween literature from the early part of the twentieth century represented in episodes such as the Halloween chapter of Judson's *Mary Jane's Kindergarten* (1918) demonstrates a strong desire to construct the holiday through educational, economic, and domestic institutions, limiting children's costume choices to ones filtered through those same institutions. As the twentieth century progressed, however, texts such as Cleary's *Ramona the Pest* (1968) and Blume's *Blubber* (1974) display an increasing appreciation of children's independent, creative choices and identity play in costuming. Moreover, this literature allows carnivalesque discord between children and dominant institutions, offering challenges to the presumed top-

down relationship between such institutions and children, especially when it comes to economic institutions. While affording child characters an increasingly active role, the literature often places children celebrating Halloween in some type of crisis or predicament, and those children often return to at least one of the "safe" institutions directing early twentieth-century literature, usually school or home. Nevertheless, the literature presents such institutions as forces that should permit children the liberty to explore identity and choices on Halloween, even when that exploration leads to discomfort, for the child or the institutions, or when that exploration results in missteps on the part of the child.

**The Early Twentieth-Century Halloween Celebration in *Mary Jane's Kindergarten***

Halloween costumes became popular in American celebrations of the holiday during the 1880s and 1890s.[2] At the time, Halloween was shifting from a subversive holiday largely associated with immigrants to a celebrated staple in the national calendar,[3] thanks in no small part to the literature that began to crop up in domestic periodicals in the later decades of the nineteenth century, including those pieces written for children (Bannatyne 101).[4] As Halloween moved into domestic space through literature, the costumes associated with the day evolved from the blackface, hoods, and crude underworld costumes employed by young adults who engaged in public pranks, often involving damage to private and public property, to sanctioned guises recommended in domestic guides for theme parties. The majority of the costumes promoted by these early guides featured outcasts and "religious outlaws" such as ghosts,

witches, and goblins, guises evocative of those donned during Celtic Samhain observations and in medieval culture to "dramatize the hidden fears and unresolved tensions" (Tuleja 90), but now instead of wandering through the dark these "outcasts" gathered in homes to play party games with peers. Mary E. Blain's holiday guide for young readers *Games for Hallowe'en* (1912), for example, suggests that children throwing a holiday gathering invite "Witches and Choice Spirits of Darkness" to a "High Carnival" at the host's home where they would participate in games of divination linked not to life and death but to romantic fate (3).[5] Also popular in the late decades of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth were "simple homemade frocks and pullovers rendered in orange and black and appliquéd with contrasting black cat, jack-ó-lantern, or crescent moon accent" (Arkins 60). Masks were recommended to complete these festive outfits.[6]

Costumes at this time were largely homemade, though instructions for making costumes, as well as new suggestions for creative getups, began to crop up in women's magazines and party guides as part of the commodification and feminization of the holiday. For example, the October 1910 volume of *The Housekeeper* floats the idea of dressing as fruits and vegetables, costumes that could "afford much amusement" with little trouble (qtd. in Arkins 62). The magazine reassures women that "with a few rolls of paper pasted or basted onto a cheesecloth foundation, any kind of vegetable or fruit may be simulated" (62-63). Dennison Manufacturing Company's *Bogie Books*, a popular series of party guides published almost every year from 1912 to 1935, also offered pointers for making crepe paper costumes alongside selections of premade crepe paper

ensembles such as the owl and the pussycat costume pair featured in the 1928 magazine. *Woman's World* stressed that with only "a little ingenuity droll juvenile costumes of black cats and owls may be worked out in crepe paper" (October 1926). Sheets and pillowcases were also common canvases for Halloween costume creations. The October 1903 edition of *The Housekeeper* highlights the ease of decorating an old sheet or pillowcase with dots to transform the partygoer into a domino game piece. The 1912 edition explains that the corners of a pillowcase can easily be gathered and fastened to resemble ears while a face/mask can then be drawn on the fabric to complete a costume. The recommendations of these guides and the frequency with which such recommendations appeared in the early twentieth century demonstrate the impulse to link the holiday with domestic and economic forces in order to create a holiday aligned with proper society rather than with marginalized and disruptive sectors of society.

The Halloween chapter in Judson's *Mary Jane's Kindergarten*[7] brings these same forces of domestic and economic institutions, adding educational institutions as well, into the realm of children's Halloween practices, and it strongly imbues children's wants with adult and institutional direction. The whole scene, in fact, is very much about the shaping of tradition and the passing on of that tradition to children. Judson's book, first published in 1918, appeared relatively early in the genre of Halloween literature for children, in the process of infantilizing Halloween, and in the kindergarten movement in America,[8] and through the chapter, Judson ties literature, education, and holidays together at the forefront of America's enculturating powers. The chapter "Halloween Frolic" follows Miss Lynn's kindergarten class as they prepare for their holiday party,

but in a significant difference between this party and later twentieth-century Halloween celebrations, these children have to be reminded of the holiday. When Miss Lynn asks the children, "How many of you know what day next Wednesday is?" (77), they have no ready answer and merely look to Miss Lynn in "puzzled wonder." They search their minds:

> Next Wednesday? It wasn't Christmas, no, they were certain sure about that. It couldn't be Thanksgiving, [sic] Thanksgiving was the beginning of winter and the beautiful red and gold leaves weren't all off the trees yet—no, it couldn't be Thanksgiving. Fourth of July, that came in the middle of the summer, Decoration Day was before Fourth of July and New Year's day was after Christmas. (77)[9]

In this passage, the text points out that Christmas is the most important holiday, and Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July seem to be next in line in terms of familiarity. Halloween, though, is not yet a staple in the child's calendar in Judson's chapter. None of the children arrives at the answer on his or her own, so Miss Lynn must prompt the groupm by asking, "Haven't any of you noticed the decorations in the windows of the stores?" (77). Here, the growing importance of retail in the recognition of the holiday becomes apparent when that prompt leads Mary Jane to recall the holiday. Mary Jane eagerly shouts, "'Oh, I know! […] I saw them when I was down town with my mother yesterday---they're pumpkin day things 'cause it's—it's—' she hunted in her mind for the big word she wanted, 'it's Hallowe'en, next Wednesday is'" (77).

The ignorance Judson locates in Mary Jane and her classmates is not entirely plausible. It is true that the bowdlerization of Halloween had not yet been cemented by 1918, and many of the most highly anticipated Halloween traditions for children, such as trick-or-treating, did not appear on the scene until later in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, Halloween was far from invisible to children at this time, and even those children in kindergarten would likely have a sense of the transgressive habits of older children on Halloween day. This scene, however, suggests that a good young child ought to know nothing about the masked pranking of naughty older children, and so Judson opts for re-creation of the holiday and a presentation of the kindergarteners as tabula rasa subjects ready to absorb holiday culture from the safe institutions of school, home, and market.

Because these children have little or no knowledge of the holiday, they need to be guided in its celebration. Again, it is Miss Lynn who suggests that the class have a party to mark the day. She gives them the option of having a "best dress party" (i.e., a formal dress party) or a costume party. Those students who begin to understand what is going on cheer for a costume party, but "some looked as though they didn't know what folks were talking about, so Miss Lynn stopped and explained that a costume party was a party where each guest came dressed up to be some one else. Then every one wanted that kind of a party just as Miss Lynn had guessed perhaps they would" (79). Miss Lynn then goes on to discuss the menu for the party, and she asks the children, "How many of you think your mother will let you bring one apple and one doughnut and two pieces of candy to the party?" In response, "Every single child held up an eager hand," to which

Miss Lynn responds, “I think she will,” as she nods with approval. Miss Lynn continues, “I’m sure your mothers will let you because most folks have doughnuts and apples in the house at Hallowe’en time and all mothers know what fun parties are” (80).

Miss Lynn’s comments work to link the Halloween celebration not only to economic institutions by mention of the market, but to the domestic institution of the nuclear family, driven by the mother. The mention of the mother as keeper of Halloween treats suggests that this is a holiday organized by women, or at least that this text wants Halloween to be a holiday organized by women. In *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children’s Culture*, Gary S. Cross observes that the female, domestic tradition is one of two veins along which Halloween developed during the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. According to Cross, the feminine vein promoted parties of “mostly young women” with calm, indoor diversions such as pumpkin carving, bobbing for apples, and divination games, once used to relieve “fears of death and the future,” but now converted to games that would predict romantic future. Parties assumed an atmosphere that was “nostalgic and playful, and no one took the pagan and magical origins of Halloween seriously” (101-02). Conversely, “a second set of Halloween customs centered around pranks and mumming committed by older boys … Masquerading as goblins and witches, male youth removed gates, broke, waxed, or soaped windows, tied shut doors, and even put buggies on roofs and tipped over outhouses. In sum, these pranks represented attacks on the domestic order” (102). Because the Halloween precursor Samhain had more in common with this external, masculine vein, taming the holiday meant developing it primarily along the feminine and

domestic line while simultaneously inverting and negating many of the original themes of the holiday, including the confrontation with death because of the female connection to creation and life.

Judson's text aligns Halloween exclusively with the feminine vein, and Miss Lynn's claims carry the idea of the female-driven holiday further into a gentle hint on appropriate maternal identity and mothering. According to Miss Lynn, mothers know about holidays, and they respect the value of parties. It is an ill and unfit mother who would not encourage a child's participation in a holiday party. While later children's novels such as *Ramona the Pest* introduce a different relationship between mother, party, and celebrating child, Miss Lynn's contention is one that has received much validation in holiday scholarship. In "The Female World of Cards and Holidays," an anthropological study of kin work, Micaela di Leonardo summarizes her collection of life studies with the observation that "the very existence of kin contact and holiday celebration depended on the presence of an adult woman in the household" (443). Elizabeth Pleck makes a similar point, noting that the "middle-class mother was at the center of the sentimental ritual, symbolizing tradition and cultural identity" (16). If Halloween was to succeed in joining sanctioned sentimental holidays, it must be linked to the female vein of celebration, a connection Judson achieves by elevating the female teacher and the mother.[10] As Judson, Pleck, and di Leonardo demonstrate, women—especially those situated as matriarchs—are the assumed preservers and perpetuators of holiday culture; a woman who does the opposite and ignores or actively rejects the day

becomes perverse (as was the case with Helen Pfeil, who will be discussed later in this chapter), or at least a less-than-desirable mother.

Miss Lynn's Halloween discussion with her young class also connects the holiday to the school setting, demonstrating how the formal educational system has been paramount in popularizing holidays and streamlining the American understanding of their histories and traditions. Ellen Litwicki observes that school holiday exercises expanded greatly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because they were recognized as ideal, malleable vehicles for the communication of national and social values. While Litwicki focuses on patriotic and civic holidays such as presidential birthdays, Judson's chapter brings Halloween into the classroom using many of the same strategies employed to streamline civic and patriotic holidays in the school curriculum and in the child's calendar. Moreover, in a demonstration of how institutions have fueled one another in the promotion of holidays, markets began buying into classroom holiday celebrations, and "School supply companies jumped on the bandwagon, offering holiday decorations, props, and souvenirs" (Litwicki 181). The children at Mary Jane's school appear to be from economically stable families, as is apparent in details such as their dress and familiarity with Christmas gift consumption, and are primed to become the next generation of American consumers who would buy into Halloween commodities just as their schools and parents do.

It seems, then, that Miss Lynn's position as a teacher and a woman makes her an ideal proponent of the holiday, and the children—largely middle class and already entrenched in national institutions—are the perfect receptacles. These children do not

decide what they want to be for Halloween. Instead, Miss Lynn assigns the costumes by giving each child a slip of paper with a typical costume written on it, and the child then delivers the paper to his or her mother so that she can construct the outfit. Mary Jane's slip, for example, instructs her to dress as a pumpkin. Another student draws the costume of a black cat, and Mary Jane's seatmate's paper indicates that he is to come as an ear of corn. Those children whose mothers cannot produce a costume are instructed to bring in white sheets so that Miss Lynn can make them into ghosts, a moment that exemplifies her assigning cultural identity to the children while also acting as a subtle reflection on the loneliness, abandonment, and exile of a child whose mother cannot or will not construct a costume. In Miss Lynn's classroom, the child whose mother fails to provide a costume becomes a ghost, and the hint is that the real-world child whose mother does not support the holiday becomes something of a social ghost. It would almost seem that a child whose mother abdicates her responsibility to make a costume is a child without a mother save the kindly and charitable schoolteacher who gladly steps in to fill the mother's role, which is, in this case, the role of promoting Halloween and its sanctioned traditions.

Mary Jane, however, does not have to worry about the lack of maternal assistance because her family is a strong example of the ideal domestic unit. When Mary Jane brings home her costume assignment, Mrs. Merrill is first a little "puzzled" (85)—reminding us again of the chapter's suggestion that good and proper families would not be familiar with Halloween until they receive sanctioned instructions from an acceptable institution, in this case the school—but then her surprise turns to happy acquiescence. As

Miss Lynn predicts, Mrs. Merrill responds that she will be "glad to" construct Mary Jane's costume and provide the appropriate treats because she "know[s] just how much fun parties are" (85). This mother drops everything to provide her daughter with a costume: "'We'll go down and get the stuff for your costume this very afternoon, Mary Jane,' decided Mrs. Merrill, 'because there isn't much time and I want it to be just right'" (85). Mrs. Merrill then turns out an elaborate pumpkin costume that is indeed "just right"; made of "crepe paper in three shades of orange and two shades of green," it features "long, outstanding petticoats," "a tiny, saucy little over jacket of stem green," and "a cunning little cap with a stiff, thick stem" (85). When the day of the party arrives, "the whole Merrill family got up early so that they might help Mary Jane get dressed" (86). Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane's older sister Alice help Mary Jane step into the costume, and even the father participates. Admittedly, he "didn't do much but admire to be sure, but they let him put the cap on at the last minute and he declared that that cap was the most important part of the whole costume!" (89) Mr. Merrill's involvement continues the idealization of the holiday by including both mother and father in domestic bliss, thereby negating the masculine and rowdy history of the holiday entirely by locating the father in the female tradition. In Judson's invention, the whole family gladly pauses to observe the holiday, and at the center stands young Mary Jane, who enjoys the holiday, though she herself has very little to do with its preparations and acts instead as a passive receiver for the influence of school, family, and market.

**The Mid-Twentieth Century Halloween Celebration in *Ramona the Pest***

While Judson's Halloween scene highlights a classroom of children who are uncertain about the day and who have virtually no liberty or authority in celebrating it, Cleary's Halloween chapter in *Ramona the Pest* depicts a kindergartener anxiously anticipating the holiday. Ramona, whose story comes fifty years after Mary Jane's, counts Halloween as the third best day of the year (the first two being Christmas and her birthday—listed in that order). While Judson's text demonstrates the process of making a child-focused holiday through educational, domestic, and economic institutions, Cleary's chapter details some of the outcomes and further developments of those traditions, including a more active role on the part of the fictional child. Instead of having her costume chosen for her, for example, Ramona picks her own, and her mother then assembles a half-purchased and half-homemade outfit.[11] As the text advances the role of the child in Halloween celebrations, those institutions of school, home, and market, which had been the unquestioned holiday guardians in Judson's text, move to more tenuous positions: Ramona's mother and teacher are not the wholly enthusiastic directors of the holiday that Mary Jane's are, and the market is not an ideal force that shapes the holiday's safe celebration, but rather an institution that threatens to cheapen and reduce the child's identity.

By the time *Ramona the Pest* was published, costume options for children had expanded greatly to include not only religious outlaw figures such as ghosts and witches, but also social outlaws such as pirates, cowboys, and gypsies, as well as costumes reflecting national events and celebrity culture (Tuleja 90-93). Ramona decides to dress

as “the baddest witch in the world” (130), a traditional choice given the increased options, though Ramona brings her own attitude to it. Ramona, we are told, “had no patience with books about good witches, because witches were supposed to be bad. Ramona had chosen to be a witch for that very reason” (130). Ramona’s sentiments about good witches versus bad witches reinforce that she is, as Claudia Mills has noted, intentionally “subversive” and positioned as an ideal character for exploring “repressed elements” of life and behavior (“Wimpy Boys and Spunky Girls” 176). Indeed, throughout earlier sections of the book, Ramona has shown a propensity for trouble-making. She cannot resist pulling Susan’s curls or stomping in mud puddles, and she is the kind of kindergartner who “[runs] around the playground” in the morning rather than getting into line to wait for the teacher (65). For Ramona, it seems that this bad witch costume will liberate, rather than stifle, a part of her character.[12] Ramona pesters her mother for days about purchasing the mask for the costume, and finally, she comes home to find the mask on her bed along with black material and a pattern that her mother will use to make the dress and hat.

When Ramona first sees the mask, she “quickly dropped it on the bed because she was not sure she even wanted to touch it” (130). The horrifying mask was “the grayish-green color of mold and had string hair, a hooked nose, snaggle teeth, and a wart on its nose. Its empty eyes seemed to stare at Ramona with a look of evil” (131). Ramona is so scared of the thing that she has to remind herself that it’s only a piece of rubber from the dime store, and she hides it in the couch at night when she sleeps. With the mask on, though, Ramona feels “very brave” (131), and at the school Halloween

celebration, she runs around the playground screaming, "Yah! Yah! I'm the baddest witch in the world!" (137). Ramona acts on both her braveness and her badness to satisfy impulses she has felt all school year. She spots the boy (Davy) she has had a crush on dressed in "a skimpy pirate costume from the dime store"—rhetoric that gently degrades commercialization as a cheapening phenomenon—and "At last! She pounced and kissed him through the rubber mask" (138). Afterwards, Ramona feels "satisfied" at her long-awaited triumph (138). Russell Belk points out in "Carnival, Control, and Corporate Culture in Halloween Celebrations" that Halloween "provides a seam through which fantasies and repressed aspects of personality can emerge" (108), and here we see Ramona using the mask for just that purpose. Cindy Dell Clark reiterates this point in "Tricks of Festival: Children, Enculturation, and American Halloween," noting, "Children are given latitude for self-expression…to 'let their hair down,' or to 'express a part of themselves they usually hold in,' to 'show off' or through masquerade to 'feel big.' This includes the child's free choice of a costume that depicts an empowering role: a superhero or an adult of power, such as a princess, football player, or threatening antagonist" (185). Ramona chooses the threatening antagonist, an apt expression of her willful and mischievous character, and both Ramona's ability to choose the costume and her freedom to express inner desires while costumed demonstrate an increasingly active role for children in the Halloween celebration not evident in Judson's text.

This theme of liberated self-expression and child-empowerment through the costume is a common one in Halloween literature for children from the second half of the twentieth century. Charlotte Zolotow's *A Tiger Called Thomas* (1963, illus. Kurt

Werth),[13] for instance, provides another example, this time in picture book form, of a child who uses the mask to liberate his personality and act out in ways that he would ordinarily avoid. Thomas, who has moved to a new house, is reluctant to leave his porch because he fears the neighbors "wouldn't like me," so he sits and watches as potential playmates pass by. On Halloween, though, his mother brings home a purchased tiger costume. When Thomas finds that he looks "exactly like a tiger" with the costume on, he seems to take comfort in the fact that "No one will know who I am when I go trick or treating," and for the first time, he ventures out of his new house and off of his new porch. Thomas believes that the costume will remake him, that it will truly mask his identity and transform him into a person others will like. All of the neighbors seem to know who Thomas is, though, even with his costume on, and they are all friendly and inviting. In the end, Thomas is able to take off his mask and embrace himself happily.

Both Thomas's and Ramona's masks allow for freer behavior. Thomas journeys from his new home into the social world beyond, while Ramona uses the costume to act on the mischievous impulses that she feels everyday but knows she must suppress. But while Thomas finds comfort in the anonymity of his costume, Ramona comes to find that anonymity terrifying. She learns this lesson while acting out another of her persistent fantasies at the Halloween celebration. Ramona has been fascinated by her classmate Susan's red corkscrew curls since the beginning of school, and she has longed to pull those curls and watch them spring back into place. Susan, incidentally, comes dressed "as an old-fashioned girl with a long skirt, an apron, and pantalettes"—a choice that Ramona "might have guessed" (138). This comment adds to the sense that the

children come dressed in reflection of what they really are. Ramona tries pulling the curls on the first day of school, only to find herself punished by the teacher whom she so admires and wants to please. On Halloween, though, she gets away with it. Ramona, "unable to resist," reaches out and yanks one of those curls (138). It is clear that Ramona is acting out her inner desires, and we see her unleash her inner dialogue when she yells, "Boing!" as she releases the curl. Ramona has always used this word in her mind to describe the curls, but she resists saying it out loud. Now, her thoughts are vocalized in public space. Soon the other children join in the fun of pulling Susan's hair, but when Susan goes to report the teasing to Miss Binney, she finds that she has trouble identifying the culprit who started it all. Susan can only say that it was a witch. Miss Binney, though, must ask, "Which witch?" (141). Because Ramona is wearing a mask from the dime store, there are several other children with the same costumed face, and she becomes one of the homogenous crowd. Just as Thomas is surprised to find out that others *do* know who he is, Ramona is surprised to discover that others do *not* know who she is. For Ramona, "That others would not know that she was behind her mask had never occurred to her" (141-42). Since Susan does not recognize her, Ramona begins to wonder whether Miss Binney can tell who she is, so she runs up to the teacher and tries to scare her by declaring, "I'm going to get you, Miss Binney!" (141). However, Ramona finds that "Miss Binney was not the one who was frightened. Ramona was. Miss Binney did not know who this witch was. Nobody knew who Ramona was, and if nobody knew who she was, she wasn't anybody" (142).

Here, the text seems to indicate that identity is dependent on another's recognition, and therein lies some of the tension between self and society on Halloween. While the child, like Ramona, may feel some authority in choosing a play identity or being able finally to liberate a sense of true identity, the child acts on that identity in public, social space, which operates within the parameters of certain educational, economic, political, and moral/religious codes. In this space others may satisfactorily reciprocate the child's sense of costumed identity, or they may react in a manner that is in some way discordant with the child's expectations, which can prove troublesome. Such is the case with Ramona. Ramona is not Ramona, it would seem, unless someone else can identify her as such, so when Miss Binney does not recognize her,

> The feeling was the scariest one Ramona had ever experienced. She felt lost inside her costume. She wondered if her mother would know which witch was which, and the thought that her own mother might not know her frightened Ramona even more. What if her mother forgot her? What if everyone in the whole world forgot her? With that terrifying thought Ramona snatched off her mask, and although its ugliness was no longer the most frightening thing about it, she rolled it up so she would not have to look at it. (143-44)

When Miss Binney suggests that Ramona put the mask back on for the parade, Ramona is torn between her desire to obey her teacher and her fear of "losing herself behind that scary mask" (146). As a solution, she runs to her classroom and constructs a sign that identifies her as "Ramona Q." (147). The mask, then, does not maintain the liberating

and identity-affirming quality it once had. Instead, it becomes a homogenizer, making this witch, this child, like every other child. Interestingly, the particular aspect of the costume that reduces Ramona is the store-bought aspect, the mask, which suggests that becoming a consumer compromises her selfhood, a rejection of one of the institutions deemed a "safe" keeper of Halloween in Judson's text. Indeed, the destructive potential of economic forces is an ever-present undercurrent in the Quimbys' decidedly middle-class life, most notably in *Ramona and her Father* (1977), in which Ramona's father loses his job, and the series as a whole offers consistent critiques of the centrality of economic forces in middle-class families and the turmoil that such influence can bring. In order to reject the reductive potential of the market, represented in the Halloween scene by the store-bought mask, Ramona adds her own production, the sign, to the ensemble, and doing so allows her to once again feel comfortable and empowered.

The text, however, does not constitute a condemnation of all authoritative institutions. Rather, the episode acts as a carnivalesque moment in which a return to law and order is welcomed after a period of chaotic suspension. Though Ramona revives some of her original excitement after her harrowing experience of "being no one," and she can even return to declaring herself "the baddest witch in the world" while she enjoys her donut and apple juice, the fright that she receives indicates that Ramona has come full circle in the carnivalesque cycle. Ramona gets to act out her desires within the context of the Halloween costume and the Halloween party, but after her fun and her fright, she does not want the full chaos of the revelry anymore. Her desire for a return to order comes when she invokes writing—something that she has learned in the

regimented structure of school and something that has a long association with law and rules—by making her sign. In his study of Halloween and the carnivalesque, Belk outlines "the two opposing models" of carnival celebrations as they relate to the holiday (109). The Bakhtinian model asserts that carnival celebrations may operate as "part of the revolutionary process and truly give participants a basis for power over the established hierarchy." The alternate model advanced by critics such as Max Gluckman and Victor Turner argues that "celebrations are mere 'rituals of rebellion' that act as a safety valve for feelings of injustice and … thereby reinforce the existing power structure" (Belk 109). This second "safety-valve view" contends that

> not only is emotion vented and dissipated by carnival celebration (and thus channeled away from rebellion), but … a small dose of disorder during carnival immunizes participants from the susceptibility to the sustained disorder of revolution. Thus, the ritual rebellion is seen to paradoxically strengthen the status quo of the social structure it mocks and derides …. The rebellion-ritual view suggests that officials encourage the celebration of carnival because they realize that the reversal is only temporary and ultimately strengthens their hegemony. (109)

Ramona's Halloween experience seems to fall under this second view. She plays out disorder, overturning institutional rules and norms that she has learned, but her enjoyment at this inversion is only temporary. She finds it refreshing to lift off the costume, and she marvels at "How cool the air felt outside that dreadful mask! Ramona no longer wanted to be the baddest witch in the world. She wanted to be Ramona

Geraldine Quimby" (144). Now when Davy runs by, taunting her to catch him, she doesn't budge. The celebration reveals as scary the child's internal desires to be chaotic, and in a moment that is supposed to be one of the most liberating for the self, Ramona feels lost, disappeared, and the return to order is welcomed.

Along with explorations of the child's relationship to economic and educational institutions on Halloween, Cleary's chapter, like Judson's, broaches the issue of parents' feelings about the holiday, but in *Ramona*, the parent-child-holiday relationship is far less harmonious than in *Mary Jane's Kindergarten*, in which the domestic institution of the nuclear family is used to guide the child enthusiastically in proper holiday celebration. While the day is much anticipated by Ramona, there are hints suggesting that it is a bit of an annoyance to adults in the book. Mrs. Quimby, for example, must remind Ramona not to "pester" when Ramona asks her "every day" about her witch mask (129). Mrs. Quimby explains that she will get the mask "the next time I go down to the shopping center," indicating that she will not make a special trip to procure the mask as Mrs. Merrill does immediately upon finding out about Mary Jane's costume assignment for school. However, obtaining the costume is not an urgent priority for Mrs. Kemp, the mother of Ramona's neighbor Howie, as it was for Mrs. Merrill in the 1918 text and as it is for Ramona now. In another moment, Mrs. Kemp has the task of managing a disconsolate Howie because he does not get to wear the costume he wants. Mrs. Kemp had "promised him a pirate costume," but she offers Mrs. Quimby a laundry list of troubles that frustrated her promise:

> his older sister was sick and while I was taking her temperature Willa Jean crawled into a cupboard and managed to dump a whole quart of salad oil all over the kitchen floor. If you've ever had to clean oil off a floor, you know what I went through, and then Howie went into the bathroom and climbed up—yes, dear, I understand you wanted to help—to get a sponge, and he accidentally knelt on a tube of toothpaste that someone had left the top off of—now Howie, I didn't say you left the top off—and toothpaste squirted all over the bathroom, and there was another mess to clean up. Well, I finally had to drag his sister's old cat costume out of a drawer, and when he put it on we discovered the wire in the tail was broken, but there wasn't time to rip it apart and put in a new wire. (135-36)

The use of the dashes to indicate that Howie is interrupting Mrs. Kemp's speech offers a rhetorical mirror of the trials that this mother (presumably standing in for most mothers) encounters in daily childrearing. With all the mundane challenges, the last thing Mrs. Kemp has time for is a Halloween costume. To her, it is of little importance, but to Howie, it is of the greatest importance, and he makes no secret of his unhappiness. The irritation these mothers feel finds no parallel in the enthusiastic feelings of Mary Jane's mother. On the contrary, the effort spent on Halloween costuming preparations is a time-consuming interruption for Mrs. Quimby and Mrs. Kemp rather than a happy family occasion.

In Cleary's text, the holiday also causes some trouble for "Poor Miss Binney" (137), who must corral students from her morning and afternoon kindergartens because both are present for the special Halloween parade. This scene differs from the tidy indoor party with quiet games and organized passing out of treats initiated and directed by Miss Lynn. Though Miss Lynn's party is ordered and enjoyable with clear adult authority, the Halloween celebration among Miss Binney's students is a raucous affair. Cleary demonstrates obvious sympathy for the solitary teacher in the midst of sixty-eight "swarming" and "screaming" children (137), insinuating that costumed children left to their own devices to celebrate Halloween are excitable, wild, devilish, and bothersome (at least to adults).

While the representations of the teacher's role as well as the Halloween day behavior of the children in costume could not seem more different between Judson's text and Cleary's, non-fiction literature suggests that the differences may lie in the way the literature presents the holiday rather than in actual childhood propensities. In a 1906 entry for *The School Arts Book* (Volume Five), Emma Woodman bemoans children's Halloween behavior, and she offers ways to engage youthful energy in productive activities to derail its disruptive and destructive potential. Woodman (somewhat begrudgingly) observes that "To the boyish heart [Halloween] is still a carnival of fun not easily given up. People endure the soaped windows and 'tick tacks' with more or less resignation to the inevitable; but at times, even the police fails to prevent ruthless destruction of property. Young people of the highest standing will indulge in the prevailing pranks" (166).[14] Woodman's criticisms likely apply to the behavior of

children older than kindergarten age; however, the observations indicate, as does other historical material, that disruptive behavior and pranking, enacted by children and young adults masked in Halloween guise, has been a consistent feature of the holiday, even as events sponsored by educational, community, and economic organizations grew in popularity in order to provide children with alternate outlets to celebrate the holiday. The question, then, is why Judson's text omits the behavior so entirely that the children do not even know what Halloween is, while Cleary's text allows it.

The omission of any mention of troublesome behavior amongst the costumed school children in Judson's text is, of course, not an indication that Judson was not aware of such trends. On the contrary, it can be assumed that Judson, a prolific writer of children's literature and, like Cleary, a winner of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for her efforts in children's literature, would be familiar with patterns of childhood behavior, and that her text, through omission, makes the point that Woodman's does through derision, even if expressed more sympathetically. By excluding such behavior from the Halloween celebration and taking control of the holiday's identity and the child's relationship to it (demonstrated quite literally in Miss Lynn's assigning of the Halloween costumes rather than allowing children to decide), Judson's text indicates that the literature should shape the holiday to represent its ideal celebration, as sanctioned by educational, economic, and domestic institutions, even if that ideal does not reflect reality. Cleary's text, however, is more tolerant of the less-than-ideal celebration (from the adult's perspective), allowing for a noisy and disordered affair with children exploring their own identities, wills, and desires. Moreover, Cleary's text critiques the

position of certain institutions, especially those pushing commercial consumption, as "safe" guardians of holidays, as evidenced in the scary reduction of Ramona's identity while wearing the store-bought mask and the cheapening language used to describe Davy's purchased costume. *Ramona*, then, places higher emphasis and value on the child's liberty to interact with the holiday and experiment with identity through costumes than *Mary Jane*, even if that liberty comes with some discomfort for the adults and for the child herself. However, it is worth noting that, despite the many differences between the texts, the work done to center Halloween attention on children in *Mary Jane's Kindergarten* has facilitated the kind of explorations possible in *Ramona the Pest*, and shortly afterwards, in Judy Blume's *Blubber*.

**The Halloween Celebration for Older Children in *Blubber***

The Halloween chapter in *Ramona the Pest* permits a child-directed, creative celebration of Halloween, suggesting that identity play through choosing costumes is an important part of childhood, though it is not an exploration without problems. Ramona's struggles come primarily from feelings of loss and confusion involved in manipulating her identity through the costume, or embracing only one facet of her identity in her witch costume. Ramona struggles to affirm her sense of self when others cannot recognize her as Ramona because of her costume, thus learning the complex significance of social recognition and affirmation in identity construction. The Halloween setting in *Blubber* (1974) also locates the practice of choosing one's own costume as a normal, much-anticipated part of the child's Halloween celebration, though problems in selecting a

costume and behavior while in costume creep into the experience as they do in *Ramona*. Because *Blubber's* protagonist, Jill Brenner, is in the fifth grade, a time when peer-to-peer interaction is even more complicated and central than it would be for a kindergartener, many of the Halloween problems for Jill arise from her interaction with peers, especially in her efforts to construct an identity against other members of her peer group. Blume's text also continues the exploration of Halloween celebrations in relation to economic, educational, and domestic institutions, as Cleary's and Judson's do. *Blubber* takes a harsh tone towards economics, but it offers more positive representations of educational and domestic institutions, both of which provide order and correction when necessary while also permitting childhood experimentations and explorations in identity, even if those explorations involve mistakes.

The novel begins two days before Halloween when Jill is still worried about what costume to choose. She has worn her mother's old witch costume for the past several years, but she wants to be something more original this time. Jill struggles to come up with an idea until finally she "thought up a costume so clever" that she keeps it a secret from even her best friend Tracy so that it will be a surprise (14). Her "clever" idea is to dress as a flenser, a person who strips the blubber from whales. She designs the "flenser suit" herself from jeans, her mom's old beach hat adorned with strips of black construction paper and pictures of dolphins because she cannot find any pictures of whales, a cardboard knife shaped like a sword, a pair of boots painted gold (much to her mother's dismay) to match her sword, and a sign identifying herself as a flenser—reminiscent, perhaps, of Ramona's sign. Her family and Tracy find this flenser costume

to be a "weird idea" (23), but it is actually not as original as Jill thinks. She gets the idea from a report that her classmate Linda gives on whales. The costume choice, then, is an early indication that Jill tends to construct her identity in relation to and against her peers, a type of identity construction that will prove troublesome for her later in the book.

Most broadly, *Blubber* is a novel about bullying, but it is also a novel about choosing who to be and how to interact with peers. At the beginning of the book, the bullying focuses on Linda, an overweight girl whose report on whales provokes further teasing and sparks classmates to nickname her "Blubber." Jill initially joins in with the others as they ridicule Linda, and Jill's choice to be a flenser for Halloween shows that she is willing to strip others of their self-determined identity in order to establish herself as one of the dominant group. According to Jill's peers, Linda is "other"; by teasing Linda, Jill declares that she is "not other." Jill literally enacts this stripping in one of many cruel exchanges. Here, Wendy, the leader of the popular group, orders Jill to remove Linda's clothes. Jill takes off the cape that Linda is wearing as part of her Halloween costume, but that is not enough for Wendy. Wendy demands that they "Strip her some more!" (32), and she pulls up Linda's skirt to expose her underwear. Wendy's "right hand man" Caroline yanks at Linda's shirt until it rips to reveal an undershirt. Linda's crying does not faze Jill, who lifts her flenser sword and demands that Linda "Do whatever Queen Wendy says." In a reflection of peer interaction and self-perception, Wendy is costumed as a queen (reminiscent of how Susan is dressed as an old-fashioned girl in *Ramona*).

As the novel progresses, though, Jill learns to separate from the pack. The turning point comes during the trial the class stages to decide whether or not Linda has tattled on Jill and Tracy for a Halloween prank. (The prank will be discussed later in this chapter.) Though the trial is Jill's idea, Wendy quickly takes control, declaring herself the judge and Jill the class lawyer. The ensuing scene is one of the most vicious peer interactions in the book. Linda has denied telling on Tracy and Jill, and she also says she does not want to play court. To force her cooperation, two boys in the class catch her and shove her into the supply closet on Wendy's order. Linda begs for her release, but Wendy will not hear of it. Just as the trial is about to begin, one of the quiet girls in the class, Rochelle, points out that there are always two lawyers in a trial, one for the prosecution and one for the defense. Jill, whose father is a lawyer, agrees: "Look Wendy…my father's a lawyer and what Rochelle says is true. If we're going to do this we're going to do it right, otherwise it's not a real trial. And since the trial was *my* [original emphasis] idea in the first place I say she gets a lawyer" (130-131). Wendy then accuses Jill of "ruining everything" and of "turning chicken like your chink friend [a slur indicating Tracy's ethnic background]" (131). Jill sticks up for Tracy, and then she begins to consider how dependent she has been on Wendy for self-validation:

> I thought about Tracy and how she said I'm scared of Wendy. And I thought about how worried I'd been on Monday, when Wendy got mad at me, and how good I'd felt when she wasn't mad anymore. And then I thought about Linda. Right that minute it didn't matter to me whether or not she had told on us. It was the trial that was important and it wasn't

> fair to have a trial without two lawyers. So I faced Wendy and I said, 'I'm sick of you bossing everyone around. If Blubber doesn't get a lawyer then Blubber doesn't get a trial.' (131-32)

Wendy refuses the lawyer, so Jill refuses to participate in the trial, and she frees Linda from the closet, in an act that also liberates Jill's identity from Wendy's influence.

Wendy is quick to punish Jill for her protest. She befriends Linda and assigns Jill the new nickname "B. B.", which stands for "Baby Brenner." The class moves Jill's desk, they make fun of her lunch, and they trip her on the bus as they had done to Linda. They tease her about not being potty-trained yet, and in the bathroom, they shove her and push her face into the drinking fountain (137). Unlike Linda, though, Jill makes a stand for herself (earlier in the book Jill identifies Linda's spinelessness as a character flaw). When Wendy tries to force Jill to say, "I am Baby Brenner. I'm not toilet trained yet. That's why I stink," Jill refuses (146). Wendy orders Caroline to grab hold of Jill's arms so that she can "pull her smelly diapers off," but Jill turns the situation around. Jill asks Caroline, "You always do what Wendy says? Don't you have a mind of your own?" (147). Then pointing out Wendy's quick new friendship with Linda, Jill adds, "Wendy doesn't even like you anymore so why should you follow her orders?" (147). This exchange results in the reordering of the class cliques.

*Blubber's* characters navigate independent identity versus peer group identity; the Halloween setting reinforces those considerations because it is a holiday that asks children to consider what they want to be. The question that frequently falls on children around this time of year, "What are you going to be for Halloween?", a mirror perhaps

of the often asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, is a reminder that children are constantly negotiating identities in relation to their own desires and in relation to pressures from peers, adults, and social institutions. Jill’s choice reveals that, at the beginning of the book, her understanding of self is largely based on the consideration of others. She starts to separate from this form of identity construction when she voices the desire to be unique in her Halloween costume, and she believes that she has produced an original idea in the flenser costume. Jill likes the idea of being unique, which makes for a bitter loss when she does not win the prize for the most original costume at school. However, the costume, of course, was not original because it depended on Linda. Moreover, the desire to dress creatively just to win a prize is not the work of an entirely independent thinker. Throughout the book, Jill learns the danger of depending on others to construct her identity, validate her identity, and in the case of Linda, work as a foil against which to build her sense of self. When Jill receives an identity constructed entirely by her peers, she finds the experience unpleasant. In that moment of complete peer-constructed identity, Jill is appropriately labeled a baby, a term indicating a lack of a realized, independent sense of self. Jill, however, wills herself beyond that identity and comes to realize that she is not the type of person who will compromise herself to the group. Ultimately, she is glad not to be like those peers who “are *always* changing best friends” and changing their identities along with those friendships (152). She learns that such behavior has a negative influence on her identity, and to be herself, she has to do it without the “I am this because I am not that” mentality behind bullying and exclusive social groups.

While Jill's flenser costume comes to represent a working out of identity, the witch's costume that she had worn in previous years does not go to waste on this particular Halloween, and the novel extends discussion of childhood identity play through costuming with the choices Jill's younger brother, Kenny, makes. Kenny asks to wear the pointy-toed shoes with silver buckles, the high black silk hat, and the long black robe that make up the costume. When Kenny expresses interest in the costume, Jill asks, "A boy witch?" to which Kenny replies, "Sure. What's wrong with that?" Their mother responds, "Nothing […] I'd love to have you wear my costume" (15). Kenny adds a pair of yellow goggles and a fake cigar to his costume, and he ends up winning his school's prize for the most original costume. This news upsets Jill, who had been vying for that prize herself, and she laments, "'I don't understand it […] I wore that witch's suit three years in a row and I never won anything" (36). Mrs. Sandmeier, their housekeeper, explains, "It was the cigar that did it […] That and the yellow goggles. He was an unusual witch" (36). No doubt, part of the unusualness of the costume also comes from the gender play. In the witch costume, Kenny has chosen an outfit traditionally designated for girls in American Halloween celebrations. Kenny's choice is humorous and a source of mild irritation to Jill, but we also know that Kenny is a socially awkward boy, so the unusual additions to the costume come to remark on Kenny's relationship with himself and other children while also commenting on the acceptability of certain costumes.

Part of Kenny's unusualness is evident in his refusal to participate in trick-or-treating with friends (there is no mention of him having friends, in fact). Jill embraces

the peer interaction that comes with the holiday by going trick-or-treating with her best friend, but Kenny ignores that part of the holiday. Instead, he stays at home and passes out the candy. Jill believes it is because Kenny is "chicken. He's scared of the dark. He really believes in witches and goblins and monsters" (39). Kenny goes against the norm in other situations too. For instance, he is friendly to Linda at a bar mitzvah even though other children frequently pick on her, and he has a preoccupation with weird and extraordinary things, demonstrated in his frequent (and, to Jill, annoying) citations from the *Guinness Book of World Records.* There is the sense that Kenny, though he is only one year younger, operates in a different world than Jill and other children their age. When Jill first spies Kenny in the witch costume he is "doing some strange dance" that he stops immediately when he sees Jill watching (20). Then, when Jill asks about the addition of the goggles to the costume, Kenny answers, "If you have to ask, you wouldn't understand" (21). Indeed, Jill does not understand, and in her opinion, Kenny is not a normal boy, nor is his costume one that a normal boy would wear.

Though Kenny does not receive peer acceptance for his Halloween costume, the institutions of home and school encourage his choice, and the school even rewards Kenny for his witch ensemble. *Blubber* thus shifts the role of institutions in the child's life, indicating that instead of serving as authorities meant to construct and enforce one proper definition of childhood identity, they are instead there to support the child's creative explorations of identity. Kenny is "weird," and he is subversive, but the text allows for both; his mother is fine with his choice, and the school gives him the Halloween prize. It is particularly noteworthy that these institutions accept the gender

play involved in Kenny's costume, a transgressive choice that might otherwise be viewed as dangerously threatening to the status quo. Real-life children's costumes that dabble in gender experimentation, for example, have stoked more controversy than Kenny's, which was the case in a 2010 incident involving a five-year-old boy who dressed as the female cartoon character Daphne from Scooby Doo.[15] Even in other literature that features gender play in children's Halloween costumes, such as Diane de Groat's picture book *Trick or Treat, Smell My Feet* (1998), that play is presented as a humorous mix-up with a return to proper gender identity by the end of the book rather than as a serious and realistic option.[16]

Holiday scholarship has also noted that while Halloween costumes in the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond have offered opportunities to practice and play identity, it seems that even an occasion so rife with inversion is subject to some rules. Foremost among these have been the norms surrounding gender.[17] According to Cindy Dell Clark's entry on holidays in *Boyhood in America: An Encyclopedia*, "Boys' choices of Halloween costume are known to be influenced by gender roles" (339). Clark observes, "Boys are more likely than girls to dress as a superhero (such as Superman or Batman), a monster (such as Dracula or a zombie), a scary animal (such as a lion or a dragon), or a character portraying conventional male roles (sports player, pirate, and so on). Boys identify with scary or powerful roles in choosing these costumes" (339). Elsewhere, Clark has noted that girls also tend to make gendered costume choices. Girls, she writes, "often chose to dress in disguises of mature beauty, in the pretty clothing of adult heroines (such as Cinderella, Barbie, or a bride) complemented as needed with a

'lady's' make up and jewelry" ("Tricks of Festival," 188). While there are, of course, costumes that cross in gender appeal such as animal costumes, it would seem that serious ventures into dressing as the opposite gender are unusual and even construed as offensive. However, that is not the case with Kenny. Kenny is strange and awkward and Jill judges him, but those are the estimations of an older sister who is far from perfect in her own social interactions. The text, though, does not judge him and instead offers the school-and-parent-endorsed liberty to experiment with identity as he will. Just as Judson's text offers a revision of the child's Halloween by writing misbehavior out of the holiday and offering an alternative way to celebrate, Blume's too offers fictional presentations that revise real possibilities, in her case allowing the child perhaps more freedom in identity exploration and in subversion than "real life" might afford.

As the above discussion of *Blubber* indicates, the domestic institution of the nuclear family and the educational institution of school support children's liberty to select their own costumes, which by extension allows for the exploration of identity, even if that exploration involves subversion (in the case of Kenny) or making mistakes (in Jill's choice to be a flenser). However, the third institution considered in this chapter, involving economics, receives almost entirely negative treatment in Blume's novel, suggesting that economics should have a very limited, if any, role in the child's celebration of Halloween (and, perhaps, in the child's life in general). While Judson's text identifies the market as one of those safe "institutions" that guards and shapes Halloween, Cleary's presents store-bought products as those that cheapen and erase identity, and in Blume's text, the children's costumes are homemade, without

dependence on the market. The only attention that Blume gives to the subject links the politics of economics as it relates to children on Halloween to the very unlikeable character Mr. Machinist.

Mr. Machinist refuses to participate in any Halloween traditions, including trick-or-treating, a kind of inverted economic activity in which the child receives something in exchange for nothing (save the reassurance that the "treater" will not be "tricked"). Jill describes Mr. Machinist as "the person who'd put razor blades in apples" if "ever there was a person" to do so (41).[18] She and Tracy do not visit Mr. Machinist on Halloween night for a treat because they know they will not get one. Instead, they go there to play a trick on him, and they do so, feeling that it is acceptable and justifiable to give a person what he "deserves" (41). In the girls' opinion, Mr. Machinist deserves rotten eggs in his mailbox because "he won't give to Unicef," let alone distribute candy. Rather than accepting the "trick" that has been played on him because he fails to dole out treats, Mr. Machinist tracks down Jill and Tracy using the photo he has taken, and he sends their parents a note, which reads, "On Halloween night two youngsters put raw, rotten eggs in my mailbox. Interfering with mail is a federal offense. One of these youngsters has been identified as your child. I suggest that you contact me immediately. William F. Machinist" (96). By invoking law and order, Mr. Machinist rejects the carnivalesque overturn of the day, he rejects the functions of the costumes, he rejects the one-sided bargaining exchange implied in trick-or-treating, and he makes a firm statement by locating authority in the hands of appointed adult officials, not children.

Most readers and many scholars as well, both those contemporaneous with *Blubber's* publication and those of the present day, would likely side with Jill and recognize Mr. Machinist as an antagonistic character. However, there are lines of both critical and popular discussion that would support Mr. Machinist's position. In "Halloween and the Mass Child" (1959), Gregory Stone voices frustration with children's attitudes of economic entitlement on Halloween in his analysis of the links between consumerism, trick-or-treating, and costuming. Through both tone and content, Stone derides the practice of trick-or-treating and the unabashed admiration lavished upon the costumed child.[19] While trick-or-treating, he argues,

> the 'trick-or-treater' is rewarded not for his work, but for his play. The practice is ostensibly a vast bribe exacted by the younger generation upon the older generation. The doorbell rings and is answered. The householder is greeted by a masked and costumed urchin with a bag—significantly, a shopping bag—and confronted with dire alternatives: the unknown peril of a devilishly conceived prank that will strike at the very core of his social self—his property; or the 'payoff' in candy, cookies or coin for another year's respite from the antisocial incursions of the children. The householder pays. (373)

According to Stone, children are essentially given something for nothing on Halloween, a troublesome exchange for Stone because it enforces misguided consumer practices through "a rehearsal for consumership without a rationale. Beyond the stuffing of their pudgy stomachs, [children] didn't know why they were filling their shopping bags"

(379). He condemns the culture that confuses privileges for rights in a display of "consumption" and "conformity" rather than "production" and "autonomy" (378).

Also implicit in Stone's argument is a fear of the power that the costumed child acquires and wields on Halloween when proper and safe institutions such as those of economics are subverted. For Stone, the power is all too one-sided because the evolved, child-centered premise of trick-or-treating disbarred adults from operating within the bargaining terms of Halloween while demanding that they not only tolerate the tricks of children but that they also shower them with treats. Indeed, in a 1964 example from real life, one woman, Helen Pfeil, made an ill-considered attempt to operate within the supposed parameters of trick-or-treating by providing tricks instead of treats as part of what she claimed to be "a self-evident Halloween joke" that stemmed from her frustration with "too many of the trick-or-treaters [who] were too old to be asking for free candy" (Santino 25). The "tricks" consisted of "made up packages of inedible 'treats' to give to teenagers. The packages contained dog biscuits, steel-wool pads, and the ant buttons, clearly marked 'Poison' with a skull and crossbones" (25). It is easy to see that Pfeil acted with poor judgement (she did eventually plead guilty to endangering children), but critics of Halloween such as Stone and the fictional Mr. Machinist may justify her feelings, if not her actions (though Jill wouldn't put it past Mr. Machinist to pull a stunt like Pfeil's), and agree with the rejection of the one-sided power politics and economic overturns of Halloween.

Mr. Machinist does not enact a retaliatory prank as Pfeil did, but he does suggest that Jill's and Tracy's parents punish them for the prank by sending them to his house to

work, thus demanding a proper restoration of economic order. The girls have to spend a Sunday raking leaves in Mr. Machinist's yard. This move would likely gain the praise of critics such as Stone as a valuable lesson in production and responsibility, but Blume ultimately presents Mr. Machinist as the one in the wrong, and the text sides with the children, not by condoning their prank, but by presenting Mr. Machinist as so completely disagreeable and absolutist that his anti-Halloween position seems to become as flawed as his character. Both Tracy's and Jill's parents are still gently in the girls' corners even as they serve their punishment, with Tracy's mother bringing them juice and cookies as a snack and tending to Jill's blisters. When Jill's father picks the girls up after they have put in a full day of yard work, he introduces himself to Mr. Machinist: "I'm Gordon Brenner and I'm taking the girls home now. They've put in a long hard day and I think you'll agree that they've done a fine job" (121). Mr. Machinist's only reply is a terse "Did they finish?" and "Did they learn their lesson?" After assuring him that the girls did indeed learn their lesson, Mr. Machinist replies, "Good…that's two more little brats I don't have to worry about." Mr. Brenner defends the girls, saying, "They are not brats," but Mr. Machinist retorts, "They are to me" as he slams the door. Mr. Brenner, surprised at the rudeness, mumbles, "Damn it […] He really is a—." Jill chimes in with "I told you, didn't I? I told you he deserved to get eggs in his mailbox." Even before this clear defense of the children, Blume includes a softer acceptance of children's pranking in Mrs. Brenner's actions on Halloween night. When Jill returns home soaked from the turn of Mr. Machinist's hose, Mrs. Brenner just "Smiled and shook her head" (46). The mother then takes Jill to the bathroom to dry her off with the hairdryer. By suggesting

the mother's tacit compliance with childhood mischievousness on Halloween, Blume hints that only an old grump, and in this case an old grump who evokes economic order, would mind holiday pranks by costumed kids.

**Conclusion**

When Jill seeks permission from her mother to design her own costume instead of wearing Mrs. Brenner's old witch outfit, Mrs. Brenner insists, "You can be whatever you want" (14). This is an often-touted sentiment in the messages adults pass on to children both in literature and in real life in the later decades of the twentieth century and the early ones of the twenty-first. At the same time, child characters in Halloween literature have found the liberty to "be whatever" a tricky proposition, which involves negotiations with individual identity, peer group identity, and social and authoritative institutions, as well as the complex task of balancing the desire to express internal identity only with the need to receive external recognition/affirmation of identity. These kinds of complex negotiations receive very little attention in Judson's text, which displays heavy adult direction over Halloween through the guiding institutions of economics, education, and domestic life. Even with this institutional control over the holiday, though, Judson places the attention of the day on children, paving the way for the child-directed Halloween scenes in later decades. Texts from the second half of the century such as those of Cleary and Blume allow the child a great deal of liberty in celebrating Halloween and locate identity exploration through the tradition of costuming as a vital part of the holiday and the child's experience. Moreover, the literature allows

the complicated process of exploring identity to bring trouble for the child characters (and for adults and institutions), locating those struggles as important childhood experiences as well, which must be permitted by society's institutions. Those institutions, primarily economic ones in the works of Cleary and Blume, that do not permit such explorations are cast negatively, threatening to cheapen and reduce individuality.

The texts and trends discussed in this chapter demonstrate that Halloween is a relatively new subject in both the corpus of holiday literature for children and in children's literature in general; however, the act of costuming and the implications for identity exploration have long been topics of academic pursuit across many disciplines. The creative possibility inherent in the practice of costuming has perhaps most famously received attention from Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, likely the most influential theorization of the mask and its uses. Bakhtin identifies the mask as "the most complex theme of folk culture" (39), arguing that it

> is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles. (40)

Implied here in Bakhtin's analysis of the many meanings of and possibilities behind the mask is the concept that the mask allows for a kind of supra-, extra-, or meta-version of the self. That is, the mask can be an inflation or revision of reality. This chapter has drawn from the fictional Halloween presentations of three female authors, all noted for their self-proclaimed and critic-affirmed dedication to the ordinary child, and indeed the fictional characters in *Mary Jane's Kindergarten*, *Ramona the Pest*, and *Blubber* are all believable as ordinary children. At the same time, though, these texts alter the realities, constraints, and possibilities of children's worlds to present them not exactly as they are, but as they could or should be, though, of course, ideas of what could or should be vary from text to text. In Judson's text, for instance, Halloween is rewritten from a marginalized and raucous holiday of inversion to a child-focused affair directed by educational, economic, and domestic institutions. In Blume's, on the other hand, Halloween becomes a day on which subversive behavior, such as plays on gender and economic overturns/inversions, are not only tolerated, but encouraged. Variations on what could or should be are not exclusive to Halloween literature; nevertheless, this particular holiday setting provides special occasion to consider that function of literature because it is a holiday so rife with blurred boundaries and porous borders.

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Notes

[1] Judson's, Cleary's, and Blume's work is representative of the literature's attitudes towards costuming and children's behaviors in costume. While costuming works as perhaps the most frequent holiday tradition represented in the literature, there are texts that focus attention on other traditions, symbols, and seasonal items. Notable examples include texts on witches such as Eleanor Estes's *The Witch Family* (1960), Jane Yolen's *The Witch Who Wasn't* (1964), Don Freeman's *Tilly Witch* (1969), and Florence Laughlin's *The Little Leftover Witch* (1971); texts on pumpkins such as Tasha Tudor's *Pumpkin Moonshine* (1938), Anne McCauley's *Jack O'Lantern Twins* (1941), Helen Cooper's *Pumpkin Soup*

(1998), and Rick Walton's *Mrs. McMurphy's Pumpkin* (2004); and texts on fright such as Pamela Oldfield's *The Halloween Pumpkin* (1974), Linda Williams's *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* (1986), and Caroline Stutson's *By the Light of the Halloween Moon* (1993). As is the case with the costume texts, literature on other Halloween topics in the early twentieth century tends towards sentimentalism and quaint portraits of holiday. From the mid-twentieth century onward, the texts often emphasize creativity in their characters, inversions, and gently irreverent and/or macabre humor.

[2] The act of dressing up had long been associated with many of the ancestral celebrations that predated American Halloween. On Samhain, Celts dressed as wandering spirits of the dead and as wild animals to ward off unwanted spirits who were believed to return to Earth along with the spirits of recently departed loved ones. For more information on Samhain costuming practices, see Jack Santino's introduction to *Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life*; Nicholas Roger's chapter "Samhain and the Celtic Origins of Halloween" in his book *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night*; and Stephen Blamires's *Magic of the Celtic Otherworld: Irish History, Lore & Rituals*, particularly the chapter "The Festival of Samhain." The observances of All Soul's Day and All Saint's Day, the Christian predecessors of the holiday, also had associations with costuming. According to Rogers, the liturgy of All Saints' Day "honored" saints, but it also referred to "'the wise virgins awaiting the coming of the bridegroom,' thereby anticipating forthcoming marriages and a replenishing Christian flock. Because this injunction to marry was sung by choristers with their hoods up 'in the manner of virgin women,' it also introduced the season of masking and impersonation that by then characterized the November and Christmas calendar. In this season of misrule, choristers became boy bishops and urban leaders were temporarily usurped from power by mock-mayors and sheriffs in a ritualized topsy-turvy world replete with 'subtle disguising, masks, and mummeries'" (Rogers 25).

[3] Accelerated Irish (and to a lesser extent Scottish) immigration brought a new wave of cultural experience, including a history of Halloween celebration, and the timing of this movement proved to be fortuitous for the longevity of Halloween in the country. In *America's Public Holidays, 1865-1920*, Ellen M. Litwicki points out that the decades immediately following the Civil War were a particularly fecund moment for holidays. The period saw the overhaul of existing holidays along with the invention of no less than twenty new ones. Some of these, such as Memorial Day and Labor Day, caught on while others, such as Robert E. Lee's birthday and Haymarket Martyrs' Day, enjoyed only short tenures. Litwicki attributes this frenzy to a combination of factors, including the "trauma of the Civil War and its aftermath, the joys of emancipation, the vast immigration of Europeans, and the struggles of American labor" (1). It also seems that migration to cities—along with the increasingly centralized education and consumerism implicated in that movement—and the growing accessibility to/of print media had something to do with the expansion and mainstreaming of holidays. These print outlets, Litwicki observes, provided the "best window on public holidays in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (5), though it is also important to note that much of the literature was not only invested in reflecting the holiday culture at the time but in actively crafting it.

[4] Joseph Illick makes a similar point about the power of literature in the shaping of holiday traditions in *American Childhoods*. Though his claim focuses on Christmas ("it was revived almost invented, in the nineteenth century by literary persons" [67]), the importance of literature in the invention of Halloween traditions also should not be underestimated. Nicholas Rogers makes this case in *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* with his discussion of the now iconic Halloween creatures—the bat and the black cat. These two animals were "not associated with Halloween in the early modern era, despite the well-established links between cats, magic, witchcraft, and devil worship. They seem to have found their way into Halloween lore through nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, most notably, *Varney the Vampire* (1847) and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat*, stories that were easily adapted for the stage, radio, and silver screen. By the 1920s, bats and cats were as familiar to Halloween as witches and goblins" (77).

[5] Blain's guide offers several of these games. For example, "Combing Hair Before Mirror" instructs participants to "Stand alone before [a] mirror, and by light of candle comb your hair; face of your future partner will appear in glass, peeping over your shoulder" (15). "Cellar Stairs" makes similar use of the mirror, but adds the extra challenge of holding the mirror while walking "boldly" down the stairs backward (13). The "pumpkin alphabet" involved carving letters into a pumpkin and directing blindfolded party guests to stick a hat-pin into the pumpkin. The letter closest to the pin would represent the initial of

the guest's future spouse (12). The feather test, during which party goers would write different physical qualities on three feathers and then blow the feathers with a small breath and wait to see which landed closest, would give participants a glimpse at the complexion of their future mates.

[6] Phyllis Galembo's *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes & Masquerade* displays pictures of these homemade and appliquéd frocks alongside the witch, ghost, and devil masks popular in early Halloween celebrations. Also among the early costumes photographed in the book are patriotically themed outfits including an Uncle Sam costume from approximately 1860 (it is not clear from the photograph whether the costume was intended for a child or an adult) and a girl's Lady Liberty costume from sometime between 1890 and 1910. Both costumes were homemade.

[7] *Mary Jane's Kindergarten* is the third in a series of nineteen titles about a "typical American little girl" (http://c.web.umkc.edu/crossonm/maryjane.htm). This installment contains fifteen chapters, including two on Christmas and one on Thanksgiving in addition to those that focus on Mary Jane's interaction with other children at school and on her life at home, especially as she helps her mother with errands and chores.

[8] Though Elizabeth Peabody opened the first English-speaking kindergarten in the United States in 1860, attendance at such schools was still relatively uncommon at the time of Judson's publication (Beatty 58). By 1910, the US Census reported that 3.1 percent of American children younger than six were attending school, still a very small percentage, but it represented nearly double the number of children that age attending school at the turn of the century (101). As the early years of the twentieth century progressed, the number of public kindergartens expanded, and attendance at public kindergartens outpaced that of private kindergartens. By 1912, "353,456 children—approximately 9 percent of the children of kindergarten age—were enrolled in public kindergartens in the United States … In 1922 the number was 500,807, and by 1930 there were 777,899 children enrolled in public kindergartens" (111).

[9] Decoration Day was the original name for Memorial Day when it first began in the mid-nineteenth century. Christine Wagner offers background on the evolution of that holiday in the chapter "Rediscovering Memorial Day: Politics, Patriotism, and Gender" in *Social Conflicts and Collective Identities* (ed. Patrick G. Coy and Lynne M. Woehrle, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

[10] While scholarship has focused heavily on the role of women in the mainstreaming of American holidays, the Christmas chapter of this dissertation emphasizes men's influence on the literature and traditions of that day.

[11] According to Schneider, "Sears Roebuck and Company offered their first pre-made Halloween costumes about 1930s" (18). By the 1940s, several other stores had expanded into the costume market, and "companies such as Collegeville, Ben Cooper and Halco were making tens of thousands ready to wear Halloween costumes" (18). Unlike the earlier crepe paper costumes recommended by the *Bogie Books*, these costumes were now often made of thin fabric with silk screened designs. These outfits could typically be purchased for less than three dollars, mask included (18). The materials employed to make costumes evolved along with the choices. By the end of the 1970s, "most inexpensive costumes were all vinyl," ultimately cheapening into "nothing more than vinyl smocks with a mask" (Schneider 18). Versions of these vinyl costumes still exist, though increasing demands for Halloween products in the last decades of the twentieth century also resulted in the production of "high quality silk screened cloth costumes," retailing for twenty to forty or more dollars (Schneider 18).

[12] In *Masks of the Spirit: Image and Metaphor in Mesoamerica*, Peter and Roberta Markman have explored the liberating function of the mask. They contend that the mask, by resisting strict conformation to the wearer, actually comes to represent a truer ideal—something perhaps like a Platonic form. The Markmans make their observations in the context of Mesoamerican culture, but their comments nevertheless pluck at some applicable threads. They argue that the mask does not function by "disguising the wearer but rather by expressing his true nature" (68). The mask is "a truer reflection of the wearer's spiritual essence than his natural face" (68), and, thus, it comes to represent not necessarily what the person *is*, but what he or she should be.

[13] The book was reissued in 1988 with illustrations by Catherine Stock and then again in 2003 with minor changes to the text and new illustrations (which most notably change Thomas's race) by Diana Cain Bluthenthal. I use only the 1963 text and illustrations here.

[14] Woodman is not alone in her recommendations to channel youthful energy from disruptive and destructive behavior to charitable behavior on Halloween, though her recommendations proceed by a decade or two national movements to tame and reinvent/repurpose the holiday in the twentieth century. In some regions, newspapers caught wind of bloody and even deadly encounters between Halloween pranksters and property owners. These made for sensational stories, so they were highlighted in hyperbolic/dramatized form (a phenomenon similar to the "Razor in the Apple" scare). In response, the 1920s saw "several ideas for diverting youthful energies in more respectable directions" (Rogers 85), and because "police forces were always stretched to capacity on this annual mischief night," this redirecting had to be "effected by community groups who strove to channel youthful energies into more respectable, law-abiding activities. All manner of clubs and societies went out of their way to provide events for Halloween. Lions, Rotarians, Kiwanis, religious groups, high schools, boys' and girls' clubs, women's institutes, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, and even the Sons of the American Revolution all rose to meet the challenge of rendering Halloween safe and sane during the interwar years" (81). These groups and organizations staged parades, carnivals, games for younger children, and dances for teens, all of which were quickly institutionalized as staples in Halloween celebrations. Such events frequently encouraged dressing up through sponsored costume contests, which solicited creative entrepreneurial spirit from younger generations, but they did so without relinquishing institutionalized supervision because the events were sponsored by appropriate groups and organizations.

[15] Photos of the boy in a bright orange wig, pink dress, and purple tights, which were posted by his mother, identified only by the first name Sarah, went viral with, according to a blog post in the *New York Times* entitled "When Boys Dress Like Girls for Halloween," "at least a million hits and more than 26,000 comments" as of November 5, 2010 (Parker-Pope), suggesting that dressing against one's gender is still an unusual and controversial event. According to Sarah, the other children at school enjoyed his costume, but some of the mothers frowned on the choice and wondered why Sarah allowed it. The discussion attracted so much attention that Sarah was interviewed on CNN's *American Morning*. Sarah highlighted those who supported the choice in her interview, but the segment also included troubling commentary by a clinical psychologist who argued, "'With all due respect, whether your child is gay or straight, I think you kind of outed him by putting him in the blog'" (Parker-Pope). Sarah claims that the reaction would be very different if it had been a girl dressed as a boy: "If my daughter had dressed as Batman, no one would have thought twice about it." A boy dressed realistically like a girl, however, ventures into a realm too taboo, even on Halloween.

[16] *Trick or Treat, Smell My Feet* is a title from de Groat's Gilbert and Friends series. The School Library Journal's review acknowledges that the characters are allowed to "at least tinker with gender stereotypes" (http://www.dianedegroat.com/bookfolder/Gilbert_8.html) though Gilbert's initial embarrassment, the humorous framing, and the return to gender-appropriate costumes suggest that children would not seriously decide to pursue opposite-gender costumes.

[17] The Valentine's Day chapter of this dissertation discusses gender as the most rigid category along which peer-interaction is constructed and enforced.

[18] According to Bill Ellis's "'Safe' Spooks: New Halloween Traditions in Response to Sadism Legends," the "razor blades in apples" scare that Jill alludes to was one of "two complexes of legends and beliefs in which deranged or sadistic adults of this world, not supernatural spirits, endanger children" (25). "The Razor Blades in the Apple" narrative appeared in the mid-1960s and warned children and parents of poisonous or booby-trapped Halloween treats distributed by strangers. The second, "The Satanic Child Sacrifice," emerged in the mid-1970s and became a national preoccupation in 1987 and 1988. The Satanic Child Sacrifice complex "described cults who planned to abduct and murder a young child on Halloween as part of a ritual ceremony" (25).

[19] Stone's article makes important early contributions to the study of the child as consumer though his approach is, by contemporary standards, condescending towards his subjects (he calls children "urchins") and undiplomatic in his dealing with opposing views (for example, he refers to the idea of costumes as disguise or protection as "Nonsense! This conception of 'trick or treat' is clearly and grossly in error. In the mass society, the 'protection racket' seems as archaic as the concepts of psychoanalysis" [373-74]).

# CHAPTER V

# THE FOURTH OF JULY: REFASHIONING FOURTH OF JULY TRADITIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

*He loved the Fourth of July block party, when the whole East End converged for a day and night of games and music and grilled chicken and ribs and sweet-potato pie and dancing until the last firecracker, and then some. Maniac loved the colors of the East End, the people colors. For the life of him, he couldn't figure why these East Enders called themselves black. He kept looking and looking, and the colors he found were gingersnap and light fudge and dark fudge and acorn and butter rum and cinnamon and burnt orange. But never licorice, which, to him, was real black.*

- Jerry Spinelli, *Maniac Magee*

The Fourth of July occupies a unique position in this discussion of holidays. Unlike the other holidays considered here, it takes place outside of the traditional school year, it has no ancient origins, and it did not go through an unsanctioned infancy. Rather than evolving as a European import, rooted (no matter how loosely) in ancient culture, the Fourth of July was established in the United States with a definitive start date.[1] Though Fourth of July traditions have evolved and expanded since the late eighteenth century, we can look to a particular historical moment as the point of origin for this holiday. Such characteristics would seem to position the Fourth of July as an ideal recommitment holiday, defined by Amitai Etzioni as a holiday that "directly serve[s] socialization and societal integration" by reinforcing shared histories, values, and ideals (11). Paul Goetsch, however, notes in "The Fourth of July and its Role in American Literature" that the holiday's presence has declined in literature and oral rhetoric throughout the twentieth century when compared with its prominence in the first half of the nineteenth century. "All in all," Goetsch asserts, "the once close connection between

the holiday, oratory, and literature has been severed" (34). Having abandoned the formal rhetorical and literary traditions that highlight nation and rekindle patriotic spirit, Goetsch argues, many now view the holiday as "chiefly a day off work, a time to relax, and a chance perhaps to take the children to a picnic and let them see a display of fireworks" (33). Goetsch's argument arises from a survey of texts for adults, but his observations are useful for children's literature as well. While children's magazine and book publishers continue to turn out Fourth of July literature with vigor, the focus of the literature has shifted. Content no longer centers only on lessons in history, nation, morality, and ideal citizenship. Instead, the texts are now turning to—as Goetsch points out—family and local community.

This chapter considers the shift in children's Fourth of July literature from emphasis on nation, national identity, and nation as family to emphasis on family, familial identity, and friction between nation and family. It begins with a discussion of early- to mid-nineteenth-century Fourth of July children's literature, which largely depends upon two strategies: first, it establishes a shared history among its characters and readers, and second, it defines ideal American citizenship by employing negative types against which to construct model national identity. Next, the chapter moves to a sample of texts that offer the Fourth of July from the perspective of characters in marginal positions, giving voice to those groups who had previously been used only as foils to emphasize what an American is not. Finally, the chapter turns to contemporary children's literature that includes ethnically and racially diverse celebrations of the holiday. Ultimately, these diverse presentations have changed the tone of Fourth of July

celebrations to privilege family over nation, with some texts going so far as to situate nation as a threat to the family. This is not to say that family received no attention in earlier Fourth of July literature; however, literature for children of the dominant group in the nineteenth century, and beyond, often positions nation as family, while literature for marginalized groups has often developed its conflicts around the clash of nation and family. This examination of children's texts suggests that Fourth of July literature has shifted the treatment of public identity from a narrow presentation of ideal citizenship, which challenges the status of those in marginalized groups, to a wide array of American identities, which challenges nation.

## Dominant Culture Fourth of July Literature in the Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century

Lorinda Cohoon observes in "Festive Citizenships: Independence Celebrations in New England Children's Periodicals and Series Books" that Fourth of July literature appeared regularly in children's texts by the 1830s and '40s. By this time, the nation had already moved several decades beyond its first celebrations of independence, which, Len Travers notes, "fed and reflected idealized (if only partly realized) nationalism of the Revolution and the years immediately following" (10). Nevertheless, as the nation moved into the middle decades of the nineteenth century, "the continued observance of these rites was increasingly vital to the maintenance of a collective belief in (or myth of) national community that superseded a myriad of regional identities and interregional antagonisms … the observance of Independence Day assured people of a common

identity and purpose. At the same time, the ritual celebrations seemed to obliterate distance and diversity" (Travers 10). The nineteenth-century literature reflective of these ritual celebrations equipped children—specifically white, Christian, male, middle- and upper-class children—with models of "festive citizenship" and "national narratives" to frame their thinking of the past and future with lionized ideals of American identity so that they might become stable, law-abiding, and productive contributors in their local and national communities (Cohoon 148). While laying out the characteristics valued in citizenship, the texts also depend on negative definitions of citizenship so that children learn what an American is not as readily as readily as they learn what an American is. The literature, therefore, encouraged children to adopt a collective, social, national identity while it simultaneously "model[ed] exclusionary practices" to work against groups outside the dominant culture (148). Matthew Dennis makes a similar observation in *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days: An American Calendar*, noting that the Fourth of July presented the opportunity to "define, delimit, or expand—while celebrating the American nation" and that its festivities have "excluded as well as included, signaling who is and who is not (or is not legitimately) American" (14). Cohoon emphasizes that such considerations would be of particular interest in the1830s and 1840s when the national agenda included "struggles over slavery, territorial expansion, and treatment of Native Americans" (142).

The 1836 *Parley's Magazine* piece "Juvenile Celebration of Independence" features the kind of ideal Fourth of July celebration that exemplifies desirable citizenship for children of the dominant class while also shunning the kind of behavior that would

be undesirable in a young American citizen.[2] The story sets a New England scene in which children, parents, and teachers gather at Sabbath School to mark the national anniversary.[3] The company begins with a hymn that associates nation with piety and then hears an address from Thomas Gallaudet, identified as the author of *The Child's Book on the Soul*.[4] Gallaudet's lecture, which is said to delight children and adults alike, explains "what was meant by celebrating American Independence [….] and he spoke of a great many sorts of freedom" (251). He includes both national freedom and personal freedom from sin. Each child meets the minister—the boys first and then the girls—and there is a modest spread of fruits, cakes, and water, which the company partakes of "very moderately" (250). The sketch contrasts this gathering with the outdoor scenes of "the parade, and noise and firing; and much drinking of spirits, and eating of unwholesome food," where there is "bad language used and many other sorts of bad conduct" (251). In this comparison, the narrator "could not help thinking how much happier the children were [to be inside] than to be in the streets." Here, the model Fourth blends religion, nation, history, family, and temperance while condemning gluttonous and unchecked revelry. The denouncing of raucous outdoor behavior reminds children—as Cohoon has noted (136)—that small, rebellious groups threaten the nation.[5] Though citizens are supposed to celebrate the protest that led to the nation's independence, they must now quell other signs of unrest. Through this story, then, children learn both the patriotic identities they should assume and the un-American behaviors they should reject.

As the nineteenth century progressed, even texts that were not as overtly religious as "Juvenile Celebration of Independence" relied on religious and moralizing

rhetoric to frame the national holiday, while also forging strong family connections between settlers and revolutionaries of the past and contemporary citizens, even if biological kinship did not actually exist. Both of these tactics are employed in Uncle Ned's chapbook *Story for the Fourth of July: An Epitome of American History Adapted to Infant Minds* (1840),[6] published just a few years after "Juvenile Celebration." Uncle Ned's text takes a more lenient approach than "Juvenile Celebration" towards enjoyment—the boys in the story (who are old enough to be trusted) amuse themselves with firecrackers, while the girls are treated to candy, toys, and books—but the text still concentrates on behavioral instruction by emphasizing the child reader's debt to a nation built through pious struggle. The piece thus performs what Christopher (Kit) Kelen and Björn Sundmark observe as one of the common tasks of national children's literature, "justify[ing] the nation to its innocents on behalf of the departed," which is often achieved through "the offering of convincing demonstrations of faith" (3). For most of the story, Uncle Ned narrates history, moving from Columbus to the Puritans with a heavy-headed nod to the courage of New World explorers and early settlers and to the divine favor that helped them along the way. He reminds the children that they must appreciate the hardships and emulate the ideal values of those who came before them because "It was for you, children, that they were willing to take all this trouble" (11-12). By indicating that early settlers had these children in mind, Uncle Ned establishes a kind of familial linkage between the two groups, even identifying early settlers as "our fathers" (12).

Uncle Ned then turns to the events surrounding the Revolutionary War, in which he casts England as the aggressor so that rebellion is safely contained in a realm of dire necessity. Uncle Ned explains that the colonists

> loved the king of England, and would obey him, if he would do right by them; but they would not let him oppress them and their children, and deprive them of their rights. Then the king was angry, and sent over armies to compel them to submit. It was at that time that our fathers sent their wisest and best men to Philadelphia. The congress agreed they and the whole country would make their own law, and be *independent* [….] this makes the Fourth of July a great and memorable day. (14 – 15)

Even in the discussion of revolution, Uncle Ned is careful to mention wisdom and new law, and he combines this emphasis on logic and order with a final appeal to religion, reminding the children that with God "on [their] side," "the United States have ever since been independent; I trust they will ever remain so, enduring as the ROCK OF AGES" (15). The children, therefore, receive a message of noble and civilized reorganization enacted in intellectual space rather than an image of violent uprising carried out in physical space.

This kind of compact and tidy history operates as what Travers calls "a veneer of shared ideology and elemental harmony," which masks "real social and political conflict" in order to present Americans with a unified understanding of patriotic identity (7). In nineteenth-century children's literature, language used to construct a family connection between readers and patriotic forefathers works especially hard to cement a

shared identity by establishing generational continuity and by requiring readers of the texts to be mindful of the sacrifices of their past relatives, binding those readers to care for the nation as one would care for a family member or a valued family heirloom. Those who are not part of the history are a direct threat to the family/nation as family, a concept demonstrated in the Fourth of July chapter of Josephine Baker's *Round Top and Square Top; or, The Gates Twins* (1887), which, like "Juvenile Celebration of Independence," was published through a religious venue, the Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society. The book, a sequel to Baker's 1886 *Dear Gates, One of the Gates Children*, follows the day-to-day adventures of identical twins, and the confusion that their similarities cause for those who interact with them. Much of the Fourth of July chapter, however, foregrounds the parental role in the holiday over the children's role, while also highlighting the xenophobic climate of the time, spurred by governmental attention to the surge in immigration. The national response included the passage of the Immigration Act of 1882, the "first general immigration legislation at the national level that applied to all aliens" (Hirota 1093). The legislation made particular effort to block the wrong kind of immigrant, adding "an exclusion clause that prohibited the landing of paupers and criminals and provided for the deportation of criminals who escaped exclusion at the time of arrival" (1093-94). A wariness of the undesirable immigrant is extremely evident in Baker's chapter.

As the Fourth of July chapter of Baker's text begins, the narration explains that "There were two days in the year that Mrs. Gates was willing to celebrate. One was Thanksgiving, and the other was the Fourth of July." For Mrs. Gates the Fourth holiday

provokes “a sense of obligation that Christmas and Easter never brought, sincerely pious as she had ever been,” and the reason for her strong feelings about the Fourth is her family’s intimate connection to the nation’s past: her grandfather had “wintered at Valley Forge” in the Revolutionary War, her father fought “with might and main” in the war of 1812 under General Harrison (presumably William Henry Harrison, future US President), and her sons, though she did not know it yet, would go on to fight for the country as well, where at least one would “lay down his life in [the beloved country’s] defence.” With her family’s roots so entwined with national history, it comes as no surprise that Mrs. Gates puts in a hard day’s work baking for the family’s holiday picnic, which she describes with great anticipation:

> This year they were to have a quiet fish-fry in the North Woods, ‘all by themselves,’ remarked Mrs. Gates, with great satisfaction. […] the party would be small and select. Mrs. Gates used her utmost skill in preparing dainties and substantials for the occasion. ‘It is not as if we were going to feed a large family with coarse appetites, like the McCoys.’

The McCoys are an Irish immigrant family living near the Gates family, and it is clear from the text that Mrs. Gates considers them to be an undisciplined, lazy, troublemaking group.

Mr. Gates interrupts Mrs. Gates’s quiet thoughts of family the night before the Fourth of July with his concerns about the McCoys, remarking, “It seems a pity that any child in this country should grow up in ignorance of the meaning of the day-- what it cost--what it has done and will do for the people, if they will adhere to the principles it

commemorates." He goes on to emphasize that such ignorance is not only a pity, but also a threat to the nation and to the Gates family because the eight McCoy boys will be entitled to a vote just like the Gates boys when they reach the age of twenty-one. Mr. Gates stresses that each McCoy son "will be sure to cast it, right or wrong, and probably wrong, unless he is trained to know the right from the wrong." Because the Gates family only has four boys to the McCoys' eight, their "right" votes could easily be overruled by the McCoys' "ignorant" votes unless they intercede. Mr. Gates concludes that "it is little use to train our children, unless our neighbor's children are trained too; especially when we are in the minority." Mrs. Gates agrees: "The McCoys must not be allowed to out-vote my boys in the land their grandfather and great-grandfather fought to make free for them. If there is no other way, they must be trained to vote *with* my children and not against them," and she concedes to allow the McCoys on their family Fourth of July excursion so that they can hear the Declaration of Independence as Mr. Gates reads it to his own boys. When Mr. Gates insists that the McCoys also be allowed to partake in the feast Mrs. Gates has so painstakingly prepared, he invokes both her Christian spirit and the injunctions of equality in the Declaration of Independence, and so Mrs. Gates puts up with the outsiders' encroachment on her family's holiday celebration as "part of the training necessary to prevent the McCoys from out-voting her own children."

Throughout the holiday, the McCoy children's father is absent, mentioned only as a man who would "sell his vote any day for a glass of rum," and their mother seems a boisterous, hapless, and uneducated woman, though neither intentionally malicious nor as threatening as the father. In the absence of strong and competent leadership from their

parents, and especially from the father, Mr. Gates steps in to provide the McCoy boys with a sense of patriotic identity. While Mrs. McCoy—referred to in the text as "Biddy" rather than with a formal prefix as the Gates parents are—erroneously believes the Fourth of July to be "a rale gintleman, so he is," Mr. Gates offers more accurate historical context by leading the children in song, prayer, and readings rife with references to the principles of the day and to national fathers. For instance, they sing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," which includes the line "Land where my fathers died," and Mr. Gates recounts the "heroic story of the Pilgrim Fathers." Mr. Gates then leads the party to a memorial with a flag, cannon, and two guns used by Mrs. Gates's father and grandfather. The children are allowed to handle the guns, feeling so moved by the day's patriotism that they are ready to "offer themselves and all they possessed to their beloved country," and Mr. Gates fires the cannon in homage to the day. Biddy's reaction to the cannon fire, however, demonstrates that she is still an outsider:

> Biddy, panic stricken, took to her heels, leaving various articles of wearing apparel scattered along her route, as she fled from the woods. Some time later they found her crouched in a heap on the bank of the brook, wailing—'Oi'm kilt—Oi'm kilt, entoirely, so Oi am. Oh! me Patsey; oh! me Mike; it's kilt we are; this day! And all for the Fourth of July, bad look ter him!'

Biddy's outburst arises from fear that the cannon fire has killed her sons, but the worry is resolved quickly enough when she sees the boys alive and well. Though this scene is likely meant to be one of lighthearted misunderstanding, it bears the reminder that part

of the McCoy boys' Irish identity is meant to be destroyed that day and replaced with American spirit.

As the holiday draws to a close, the party declares it "a long happy day" in which "they were all children together," but the text is nevertheless filled with reminders that outsiders threaten the national family/nation as family. As a group, the McCoys are a wild and ill-mannered bunch who take heartily from the Gates's resources, demonstrated in the text with their ravenous consumption of the special occasion food Mrs. Gates has labored to prepare and suggestive of the deeper fear that the wrong kind of immigrants and undesirable outsiders would drain the nation of its resources. Moreover, the text must remove the McCoy children's father and weaken their mother (she is never on terms of equality with Mrs. Gates, whom she calls "misthress") in order to sever their ties with Ireland and allow them to assume a desired American national identity replete with familial associations to the founding fathers and the "fighting-blood" of the country passed down through generational lines. While later Fourth of July literature from marginal and multicultural views positions the nation as a potential threat to the biological family, the nineteenth-century tradition of constructing the American nation and its ideals as part of the reader's biological makeup and natural inheritance was a common tool in literature for children of the dominant group. This trend has persisted in children's literature throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well, even as the nation expanded geographically and ethnically.

The chapter "Fourth of July" in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941, set in the early 1880s), for instance, demonstrates that even as nuanced

perspectives entered children's Fourth of July literature to expand—or at least complicate—the roles of those who qualified as members of the dominant group, the efforts to craft national citizenship and invest participation in country through the language of family remained relatively unchanged. The chapter records the Ingallses' Fourth of July in the burgeoning town of De Smet, South Dakota. Laura's mother notes that they do not yet have the resources for a proper Fourth of July picnic because of the remote frontier location, and when Laura and Carrie go into town with their father to watch the horse races, similar circumstances are noted by a man there:

> Most of us are out here trying to pull ourselves up by our own boot straps. By next year, likely some of us will be better off, and be able to chip in for a real big rousing celebration of Independence Day. Meantime, here we are. It's Fourth of July, and on this day somebody's got to read the Declaration of Independence. It looks like I'm elected, so hold your hats, boys; I'm going to read it. (73)

Laura listens to the reading, followed by the crowd's eager chorus of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," struck up by her father, which prompts her to consider national inheritance and legacy. It occurs to Laura that "Americans are free" with no king but God, and she thinks, "'Our father's God, author of liberty—' The laws of Nature and of Nature's God endow you with a right to life and liberty. Then you have to keep the laws of God, for God's law is the only thing that gives you a right to be free" (76). The text works from the female perspective (Laura and Carrie initially feel uncomfortable among the crowd of strangers in town, most of whom are boys and men, and they listen to the reading

from within their father's store), as well as from the frontier setting. Though the characters are geographically distanced from the nation proper without many of the material trappings of holiday and the girls lack the full rights of citizenship enjoyed by their male counterparts, the ideology of the day follows that presented in other literature for children of the dominant class. Laura's observations on the Fourth reflect the familiar conflation of religion, country, and family to communicate an ideal American identity in the tradition of dominant culture children's literature frequently published throughout the nineteenth century and recurrent in literature of later centuries.

**Fourth of July Literature from the Marginal Perspective**

Throughout the nineteenth century, Fourth of July literature for children of the dominant group of society has largely dealt with otherness, diversity, and marginalization either by using figures from those groups as tools/foils against which to construct ideal citizenship or by collapsing difference to create the façade of uncomplicated national unity. As the nation expanded in region and population, literature for the dominant group continued to demonstrate that members of that group would "imagine themselves, however particular they might be, as essential, prototypical Americans and imaginatively assimilate (or exclude) others within the national boundaries, evaluating the others' claims to citizenship on the basis of the criteria established by their own ideal image" (Dennis 13). However, there have also been trends in the literature that defamiliarize the holiday by embracing the perspectives of those outside the dominant group. These trends appear even in nineteenth-century literature in

the vein of Frederick Douglass's "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" (1852), in which Douglass famously declares, "The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me." In the address, Douglass wields the language of family used so often in the holiday literature for the dominant group, though he twists the language to draw a distinction between that group and the marginalized sector to which he belongs. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century children's literature often treats the confrontation between the dominant group and marginalized groups of society with less gravitas than Douglass does in his address; however, peripheral presentations of the Fourth of July in children's literature have grown in the later decades of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first to address marginal perspectives less playfully and more dynamically than was typical of earlier works for children.

As an example of the lighthearted approach to racial difference found in many post-Civil War works, we may consider Louise-Clarke Pyrnelle's 1882 *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot, or Plantation Child-Life,* a volume containing stories, games, and hymns of Southern slaves. Here the question of the Fourth of July's significance to the slave population arises, but it is framed in a sentimental text of white authorship intended to "amuse," and devoid of the authentic criticism of Douglass's speech and of later Fourth of July children's literature. Pyrnelle (1850-1907), a teacher and public speaker as well as an author, was born in the antebellum South to a family of plantation owners, an upbringing that provided the basis for the childhood experiences presented in her writing. Praised at the time of its publication and in the subsequent release of reprints

throughout the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century for its "portrayal of Southern childhood and its usage of what was then called 'Southern Negro Dialect'" (Kelley 140-41), the text "prove[s] difficult and distasteful to today's audiences" because of the frequent use of that same dialect and for its "derogatory racial epithets" (142). Pyrnelle herself nods at the problem of slavery in the preface to the book, but she quickly rationalizes it when she writes that her "little book [does not] pretend to be any defence of slavery. I know not whether it was right or wrong (there are many pros and cons on the subject); but it was the law of the land" (v). By modern standards, Pyrnelle appears naïve or willfully ignorant at best when she claims that her purpose is to "tell of the pleasant and happy relations that existed between master and slave" (vi). Joyce Kelley, one of only a few critics to study Pyrnelle, argues that though Pyrnelle certainly occupies the troublesome "position as entertainer of [her] contemporary white audiences accustomed to racist stereotype and minstrel humor," her writing also "suggest[s] that she sincerely means to recreate rather than misrepresent," even as her "view of master-slave relations remains rosily colored by nostalgia" (143-44). I would note further that while questions about the Fourth of July in Pyrnelle's text come in lighthearted fashion rather than in harsh denunciation in the manner of Douglass's work, the text nevertheless opens discussion within the context of children's literature about the holiday's significance for populations who exist outside of the "biological" national family constructed so rigorously in literature for children of the dominant group.

*Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* takes its title from the nicknames that Mammy assigns to the Waldron girls, whose real names are Madeleine, Elinor, and Eugenia. Mammy has been with the family since Mrs. Waldron's infancy as one of their many "loved" slaves, whose names and positions are offered in the second paragraph of the first chapter before readers even receive much detail on the Waldrons. The Fourth of July chapter comes near the end of the book, the fifteenth of seventeen chapters, after sections in which the Waldron children hear fairytales and religious instruction from the slaves, participate in games and excursions, learn about the business of running the plantation, and celebrate another holiday, Christmas. As the Fourth of July chapter begins, the text explains that, in keeping with plantation culture across the South, the Fourth of July is a day of "general mirth and festivity" (199), both for the white family and for their black slaves, and all will attend a holiday barbecue, though there are separate provisions and tables for the different races. Major and Mrs. Waldron depart for the celebration in their own carriage, leaving the girls to ride with Mammy and the other slaves to the creek where the barbecue will take place.

On the ride, Dumps, the middle daughter, asks, "Mammy, what does folks have Fourf of Julys for?" (203). The question sets off all kinds of speculative answers. Mammy replies, "I dunno, honey […] I hyear 'em say hit wuz 'long o' some fightin' or nuther wat de white folks fit one time." Mammy is not entirely sure about the fight, but she thinks it may have been the time that David fought Goliath or the time that Samson "kilt up de folks wid de jawbone" (204).[7] Diddie, the oldest Waldron daughter, provides an alternate answer, "It was the 'Declination of Independence' […] It's in the little

history; and it wasn't any fightin', it was a *writin'*; and there's the picture of it in the book." Uncle Bob, the slave driving the wagon, agrees that he has also heard of the "Defemation uv Ondepen'ence," though he "furgits de zack meanin' […] hit's some kin' er writin', do, jes like Miss Diddie say; but, let erlone dat, hit's in de squshionary, an' yer ma kin fin' hit fur yer, an' 'splain de zack meanin' uv de word." However, Daddy Jake, the "oldest negro on the place," offers yet another take, arguing, as Biddy McCoy does, that the Fourth of July celebrates the birthday of a man named "Marse Fofer July" who was a "pow'ful fightin' man; but den who it wuz he fought I mos' furgot, hit's ben so long ergo" (205). Daddy Jake remembers going with his old master to an event at which the man named "Fourth of July" was speaking, for he was also a great and wise man according to Daddy Jake's recollection, and though Daddy Jake concedes that he never saw Master Fourth of July himself, he remembers hearing the applause of those who witnessed the oration. As Daddy Jake continues on with his explanation, his narrative expands, and he even insists that "his folks usen ter visit our wite folks. I helt his horse fur 'im de many er time; an', let erlone dat, I knowed some uv his niggers; but den dat's ben er long time ergo." When Diddie challenges him about the writing she saw associated with the Fourth of July in her history book, Daddy Jake says, "I dunno wat he wuz writin' erbout; but den he wuz er man, caze he lived in my recommembrunce, an' I done seed 'im myse'f," and "That settled the whole matter" (206). Though Diddie draws on the authority of her history book and gives what we consider to be an accurate account of the Fourth of July, Daddy Jake adamantly delivers the final word,

destabilizing the authoritative history of the dominant group by demonstrating that history depends on fluid witness and hearsay from long ago.

In contrast to the children gathered around in Uncle Ned's chapbook to hear the revered tale of their forefathers and the nation's founding and in contrast as well to Mr. Gates's efforts to indoctrinate the children of his Irish neighbors in accordance with his impassioned view of civic responsibility, the Waldron girls discuss the meaning of the holiday with a marginalized and disenfranchised sector of society: their slaves. Moreover, even after the erroneous explanations of the holiday, there is no clarification about its "true" history and significance, and both the white children and the slaves go on to enjoy the rest of the day in sport and feasting. While there is the assumption that the girls will receive proper instruction in their nation's history at some point in their educations (a formality that will never be afforded to the slaves), the text makes no effort to bring such education into its holiday scene, thus banishing the solemnity of the holiday and its "truths" established by many texts of the nineteenth century, especially those associated with the Sunday school movement. Rather than glean instruction on the national significance of the Fourth of July, readers, Kelley notes, "are meant to be amused" by the misunderstandings in the scene, pointing out that Diddie is "only slightly more literate than the slaves" (158). Diddie and her sisters will gain their national literacy as they grow older (though they will remain disenfranchised, so one must wonder what this text would look like if the Waldron children were boys), but at least for the time being, the white child characters and the child readers experience the confusion and estrangement, albeit in lighthearted manner, that the holiday carries for groups

outside of the dominant class. The mild introduction of such perspectives hints that national identity is not innate, that history is malleable, and that even though the holiday seems to be one of recommitment, its unifying force comes at the exclusion of non-dominant populations.

Pyrnelle's text indicates that though children's literature was beginning to consider the Fourth of July from perspectives beyond those of the dominant group, many of those perspectives came only in humorous form. Playful address of the holiday from the vantage point of the periphery continued into the twentieth century in texts such as Thornton Burgess's 1927 short story "Everyone Is Anxious." Burgess slips the Fourth from the realm of the familiar into that of the strange by following a nervous group of animals who hear loud bangs in the night and assume that a hunter is out to get them. The noises come only from firecrackers set off by Farmer Brown's boy in celebration of the Fourth, but because the "little people [the animals of the Green Meadows and the Green Forest] knew nothing about this," they were afraid (22). None of the animals "knew what to make of it. No one could guess what was going to happen. Anxious eyes watched for the appearance of the hunters with the terrible guns." This scene indicates the confusion entailed in the Fourth of July for groups standing outside of its tradition and history. Moreover, it signifies fear, and the animals' fear in the story is indeed grave: they fear for their lives. While Burgess's story is likely intended as a playful sketch, other texts about the Fourth of July from the marginal perspective present cultures, liberties, and lives at very real risk.

These threats are apparent for sixteen-year-old Steven Harmon, the black protagonist of Walter Dean Myers's young adult novel *Monster* (1999), who is on trial for his life, accused of felony murder, and his trial takes place against the backdrop of the Fourth of July. Fourth of July children's texts featuring minority perspectives appeared in the span between the publication of Burgess's short story and that of Myers's novel, including a notable chapter in Sydney Taylor's *All-of-a-Kind Family* (1951, about a Jewish immigrant family living in New York) and Dale Fife's *The Boy Who Lived in the Railroad Depot* (1968, about a white boy from New York who moves to the American Southwest and befriends a Native American boy). However, Myers's novel offers a sharper contrast with the playfully sketched marginal perspectives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than the mid-twentieth century texts do. In an early scene of the novel, which is written in journal entries and as a movie script from Steve's perspective, the judge engages the attorneys in a little start-of-the-day chit-chat, opening the trial by asking whether everyone has had a good holiday. Asa Briggs, the attorney for Steve's co-defendant, James King, replies, "The usual barbecue and a softball game that reminded me I can't run anymore" (18). Steve's own attorney, Miss O'Brien, responds, "With all the fireworks, it's my least favorite holiday." For these attorneys, whose descriptions indicate that they are white, the holiday is a nuisance, and this attitude becomes all the more striking when the prosecuting attorney, Sandra Petrocelli, invokes the founding fathers in her opening statement. Miss Petrocelli tells the jury that the founding fathers wisely constructed a sound judicial system because "they knew that there would be times and circumstances during which our society would

be threatened" (21). She identifies the crimes that led to this trial as "one of those times." The lawyer describes the victim as "a citizen of our state and country," while she labels Steve and his co-defendant as "monsters […] who are willing to steal and to kill, people who disregard the rights of others" (21). Miss Petrocelli's appeals, however, appear disingenuous when prefaced by the attorneys' dispassionate sentiments about the Fourth of July, and the juxtaposition shows an evident disconnect between the rhetoric of historical American ideals and their application in contemporary national institutions. In this contradiction, Myers turns Miss Petrocelli's words back on themselves to expose the justice system—not Steve—as the societal threat.

Myers could have established setting in any number of ways. He could have simply said that the trial was taking place in July. He could have located the trial in a different month altogether, but the Fourth of July choice inflates the setting with symbolic importance. Moreover, Myers also places the crime in a holiday setting, drawing attention to the decision to use holidays as a tool in reflecting the book's content. The robbery and murder that Steve is accused of participating in took place just days before Christmas, no doubt making the crimes seem worse in the eyes of a jury. Holidays, therefore, bookend Steve's experience with American law and justice, reinforcing the idea that dominant American traditions constitute moments of turmoil for individuals excluded from that dominant group. Moreover, situating Steve's experience in the justice system against the most recognizable holiday of nation translates his experience with legal institutions to his experience in the nation at large. Dennis contends that the Fourth of July holiday forces reflections on both public and private

selfhood, observing, "Identity and the boundaries of American citizenship and public life are fundamentally at stake during the Fourth of July" (14). Indeed, in *Monster* Myers considers these boundaries against his chosen backdrop of the Fourth of July, especially as they relate to race and age.

At several points in the novel, characters insist that race is not an issue. During one of her visits with Steve in jail, his mother comments, "Some of the people in the neighborhood said I should have contacted a Black lawyer," to which Steve "shook [his] head. It wasn't a matter of race" (146). Mayor Giuliani (in the book) makes a similar note that race is not at stake during a press conference about the crime Steve is on trial for. The mayor says, "The idea that we're just trying to stop crime in white or middle-class areas is nonsense. Everyone living in the city deserves the same protection" (123). The victim in Steve's case, Alguinado Nesbitt, is an immigrant from St. Kitts who owned and operated a drugstore in Harlem. Despite Steve's and Guiliani's claims, however, it is hard to ignore that, in the novel, those who perpetrate crime, those who are accused of crime, and those who are victims of crime are all part of minority racial groups, and that those who represent law, justice, and order are members of the dominant racial group. Steve is also doubly disempowered in his identity: he is black and he is young.[8] Throughout the book, Myers calls attention to the demographic similarities between Steve and his fellow inmates, noting that the prisoners are disproportionately young and overwhelmingly black or Hispanic, and Miss O'Brien tells Steve that the odds are particularly stacked against him because of both his youth and his race: "Half of those jurors, no matter what they said when we questioned them when we picked the

jury, believed you were guilty the moment they laid eyes on you. You're young, you're Black, and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?" (78-79). As is evident in the didactic literature from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is a longstanding distrust of youth, especially boys, in Fourth of July literature, even youth of the dominant class. When that youth presents itself in a teenage boy of a minority race, the threat to nation appears to be twice as strong.

The justice system technically works for Steve when the jury finds him not guilty, but the final lines of the novel indicate that Steve is only a nominal citizen.[9] After the verdict, Steve extends his arms to hug his attorney, but she tenses and moves away as "STEVE, arms still outstretched, turns toward the camera. His image is in black and white, and the grain is nearly broken. It looks like one of the pictures they use for psychological testing, of some strange beast, a monster" (276). Throughout the trial, Miss O'Brien frequently asks Steve how he is feeling, especially when she knows he has had an upset stomach. She smiles at him, pats his hand, and even lets him into her life outside of the courtroom by answering Steve's questions about her weekend plans. However, Miss O'Brien's reaction to Steve's outstretched arms at the novel's conclusion reveals her efforts to humanize him throughout the trial to have been a charade. Miss O'Brien acknowledges Steve's rights under the law, but on a personal level, she casts him in a group that is other, strange, and fearful. In light of the Fourth of July setting, Miss O'Brien's behavior exposes the superficial nature of equality in the United States. By this point in national history, the law technically upholds citizenship for all

Americans regardless of minority status, but the text of *Monster* indicates that there is only letter and no spirit in the law.

The novel emphasizes Steve's marginalized citizenship through the extreme fear and alienation that he experiences in the nation's justice system. While in prison, Steve confronts systemic violence and dehumanization: prisoners are stripped of access to privacy and decency, guards place bets on inmate verdicts, and court officers make sexist remarks about female jurors. Entrenched in a system of dehumanization, prisoners consume that identity, and Steve routinely witnesses inmates beating and sexually attacking one another as guards turn a blind eye. The effects not only emphasize Steve's preclusion from full and genuine citizenship, but they also stress the processes by which dehumanization and self-estrangement occur. While Steve is fortunate enough to escape the fate of many of his peers, his experience with the national justice system unsettles his sense of self, apparent both through the narrative mode of the film script in which he peers in on his own life as if mediated by a lens and through his direct statements about uncertainty of his identity. At the beginning of the novel, Steve realizes that his short stay in prison has changed him already: "When I look into the small rectangle, I see a face looking back at me but I don't recognize it. It doesn't look like me. I couldn't have changed that much in a few months. I wonder if I will look like myself when the trial is over" (1-2). By the novel's conclusion, it seems that there is no returning to the person he had been before his involvement with the American justice system. After the trial ends, Steve extends his interest in film and adopts the habit of recording himself, explaining that he does so because "I want to know who I am [….] I want to look at

myself a thousand times to look for the one true image" (281). Ultimately, the novel, set against the Fourth of July, demonstrates the ways in which national institutions prepare young minority men to be "monsters" rather than to be citizens.

In analysis of the Fourth of July passage in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982),[10] Lauren Berlant points out, "The Fourth of July has been a politically charged holiday for Afro-Americans as well as for other marginalized groups" because what it "resolves for the identity of Anglo-Americans it has raised as a question" for those in the periphery (832).[11] For Steve, the questions raised through his experience with the justice system estrange him not only from full inclusion in national institutions, but from his personal sense of humanity as well, and his identity becomes more one of performance than one of authenticity. As Tim Engles and Fern Kory note, Steve's "fate hinges on a successful performance of an 'acceptably black' version of himself, one that convinces bearers of the white imagination that despite his blackness, he is as fully human as they are" (57), and though he does perform an "acceptable black version of himself" (61) successfully enough to earn an acquittal, he never experiences full recognition of his personhood. While Fourth of July literature featuring children of the dominant group works to establish a seamless, familiar narrative through which children may view themselves as the ideological and even biological descendants of brave and just forefathers, holiday literature featuring peripheral perspectives—older texts as well as more recent ones—introduces confusions, mistellings, and unsettled conclusions, which disrupt the fluid national history constructed in dominant Fourth of July literature.

**Diverse Representations in Contemporary Fourth of July Literature**

The troublesome presentation of the Fourth of July in a text as recent as *Monster* indicates that the holiday continues to operate as a symbol of the type of exclusivity that Douglass criticized in his mid-nineteenth-century speech. However, there has also emerged a trend in recent children's literature that represents the relationship between the Fourth and marginal groups in a different way. These texts offer visions of close-knit, diversified communities and harmonious multicultural versions of the holiday. In the epigraph to this chapter, taken from Jerry Spinelli's *Maniac Magee* (1990), a book deeply invested in race dynamics and the child's ability to navigate between races where adults have failed to do so, Maniac celebrates the rainbow of skin colors he observes during a Fourth of July block party in New York's East End. While Maniac's observations of the unified holiday party provide a small snippet of an idyllic celebration among a diverse population that has historically been distanced from full participation in the holiday, some of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century texts with more extended treatments of the Fourth of July have been criticized for collapsing diversity into quaint, unrealistic, and unproblematized snapshots of collective harmony. The scenes from Leslie Kimmelman's 2003 *Happy Fourth of July, Jenny Sweeny*, for example, are statically homogenizing. In the picture book, Jenny, who is racially ambiguous, observes members of her community from several different backgrounds as they engage in Fourth activities such as preparing for parades, setting up picnics, and saluting the flag. Linda Kenton's review for the *School Library Journal* notes, "The wide green lawns, the manicured flower gardens, and the lovely lakeside setting suggest

an idealized Middle America" (100). Karen Hutt's *Booklist* review adds that many of the activities seem contrived—especially the image of an Indian family proudly displaying new certificates of citizenship—but that "as a whole, the book shows a diverse community celebrating together" (1672). That, according to the review, is a positive step. However, reductive historical information in an appendix entitled "About America's Birth" about the flag, the national bird, a handful of forefathers (who were born/died on July Fourth) and the Liberty Bell, reinforces the idea that this text's characters model assimilation and minimize difference in a manner that makes this text an example of what Rudine Sims Bishop has termed "melting pot" books, those which offer superficial representations of diversity in characters' physical appearances only (33-43). The picture book's appendix even stresses that "Americans celebrated much the way we do today, with picnics, fireworks, and parades," and while there is some validity in the observation, the comment draws all Americans across time under one cohesive umbrella in much the same way that the illustrations gather the diverse characters under the same stereotypical models of citizenship.

In this same vein, there are texts that engage with the stereotypes of the privileged and dominant version of history while also reworking that history (in both image and text) to feature minority groups as full participants in the Fourth of July, erasing the notion of exclusion as ever having been part of the American experience. One example is Karma Wilson's *How to Bake an American Pie* (2007). Before the text of the story begins, Raúl Colón's illustrations offer a scene of nine individuals, each enjoying a heaping bite of pie. The individuals include a Native American in full

headdress, Abraham Lincoln, a colonist in a white wig and tricorn hat, an Asian woman, a black man, a tan-skinned man, a white man in a baseball cap, and two additional women—one with blond hair and one with red hair. The same illustration appears again after the text has concluded, now with each of the characters facing the opposite direction than he or she faces in the opening illustration. The story's main characters are a cat and a dog, who prepare and bake the American pie, but the book also includes another image of diversity mid-text in an illustration that shows eight individuals tumbling onto the page to be caught up in the dog and cat's net. There are a Pilgrim, a man in a kilt, Asian immigrants, a woman in a long black dress with her head covered in the same black material (perhaps meant to be a hijab), and a black man in a loose-fitting white shirt evocative of slave dress commonly employed in film and illustrations. The majority of the individuals carry luggage and wave American flags. On the page opposite the illustration, the text continues with its directives for constructing an American pie: "Spice with ideas seasoned with dreams and customs of faraway lands." Though the text offers no details or examples of dreams or customs from distant parts of the world brought to the United States, the words and the illustration suggest that diversity has always been a prized American principle and that the slave, the Pilgrim, the European immigrant, and the Asian immigrant have all historically had the same hand in shaping the nation and have all participated in full citizenship—that all have been valued and treated equally. The messages of collective unity and blanket acceptance are repeated often in the book. Near the beginning, the text informs bakers of an American pie to "Preheat the world until fiery hot with a hunger and thirst to be free / Now find a

giant melting pot on the shores of a great shining sea. / Pat out a crust of fruited plains then spread it as far as you dare. Fold in some fields of amber grains, enough for all people to share." Later, readers are told to "Whisk in waterfalls kissed by the sun; then fold in sweet freedom for all."

Mixed in with these images of a diverse and harmonious country is the rhetoric of other national ideals—liberty, justice, courage, meekness, and might—alongside celebrations of the nation's natural resources and landmarks— farmland rich with produce, spacious skies, majestic mountains, the Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore, ships of explorers and settlers approaching from the rolling sea. Overall, the message is that the nation is one conceived of by all, bountiful enough for all, and welcoming of all. That message marks a starkly different representation of diversity than the othering of the McCoys in Baker's Fourth of July scene, the questioning and convoluted historicizing in Pyrnelle's text, the fearful confusion provoked by the holiday for those situated outside of it in Burgess's short story, and the systemic dehumanization of minority groups in Myers's novel. Instead, Wilson's picture book positions diversity among the noblest and most celebrated of American values, a sentiment representative of progressive twenty-first-century messages of tolerance and inclusion. At the same time, the collection of national iconography and lofty democratic philosophies compress time, diversity, and historical turmoil of all kinds to present the nation as one baked to perfection from the beginning (the first line reads, "First ever made on the Fourth of July"), always and forever prepared to serve all (the final line reads, "Serves: Just as many who wish to stop by"). When considered within the broader scope of Fourth of

July children's literature, *How to Bake an American Pie*'s emphasis on a static ideal reads as a presentation of how national history could have been and should be rather than a history of how things actually have been.

More complicated than representations that collapse or forget diverse identities are contemporary texts that refashion historical and national emphasis by focusing instead on family, a significant reworking of the Fourth of July because of the literary tradition of positioning nation as family. One such example is Janet Wong's 2002 *Apple Pie 4th of July*, a text which embraces the immigrant perspective rather than trying to "fix" it as Baker's text does. The picture book follows a Chinese-American girl who worries about how her family will be perceived for keeping their restaurant open on the Fourth. The girl, who remains nameless, reports smelling apple pie from a neighbor's kitchen and criticizes the smell of chow mein coming from her family's restaurant. "Chow mein!" she exclaims. "Chinese food on the Fourth of July? No one wants Chinese food on the Fourth of July." Her father reminds her, "Fireworks are Chinese," but she has no patience for his observation. The images of the girl show her conspicuously dressed in blue overalls and a red and white striped shirt—emblematic, of course, of the American flag. She lingers on the sights and smells of the holiday and watches the parade pass by with a mildly threatening "BOOM BOOM," but as the signs in the shop windows along the street where she stands watching indicate, the holiday and its celebrations seem "closed" to her. As the day marches on and no one comes into the restaurant for Chinese food, the girl again laments, "My parents do not understand all American things. They were not born here. Even though my father has lived here since

he was twelve, even though my mother loves apple pie, I cannot expect them to know Americans do not eat Chinese food on the Fourth of July." But then at five o'clock, customers begin to trickle in, and the girl's parents bring fresh food from the kitchen. Throughout the evening, the store becomes crowded with customers until it is time to close and "climb to our rooftop chairs, where we sit and watch the fireworks show—and eat our apple pie."

In this story, the girl and the readers do not really learn anything about the Fourth or about the glorified ideals of nation, and readers actually gain more Chinese history (that fireworks originated in China) than American history. Audiences also learn that there is nothing "un-American" about eating Chinese food on the Fourth and that Chinese immigrants can enjoy apple pie just like "real" Americans. Moreover, there is a lesson on family. While dominant children's literature of the nineteenth century and beyond conflates nation and family to encourage a personal identity tied up in public/patriotic identity, the main character of Wong's picture book is painfully aware of the possible disconnect between nation and family, especially when one's family is of a minority group. The girl is embarrassed by her parents, and she experiences the alienating feeling that her identity lies neither entirely within the world of her parents nor within dominant American culture. As the story progresses, the girl learns that she can navigate both an American identity and Chinese ancestry, though the text places particular emphasis on her acceptance of her personal familial history. When the restaurant turns busy, the girl helps her parents, and by the conclusion, she no longer uses the separating language of "my parents" to refer to them. Instead, she uses the

language of "we," including herself in a unit with her parents. By the end, this story is more about placing oneself in family than it is about locating oneself in nation, and in the process, the *Kirkus* review notes, "All at once, cultural boundaries don't seem quite as defined." Though the cultural boundaries prove porous, the text calls attention to distinctions between cultures rather than collapsing all difference and gathering all individuals in a catchall definition of American citizenship.

Diane Gonzales Bertrand's picture book *Uncle Chente's Picnic* (2002) goes even further than *Apple Pie Fourth of July* in emphasizing family over nation on the Fourth of July holiday. The book features the Mexican-American Cárdenas family as they prepare a special celebration in honor of their uncle, a truck driver, who will come to visit on the Fourth of July. The text weaves Spanish words (tío, abuelito, pajaritos) and names into the English prose, and the celebration, too, is a mixture of Mexican and American. Elizabeth Pleck terms this intermingling of cultural traditions "Syncretization, a blending of cultures to produce a new result," noting that it is a "common" process, which "allow[s] immigrants to inject some elements of ethnic life into the rituals of the dominant culture and thus symbolized their desire to forge a dual identity, ethnic and mainstream" ("Who Are We" 51). In Bertrand's text, this process is obvious in the family's holiday menu, which includes standard American Independence Day fare such as hamburgers, potato salad, and corn on the cob, but the family adds jalapeños and homemade frijoles to its picnic as well. The children decorate the trees with red, white, and blue streamers, and lay red paper plates out on the picnic table. After dinner, they plan to watch the television broadcast of fireworks at the Statue of Liberty.

However, on the day of the picnic, it rains. The external world becomes a stormy place, reducing the patriotic streamers to mere strings and blowing the thin paper plates easily from the table. The family retreats to the safe environment of the home and later to the liminal space of the porch. They lay out their fancy china, which is praised as more beautiful than the disposable Fourth of July plates, and Uncle Chente begins to tell family stories. He recalls a funny incident about the first time he came to Texas with his Tío Pepe to sell goats, and after the power goes out due to the storm, he tells another story about growing up with his abuelita in Mexico, where "it was very dark at night. But our abuelita, your great-grandmother, always kept candles burning in front of her picture of La Virgen de Guadalupe." Through these stories, the children learn about life in Mexico and about their own family history, but they learn nothing of American Fourth of July history. Yet the children hardly miss the lessons on nation, finding Uncle Chente's tales more enjoyable than the fireworks they would be watching on television. While the Fourth of July sets the occasion for the visit, the holiday quickly fades and emphasis instead turns to the family relationship. As the *School Library Journal's* review by Ann Welton indicates, "This quiet book shows a real delight in family" (128). In a notable contrast to another uncle's narration, Uncle Ned's, about American history and the sacrifices of forefathers, positioned as biological ancestors through the rhetoric, Tío Chente's stories are intimate tales of one individual family. Bertrand's text thus transforms the holiday entirely from one in which the tropes of family are used to instill national identity, to one in which individual families become the focus of the celebration.

## Conclusion

Much of nineteenth-century children's Fourth of July literature reinforces a dominantly sacred version of American history and a national identity that links allegiance to nation as a familial and religious duty. This presentation of the holiday has continued in contemporary children's literature, and in 2010 alone, books including Patrick Merrick's *Fourth of July Fireworks*, Kathy Allen's *The First Independence Day Celebration*, and Shelley Marshall's *Molly the Great Respects the Flag: A Book about Being a Good Citizen* make use of a conventional version of history and citizenship, reliant on heavy, idealistic national language. At the same time, children's literature for the Fourth of July has expanded tradition to include a wide variety of texts from non-dominant perspectives. Contemporary multicultural Fourth of July literature reduces the lessons on history, American exceptionalism, and divine purpose, and focuses instead on individual identity, family, and/or harmonious local community. When considered against the confusion and alienation of earlier texts incorporating marginal perspectives such as Pyrnelle's and Burgess's (even as those texts rely on humor) and the evident dehumanization of the black male teen in *Monster*, contemporary holiday literature offers a myriad of views meant to engage the range of American experience.

The shift from focus on nation to focus on family in particular marks a change in literary representations of the holiday, especially as contemporary texts often situate nation as a threatening force with the power to disrupt family. At the beginning of *Apple Pie 4th of July*, for example, the girl disassociates from her parents because they are not American enough. Nineteenth-century literature for children in the dominant group,

however, does not intimate this disconnect. "Juvenile Celebration of the Fourth of July," for instance, shows children, parents, and community learning about national ideals together. *Epitome of American History* goes one step further by establishing nation *as* family. Uncle Ned's relation to the children in the story is ambiguous, but he is nevertheless named uncle, and he gathers the children around him to relay a unified American history as if he is telling the history of a family. The rhetoric of "fathers" and "children" used throughout his narration reinforces the positioning of national history as family history. Uncle Ned's storytelling role thus mirrors Tío Chente's role in Bertrand's picture book nearly a century and a half later, but Tío Chente is a biological relative and his stories are family history. While nation operates as the institution driving identity in dominant nineteenth-century Fourth of July literature for children, nation conflicts with family in contemporary multicultural texts, and in the case of the texts considered here, family is often situated as equal, if not superior, to nation in importance.

As nineteenth-century Fourth of July texts indicate, the holiday literature has historically represented the national climate, albeit filtered through the limited and desired views of dominant class citizens. Contemporary children's Fourth of July literature continues to engage national sentiment in its presentation of holiday, and there are a host of factors that have fed into the current literature's view of nation as potentially threatening to individuals and families. In his contribution to the collection *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, George Lipsitz has identified such factors as the "stagnation of wages, automation-generated unemployment the evisceration of the welfare state, threats to intergenerational upward mobility,

privatization of public resources, and polarization by class, race, and gender" along with "the aggrandizement of property rights over human rights" (104). The perception that the nation has failed to protect people from such changes has created the sentiment that "people cannot participate in the decisions that most affect their lives," which in turn has "wreak[ed] havoc in their lives as citizens and family members" (105). Lipsitz's observations come in the context of post-Vietnam decline in national confidence and the development of Reagan-era "new patriotism," which authors writing in the '90s and early years of the 2000s would likely have been sensitive to. Many of the factors Lipsitz points to continue to influence confidence in nation. More recently, public perception of the national response to catastrophic events such as the 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, and the recession have added to the suspicion of nation and its ability to protect people, especially those who were already in marginalized positions. In this context, contemporary children's literature has permitted critiques of nation, allowing for revisions to history and for the rejection of nineteenth-century constructions of nation as family, suggesting instead that national policy rooted only in dominant group history destroys families.

In scholarly examinations of holiday, critics have often drawn a distinction between family and nation, choosing to hone an investigation either on sentimental holidays that center on family or on public holidays that focus on nation. Pleck, whose study *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* concerns itself primarily with the intersection of family, holiday, occasion, and celebration, points to the reasoning behind such distinctions and defends her choice to

exclude the Fourth of July from her volume, writing, "I have not discussed the major national holidays, such as Fourth of July, at length, because these were largely public festivals and secondarily or incidentally times for family gathering" (236). In contemporary Fourth of July texts, however, the nationalism of the holiday becomes secondary to the family and unique individual identities. Such changes have prompted critics to suggest that the Fourth of July no longer carries much collective importance. For instance, John MacAloon notes in "Sociation and Sociability in Political Celebrations" that July Fourth celebrations are "so optional and variable that they no longer bind" (266). Dennis also argues that the Fourth of July has lost its public power, asserting that the holiday has come to "signify everything and nothing …. [G]enerally the day is more flash than substance, an opportunity for mirth and avoidance of politics, not for redefining political identity, challenging historical memory, or claiming entitlements" (69). In relation to children's literature, such remarks bear some truth: contemporary literature weakens nation by providing simplified, truncated versions of history (if there is any historical component at all) when compared to nineteenth-century counterparts and by shifting the holiday's emphasis from nation to family. In such challenges to nation, however, the holiday hardly becomes one devoid of reflection on identity, both public and private. Rather, readings of contemporary Fourth of July children's literature in relation to nineteenth-century literature reflect the trend to challenge nation and to favor individualized, personal history over a singular, dominant, patriotic national identity.

Notes

[1] Granted, there has been some debate over the date on which the national anniversary should be celebrated. Len Travers begins the first chapter of *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* with a discussion of John Adams's often cited July 3, 1776 letter to Abigail Adams in which he identifies July 2, the date on which Congress passed the resolution for independence, as the day that will be "celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival" (Adams qtd. in Travers 16). In *The Glorious Fourth of July: Old-Fashioned Treats and Treasures from America's Patriotic Past*, Diane Arkins emphasizes that July 2 is the date on which the Second Continental Congress "declared the United Colonies Free and Independent States" (qtd. in Arkins 15). Two days later, on July 4, Congress "approved a final version of the Declaration of Independence and ordered it printed for distribution to the states: the date it bore was July 4, 1776. (No one actually signed the document until August and the last remaining signatures weren't affixed until November)" (Arkins 15 -16).

[2] The magazine was established by Samuel Goodrich, who used the name Peter Parley pseudonymously in his writing for children. Goodrich sat as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1836, the same year that "Juvenile Celebration of Independence" was published, and as a member of the Massachusetts Senate in 1837.

[3] The Sunday school movement, recorded approvingly in pieces such as that from *Parley's*, "sought to subdue the evils of traditional, bacchanalian Independence Day and to employ the Fourth of July in the interest of reform [….] By the 1830s, [Evangelical] organizers sought to use the Independence Day holiday didactically as well as recreationally for their scholars, who should be shielded from the drinking and carousing of immoderate celebrations. The Sunday school children's Fourth of July fete thus became a religious and civic institution" (Dennis 31 – 32).

[4] Here, the text refers to the Reverend Thomas Gallaudet, a New England educator best known for his advancements in deaf-mute instruction and for his religious considerations in education. *The Child's Book on the Soul* (1836) was the second of three books by Gallaudet published by The American Tract Society in Boston. The other two are *The Child's Book on Repentance* (1832) and *The Child's Book on the Fall of Man* (1841).

[5] Allusion to the rebellion of the Revolutionary War often comes in displays of fireworks, cannon fire, gun salutes, or reenactments. Though this chapter does not focus on the symbolic employments of fireworks (or gun or cannon fire), their usage is a persistent feature of Fourth of July children's literature. Stories such as "Juvenile Celebration" denounce loud outdoor celebrations, but there was also a trend in nineteenth-century literature to be fairly tolerant of the use of fireworks. Texts such as Louisa May Alcott's short story "A Jolly Fourth of July" (in *Jimmy's Cruise in the Pinafore*, 1879), Amanda Minnie Douglas's chapter "Fourth of July" (in *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe; or, There's No Place Like Home*, 1874, and the Fourth of July story of Lucretia Hale's *The Peterkin Papers* (published in book form in 1880 after the first Peterkin story appeared in Our Young Folks in 1867) offer mild warnings about their dangers, but nevertheless accept fireworks as a normal component of boyhood mischief on the holiday. Alongside these lighthearted sketches, though, there also came literary cautions against celebrating with fireworks such as in the harsh denouncements found in Asenath Carver Coolidge's *Christmas vs. Fourth of July* (1908).

Diane Arkins begins her study *The Glorious Fourth of July: Old-Fashioned Treats and Treasures from America's Patriotic Past* with a lengthy discussion of public rejection of the use of fireworks, accompanied by postcards and newspaper clippings of the kind of explosive-related accidents that cropped up when "backyard patriots" took celebrations into their own hands (16). The postcard and newspaper images often feature young boys, suggesting that the fireworks/guns and their dangers were associated with a juvenile brand of rowdiness that many believed had no place in the celebration of the nation's birthday. While the use of fireworks is a longstanding marker of the holiday, recommended even by John Adams, Cohoon has pointed out that such traditions become more complicated when children are

concerned. Cohoon notes, "the fascination with boyhood citizenships evident in the periodicals complicates the Fourth of July representations that occur so regularly since the 'sons' of the new nation must celebrate their forefathers' rebellions, but they must also comply with the laws and regulations of their towns and nation" (136). The child's use of fireworks and guns seems to bring this complication to a head by operating as a symbol of necessary violence during the revolution, but one of future anarchy should children not assimilate to desirable citizenship.

[6] Uncle Ned operates as both the author and the narrator, and while the jacket summary of the book indicates "Uncle Ned tells his nieces and nephews the story of the pilgrims and the founding of the United States," the text itself suggests that Uncle Ned may be speaking to a broader group of children than just those biologically related to him. The name is obviously a pseudonym, though special collections holding the text (such as DePaul University Library) have not linked the author's real name with the book.

[7] This is a reference to the Biblical passage in which Samson kills one thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15).

[8] In "Childhood of the Race: A Critical Race Theory of Intervention into Childhood Studies," Lucia Hodgson examines the treatment of minors in the criminal justice system, employing critical race theory to "focus on the racial disparities in sentencing children as adults to elucidate how the practice draws on racist theories of child development that ultimately rationalize and implement legal maneuvers that impact all children" (40).

[9] While the jury finds Steve not guilty, the truth about his involvement in the robbery remains ambiguous. Steve is alleged to have been the lookout, casing the convenience store before his co-defendant James King and another young man, twenty-two-year-old Richard "Bobo" Evans, entered. Steve is not accused of being in the store at the time of the robbery or murder, however. In interviews, Myers has commented that the truth is intentionally ambiguous because "I wanted the reader, given the facts of the case and having the benefit of Steve's inner thoughts, to reach their own decision" ("Questions" 8). He has added that some people "scream at [him]" that Steve was guilty and should have been sent to jail, while others have said, "he should never have been tried" ("Walter Dean Myers Discusses Monster"). Tim Engles and Fern Kory contend that Steve is guilty, arguing, "The question of Steve's guilt is ultimately resolvable by careful readers, but its ambiguity gestures toward bigger questions about white hegemony, such as how being treated as less than human might make young black men regard themselves, and how that distorted self-regard might even encourage some of them—Steve's codefendant, perhaps?—to commit the crimes they are already widely presumed to have committed" (53).

[10] Though not considered a text for children, the novel poses the Independence Day question through the voice of young Henrietta, who wants to know "Why us always have family reunion on July 4th" (287). She gets the answer, "White people busy celebrating they independence from England …so most black folks don't have to work. Us can spend the day celebrating each other" (287).

[11] In the introduction to *We, the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence*, Philip Foner considers economic class, gender, and occupation in addition to race as exclusionary categories that would alienate individuals from the Fourth of July holiday.

# CHAPTER VI

## CHRISTMAS: SANTA CLAUS, PATERNAL POWER, AND CONSTRUCTING THE CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS CANON

*No Santa Claus! Thank God! He lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.*

- Frank Church, "Yes, Virginia…"

This dissertation takes as its starting date 1823, the year in which "An Account of the Visit from St. Nicholas," now known commonly as "'Twas the Night before Christmas" or simply "The Night before Christmas," was published anonymously on December 23 in the *Troy Sentinel*.[1] The fifty-six line creation would shoot to such popularity that historians Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace have identified it as "arguably the best-known verses ever written by an American" (463). The poem has dominated scenes of the ideal American Christmas for two centuries and has served as an influence on many of the Christmas texts that have followed. "An Account" has much to do with the "invention" of Santa Claus, the invention of Christmas more broadly, and even the invention of fantasy culture in the United States. Decades before Santa's workshop and elves, Rudolph, Frosty, the Grinch, and Charlie Brown's Christmas tree, "An Account" laid the groundwork for America's canonical Christmas figures through its most indelible contribution, a clear description of and narrative for the Santa Claus figure, whose depictions and role in children's literature are the focus of this chapter.

Christmas is the holiday most widely represented in American literature for children, and for many children and child characters, it is the most visible and anticipated holiday in the calendar year. Lists of Christmas literature for children boast

several bona fide classics, fiercely guarded by popular culture and nostalgia, along with scores of lesser-known texts that feed into commercial demands for all things Christmas, as well as into niche markets that target children who are not represented in the popular conventions of the white, Christian, financially comfortable Christmas and its Santa Claus. The literature ranges from sentimental to silly to religious and incorporates a whole gamut of lessons on what is important to us as a society, what is worth preserving, and how we should behave and treat one another. The primary text choices available for this chapter are plentiful indeed. However, because the Santa Claus figure is the most pervasive topic in children's Christmas literature, this chapter takes a particular interest in the role that children's literature has had in creating, evolving, and transforming that figure. Specifically, I suggest that it is the treatment of Santa Claus in line with the tradition of "An Account" and, increasingly, the success with which a text allies his character with children that lead to a work's staying power in the Christmas literature canon. The first text of this chapter offers a father's account of Santa Claus for his children, and the final work discussed, *The Polar Express* (1985), also features an account from an adult male narrator, though in the form of a recollection from childhood. By the time of publication of *The Polar Express*, the symbiotic relationship between Santa Claus as the guardian of children and children as the guardian of Santa Claus is fully realized, conveying a shift in power from the adult's authority over the holiday to the child's, at least within the context of children's literature. However, this shift comes about not always through increased agency on the part of the child, though the child certainly becomes a more active force in the construction of Christmas in many

texts, but through the complex treatment of central adult male figures, whether they be Santa Claus figures, paternal figures, or authorial figures, as troubled and in need of help or redemption on Christmas. More than other holiday literature, then, literature of the child's Christmas canon is about the evolution of adult identity, particularly male/paternal identity, even as it depends upon the empowerment of the child to be successful.

**"An Account"'s Expansion on and Departure from Tradition**

"An Account" is hardly the first American text on Christmas, nor is it the first text to treat the character of Santa Claus, and the poem itself, in addition to creating tradition, participates in the transformation of preexisting traditions. While the figure draws on centuries of legend as well as the mythic figure Saturn, numerous histories point to the work of John Pintard, Washington Irving, and a poem published as the lithographed book *The Children's Friend: A New Year's Present, to the Little Ones from Five to Twelve* (1821),[2] as direct influences on Moore's poem. Merchant, civic leader, and philanthropist, Pintard, according to Bruce David Forbes's *Christmas: A Candid History*, pushed the "Saint Nicholas snowball" when, "Under Pintard's leadership, the New-York historical society," which Pintard organized in 1804 and of which he served as the first secretary, "began an annual Saint Nicholas Day dinner on December 6, 1810, and for the occasion Pintard commissioned a woodcut illustration of Nicholas, clothed in a bishop's robe" (81). Thus, Pintard was instrumental in linking St. Nicholas to New York's influential cultural and literary circles. Irving, Pintard's brother-in-law and a

fellow member of the New-York Historical Society, has often been praised for his contributions to the American Christmas and the Santa Claus figure. Noted Santa Claus expert Charles W. Jones argues that "Without Irving there would be no Santa Claus" and that "Santa Claus was made by Washington Irving" ("Knickerbocker"), and Charles Dickens, also touted as a preeminent literary father of Christmas, made no secret of his admiration for Irving (Kelly 20). Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, a satirical allegory of Samuel Latham Mitchell's 1807 *The Picture of New York* (Wheeler and Rosenthal 169), references Saint Nicholas many times, among which are mentions of him soaring above trees in a wagon, smoking a pipe, dropping presents down chimneys of his favorite children (and only children because of the "degeneracy" of adults), and placing his finger alongside his nose, a gesture borrowed directly in "An Account." In addition to elaborating physical details of the man and his actions that would receive expansion by future authors, Irving presents the character as a beacon of goodwill, benevolence, charity, and protection even if he was still, as Stephen Nissenbaum points out, "the mythic patron saint of New Amsterdam" rather than the patriarch of Christmas day (71).

Nevertheless, Irving's Santa Claus laid the groundwork for later perceptions, and his ideas about the figure have been highlighted for their contribution to fantasy as "Irving's work was regarded as 'the first notable work of imagination in the New World'" (St. Nicholas Center). Irving, therefore, not only laid down some of Santa Claus's physical attributes, mannerisms, and sentimentalities, but also established the character as part of a collective imagination, situating the figure as a malleable one of

fantasy that can be stretched and manipulated so that his tradition may be both preserved and evolved. In this way, Irving's contributions were similar to those of James Kirke Paulding, who also drew on Dutch legend to spin American fantasy, though Irving's influences have been more visible and extensive. In *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922*, Gillian Avery argues that most Old World faerie lore was not transferred to the New World, but she identifies the Dutch Santa Claus as one "honourable exception" (131). Avery goes on to name Paulding's *A Christmas Gift from Fairyland* (1838), which was at least partly intended for children, as an important early attempt at fantasy literature in America.

In 1821, *Children's Friend* brought further nuances to the figure and located Santa Claus in a work exclusively for children rather than for a general readership. The illustrations show a tall, thin man clad in a hat shaped similarly to a miter (though it does feature a gold-colored band reading "Sante Claus") and a robe somewhat evocative of the bishop's robe; however, neither of these garments was, Penne Restad argues in *Christmas in America: A History*, "quite like a suit of clothing an American might wear, nor like a flowing robe of a bishop, such as Saint Nicholas, might wear. Neither did it resemble the old Dutch garb that St. Nicholas wore in descriptions written by Washington Irving and James K. Paulding" (144). In its physical representations, then, this text serves as an example of the evolution of tradition, offering images that begin to separate the Santa Claus character from his history in religion and European legend. Additional details do more to transform the character. The St. Nicholas Center notes, "This 'Sante Claus' arrived from the North in a sleigh with a flying reindeer," and he

appeared on Christmas Eve rather than December 6. Moreover, the poem associates Santa Claus with a bargaining proposition that promised gifts to good children and punishment—by way of a "long birchen black rod"—to the naughty. Thus while offering expansions on the fantastical elements of the figure, this Santa Claus still "fit a didactic mode" (St. Nicholas Center): children who veered from "virtue's path" would receive their lashing; those who remained on it would receive appropriate toys such as dolls, books, and balls.

In addition to ushering in several details that Moore and others would go on to develop, *Children's Friend* introduces many of the deeper struggles and thematic issues that have also evolved alongside the Santa Claus figure. For instance, as the full title *The Children's Friend, A New Year's Present to Little Ones from Five to Twelve* suggests, the poem raises the issue of the problematic relationship between children and consumer culture, a dynamic that has received much scholarly attention. [3] Furthermore, the text employs a new format, featuring for the first time in an American book colorful lithographs that would be attractive to children. The text and the concept behind it, then, are meant to appeal to children's imaginations, offering them the chance to participate in rich fantasy building.[4]

Just two years after *Children's Friend* was published, the *Troy Sentinel* ran "An Account" for the first time.[5] Cultural histories of Christmas and Santa Claus have frequently pointed out the poem's original contributions. Forbes, for instance, notes that the poem is the first to give Santa's sleigh eight reindeer, each of which has a name (85). Restad emphasizes that the "vivid word-pictures" of a "plump Santa" with genial

features and dressed in fur so dominated "public opinion not only about how Santa acted but also about how he looked" that by "mid-century artists seldom portrayed Santa Clause except in association with 'A Visit'" (146). Nissenbaum asserts that the poem gave the figure a unique spin by both "defrock[ing]" and "declass[ing]" him (81). The poem's originality and success also come from its efforts to connect Santa Claus with children. While other texts, such as *Children's Friend* and *A Christmas Gift from Fairyland*, have child audiences in mind, and *Children's Friend*, as the title indicates, goes so far as to identify Santa Claus as the "steady friend of virtuous youth," Moore's poem stands out by divorcing the character entirely from his didactic functions, and crafting both a human father (the narrator) and a Father Christmas who serve, at least at Christmastime, only to delight the child.[6] Though guardianship of the holiday and the Santa Claus figure still rests squarely in the hands of adult figures throughout the poem, "An Account" begins a tradition of literature that affords the child power in shaping and perpetuating the holiday. The influence of "An Account" has so profoundly shaped the Christmas canon that the success or failure of subsequent texts in entering the holiday literature has often depended on their ability to acknowledge and incorporate the image presented in "An Account," especially with regard to the character of Santa Claus and the power afforded to the child through connection with his character.

"An Account" devotes nearly two-thirds of its lines to the speaker's observation of St. Nick's appearance and actions, and these extensive physical descriptions indicate that this is the first time that the speaker, an adult and the father of the children mentioned in the poem, witnesses Santa Claus. The text thus operates as an introduction

to his physical and non-physical character and has the feel of myth in the making. The descriptions, which skip along in lively anapestic tetrameter, are full of rich and inviting language, describing St. Nick as "a right jolly old elf" with eyes that twinkle, merry dimples, cheeks like roses, and a "nose like a cherry." His "droll little mouth" is turned up "like a bow," ornamented with a beard "white as snow." An obviously joyful fellow, he laughs so robustly that his "little round belly" shakes "like a bowl full of jelly," the sight of which in turn prompts laughter from the observing narrator. Furthermore, "An Account"'s St. Nicholas has magical command over his surroundings, usurping the hints of real historical past with child-oriented fantasy. He rises up the chimney with a slight nod of the head, and he commands his team of flying reindeer with a mere whistle. While the adult speaker demonstrates control over this scene by acting as observer and reporter of the Santa Claus figure (and inventor), there is much in the elaborate and playful fantasy detail meant to delight the child, and the youthful qualities that pervade Santa Claus's character despite his age give him a special connection to children as well. This is not the tall, slim man of *Children's Friend*, but an opulent, corpulent, diminutive elf fashioned to entertain young audiences.

Even more important than the physical qualities that connect and endear the figure to the child are the character changes that remove the authoritarian and punitive rolls from St. Nick's purview, presenting him instead as a kindly figure whose only purpose is to bring a joyful holiday, not because children have been "virtuous," but, it would seem, for the pure sake of joy itself. The poem, thus, changes his nature and makes explicit efforts to remove any fearful or disciplinarian qualities associated with

the solemn authority and judgmental power of the old-world legend.[7] The poem works specifically to defray any fears when its narrator observes, "A wink of his eye / and a twist of his head, / Soon gave me to know / I had nothing to dread." The exchange here is an intimate moment between the human father and the Father Christmas figure, and much of the poem is the quiet passage between father and Santa Claus, aligning the two in innocuous authority and kindly service to the child. This familiarity and the assurance that there is nothing to fear, combined with the absence of any kind of moral reckoning or doling out of punishments, alters the figure dramatically to one of complete paternal benevolence in utter allegiance to the child. In fact, Santa Claus's sole purpose in the poem is to please the child.

Nissenbaum argues that this aim to delight the child was not as innocuous as it may have seemed in the context of the early nineteenth century. Efforts in the early decades of the nineteenth century to "transform Christmas from a season of misrule into an occasion of quiet pleasure" through religion had failed to take hold (48). A far more effective strategy came in linking Christmas to the burgeoning domestic culture, which could be achieved in part by associating the holiday with children. Nissenbaum observes that the rowdy, subversive, and very public raucous celebrations "would not be vanquished by the house of God, but by a new faith that was just beginning to sweep over American society. It was the religion of domesticity, which would be represented at Christmas-time not by Jesus of Nazareth, but by a newer and wilder deity—Santa Claus" (48). Such manipulations suggest the malleability of the Santa Claus figure, and in the early and mid-nineteenth century, that malleability was used to accommodate preexisting

conventions of Christmas and transform them from the threatening traditions of marginalized castes of society into a comfortable feature of respectable holiday. In particular, Santa Claus was used to transform the practice of gift-giving. Previous Christmas expressions of charity were often centered on lower-class household employees and the poor outside of the home in an exchange that would "assure [the upper class] that they had fulfilled their obligations" (Nissenbaum 84). "An Account," however, proposed that upper-class audiences could swap their children in as the needy recipients of Christmas gifts, which "preserve[d] the structure of an older Christmas ritual, in which people occupying positions of social and economic authority offered gifts to their dependents," but those expressions "now remained securely within the household" (Nissenbaum 84), with Santa Claus rather than the human parent enacting the exchange. This interpretation of Santa Claus as the representation of an earlier bargaining relationship between powerful and powerless locates the figure in the center of a push and pull dynamic, this time between adult and child. While Nissenbaum's reading is unquestionably a useful one and one that informs discussion in this chapter, "An Account" lays the groundwork to give the child more power than Nissenbaum concedes. In Nissenbaum's reading, the child is placed in a position of power by adults who need the child to serve a social and cultural purpose, which is certainly true. However, establishing Santa Claus's exclusive purpose as the service of children as well as linking his characteristics to those of children aligns the child's power with his. This text begins a Christmas literature and cultural tradition that values the child as a source of power, a feature that becomes even more obvious in twentieth-century literature that

weakens and shows the flaws of adult figures. So influential has this tradition been that a powerful child character or focus on childhood has developed as one of the cornerstones of a canonical Christmas text.

"An Account" raises one additional issue that I have already mentioned in the footnote about the poem's contested authorship but would like to address more thoroughly here, as this point will also feature throughout the holiday literature. This point is the relationship between Santa Claus and the father/Father. The storied image that popular culture holds of Moore composing the poem for his children while on a sleigh ride home Christmas Eve after a day of charitable giving in snowy New York City is one of "a benevolent figure, a scholarly but genial professor of Hebrew who stepped, just this once, out of his ivory tower, to write, for his own children, those magical verses on what happened 'the night before Christmas'" (Nissenbaum 65-66). Those who doubt Moore's authorship have painted a very different picture of the man, presenting him as a "curmudgeon," sensitive to noisy distractions of children and family and focused instead on serious literary aims and religious study (Foster 246). If, however, we accept Moore as the author of the poem and if we take this legend of the poem's origin as fact (or if we wish to believe it as fact), what we have is the picture of a father, wanting to bequeath to his children the image of an eternal and ever benevolent paternal presence, which is given and can only ever be given through fantasy.[8] The convergence of Santa Claus and the father, whether that father be the human parent or God the Father, lingers constantly in the figure and in the issue of the child's relation to him. This issue hovers in the background of Moore's poem and has persisted as a vein in Christmas texts since, and it

is no accident, I believe, that despite women's pronounced influence in domesticating and popularizing the holiday, the majority of canonical Christmas texts have been authored by men (and the one "canonical" text included in this chapter that is written by a woman figuratively kills the father by rendering him unnecessary).[9] It is not too much of a stretch, then, to contend that ensnared in the child/Santa Claus relationship are the specific concerns of paternal identity, desire, and anxiety.

## Imaging Santa Claus through the Civil War: Nast's Illustrations and Alcott's *Little Women*

As "An Account" continued to direct Christmas imaginations in the nineteenth century, other texts slowly added to the growing body of Christmas literature for children. Publications by Peter Parley (e.g., *Tales about Christmas*, 1838) and the American Sunday-School Union (e.g., *Christmas Holidays; Or, A Visit from Home*, 1827) demonstrated acceptance of the holiday into work deemed suitable for good Christian children and proper citizens. Others such as *Kriss Kringle's Christmas Tree: A Holiday Present for Boys and Girls* (1847) showed the process by which additional holiday traditions set in. For instance, the text, a compilation of many short vignettes, some taking place on Christmas and some not, begins with an "Advertisement" commenting on the advent of the Christmas tree in place of the stocking as the central location for gifts in the home and recommending that "all parents, guardians, uncles, aunts, and cousins, who are desirous to conform to the most approved fashion, will take care to hang one, two, or a dozen copies of the book on their Christmas Tree for 1847."

Many of these texts have now fallen into obscurity, but they speak to the burgeoning volume and regularity with which publishers turned out literature for and about the holiday. Meanwhile, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), a work spurred by the author's concern for poor British children, crossed the Atlantic into the hands of adult and child readers alike, and explored the holiday through the transformation of a cold-hearted and childless old man into a Father Christmas figure, generous and benevolent in no small part because of his concern for the boy Tiny Tim. This text is similar to Moore's in that, though tinged with political apologetics, it regards Scrooge, once he has transformed himself into the Father Christmas figure, as an entirely jovial, rather than judgmental, spirit and a source of material comfort. Moreover, *A Christmas Carol* also emphasizes the special connection between the holiday and the child both through the strong pathetic appeal of Tiny Tim and by giving Tiny Tim the final line of the novel, "God bless us, every one!" (125). Though a British text, *A Christmas Carol* has had a continued impact on American Christmas literature, especially showing its influence in the transformative works of the twentieth century.

In addition to these literary expansions, Thomas Nast's annual sketches for *Harper's Weekly* (spanning three decades beginning in 1862) honed the physical characteristics of the Santa Claus figure. Often touted as the artist who "invented Santa Claus," the German-born Nast, who established his career as a Civil War correspondent and went on to be an influential force in American political cartoons, "hewed closely" to Moore's depictions of Santa Claus in his cartoons, and he even illustrated an edition of "An Account" in 1863 (Restad 146).[10] While borrowing liberally from Moore's work,

Nast introduces some novelties to the character that further developed Santa Claus's connection to children. Nast was the first to feature Santa with a workshop at the North Pole, and, as Thomas Nast St. Hill (Nast's grandson) observes, the drawings display "an abundance of toys so popular with the children of that day […] jumping jacks and jacks-in-the-box, hobbyhorses, toy soldiers, wooden animals, miniature houses and trees to be laid out in little villages, dolls with china heads and sawdust-filled bodies, dolly dresses and furnished dollhouses, tenpins, drums, tools and building blocks—enough to keep Santa Claus busy all year long" (xvii). Moreover, in the same type of conflation between authorial father and Father Christmas touted in "An Account" and later in texts such as *Rudolph*, St. Hill recalls that Nast would often use his own children as models for his Christmas scenes and that he embraced the holiday with "childlike delight" (viii).

In an illustration that ran on December 30, 1871, Nast draws Santa Claus ensconced in a comfortable scene at his desk. His feet rest on a pillow, and he leans against the deep cushion of an oversized chair. His red hat and jacket are hung neatly on pegs on the wall. Santa Claus is perusing a list, with a tall stack of letters to his right in front of which is a sign reading, "Letters from Naughty Children's Parents." To his left is a much shorter stack of "Letters from Good Children's Parents." The picture is hardly threatening with its cozy atmosphere and assortment of toys scattered in front of Santa Claus's desk; nevertheless, this idea of judging and cataloguing good behavior versus bad behavior harkens back to the pre-Moore days in which the figure was a stern patriarch and religious authority.[11] The reintroduction of the adult-driven moral element, as opposed to "An Account"'s strict focus on magic and play, reflects, perhaps

consciously or unconsciously, cultural concerns about the effects of lavishing such unsolicited, unearned, and unreciprocated material attention on children. The concern was that gift-giving for the pure joy of delighting children in a display of parental affection would in turn "caus[e] those same children to become self-centered and materialistic—in other words, spoiled" (Nissenbaum 202). Critics thus located the trend of establishing the parent as in service to the child as undesirable precedent. Nevertheless, neither those attitudes nor Nast's contribution of the "naughty or nice" lists deterred the child-focused Christmas, nor did they diminish the importance of "An Account"; however, literature of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries also began stressing a non-material Christmas spirit to accompany the material indulgence in Moore's Christmas scene.

Around the same time as the publication of Nast's illustration with the good and bad children's letters, Louisa May Alcott published her classic *Little Women* (1868-1869). While not exclusively a Christmas text, it is now often featured on lists of the best Christmas books for children, likely because an extensive Christmas scene opens the novel.[12] Unlike other works discussed in this chapter, Alcott's novel is not a fantasy, nor does it center on Santa Claus, though a father figure does feature prominently through his absence. Moreover, the March girls, who range in age from twelve to sixteen at the start of the book, are a little older than many of the children featured and/or targeted in other texts included in this discussion. However, I bring up this chapter here to illustrate how children's texts pushed against some of the more materialistic and opulent imaginings of Santa Claus, critiqued by those who worried about generations of spoiled

children, by stressing charity alongside the notion of consumption and by revealing the myth of an omnipotent paternal authority. In some ways, the text works with the same idea proposed in *Children's Friend* and then later (and more mildly) by Nast, namely that the child must do good in order to ingratiate herself to a higher being and receive the reward of a gift at Christmastime. On the other hand, the text hints at disillusionment with the Santa Claus myth and its implications for children. Thus, the Christmas scenes that open *Little Women* offer an apt example of the kind of charitable reckoning that reinforces the adult-driven demands of the child while simultaneously subverting those demands in other ways by exposing the myth of omnipotent paternal authority, using Christmas as the backdrop to do so.

In a move that indicates the growing importance of Christmas in the domestic calendar, *Little Women*, popularly considered a quintessentially domestic novel, begins at Christmastime with a discussion of the holiday. Far from presenting it as a warm scene of abundance and celebration, Alcott's first chapter establishes the holiday as troublesome. In the opening line, Jo laments, "Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents" (3). Meg and Amy then point out the discomforts of being poor and not having nice things: Meg sighs, "looking down at her old dress," while Amy complains, "I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls to have nothing at all." Beth, the eternal voice of optimism, compassion, and charity, contradicts the other girls' grumblings and proclaims, "We've got father and mother and each other." The girls take momentary solace in Beth's proclamation, until Jo protests, "'We haven't got a father and shall not have him for a long time.' She didn't say

'perhaps never,' but each silently added it, thinking of father far away, where the fighting was" (4).

Set during the Civil War, the book foregrounds the absence of the father (away as a chaplain for he is too old to serve as a soldier), which seems to become all the more important and troublesome against the Christmas setting.[13] There is neither human father nor Father Christmas to descend and fulfill these girls' wishes. Not only is their father absent, but there is also the implication that he is something of a careless and inadequate father and man, though the girls miss him sorely. [14] Meg remarks, "Don't you wish we had the money papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me, how happy and good we'd be if we had no worries!" (5). Because of both their father's financial troubles and his absence, the girls, with the exception of Amy, who attends school, must work to contribute to the family. Meg works as a governess, Jo as a companion to her elderly and unappealing Aunt March, and Beth at the upkeep of the family home. The family's financial situation leaves no extra income for Christmas gifts, and furthermore, the girls face the moral issue of satisfying personal desires when there are others who suffer need. Meg explains, "You know the reason mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly" (4). The girls resign themselves to no family gifts, but they agree to spend a dollar each of their own on themselves as "the army wouldn't be much helped by our giving that." However, when they see their mother's worn out slippers, they decide that she must have new ones

for Christmas. Without any father, or any mention of Santa Claus, the girls each use their dollar to buy presents for their mother. The girls' first act of Christmas charity, then, is to forego their own desires to purchase gifts for their mother.

Their generosity does not stop with the gifts for their mother. The girls begin their Christmas morning by finding small books, usually identified by critics as copies of *Pilgrim's Progress*, under their pillows. The books contain lessons on proper and moral behavior, and so the day begins with a discussion on being good, and the small gifts are presented with delight in spite of the lack of material excess. In this spirit of goodness and charity, when their mother comes in on Christmas morning from a visit to the destitute Hummel family and asks the girls to give their breakfast to the family as a Christmas present, the girls, though they are "unusually hungry, having waited nearly an hour" (21), not only gather up their meal, but they also ask to join their mother in delivering it. The narrative proclaims it "a very happy breakfast, though they didn't get any of it; and when they went away, leaving comfort behind, I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the little girls who gave away their breakfasts and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas morning" (23). In this moment, the March girls subvert the Santa Claus figure, asserting their own feminine and domestic power, notably on Christmas, when the father has failed them.

Because the girls have given so generously in the morning, they are rewarded and permitted guilt-free indulgence at the end of the day. On Christmas night, the girls walk down to a surprise supper, one so rich and fancy that it had been "Unheard of since the departed days of plenty. There was ice cream—actually two dishes of it, pink and

white—and cake and fruit, distracting French bonbons, and, in the middle of the table, four great bouquets of hothouse flowers!" (30). The surprise is not from Marmee, Santa Claus, or fidgety Aunt March, but from the March family's next door neighbor, Mr. Lawrence, who has heard about the girls' "breakfast party" through one of his servants and is so pleased with their actions that he sends a note to their mother, "saying he hoped [she] would allow him to express his friendly feelings toward [her] children by sending them a few trifles in honor of the day" (30). Mrs. March adds, "I could not refuse; and so you have a little feast at night to make up for the bread-and-milk breakfast" (30). The girls' Christmas indulgence, in other words, is directly linked to their charitable acts and not to the benevolent spirit of Santa Claus. Nonetheless, they are allowed to consume their holiday feast, and thus the text does not entirely condemn Christmas indulgence, but rather offers a way to enjoy the delights and excess of the holiday by situating those enjoyments as the reward for charitable actions rather than as an unearned gift from Santa Claus. It is true that the gifts come from kindly old Mr. Lawrence. However, Mr. Lawrence is neither expected nor obligated to attend to the girls' desires the way the father or Santa Claus would be. Instead, the girls excite those feelings in Mr. Lawrence through their choices and actions.

The father is certainly not forgotten as the Christmas passage ends with Beth snuggled up to her mother, wishing she could "send my bunch [of flowers] to father. I'm afraid he isn't having such a merry Christmas as we are'" (31). Nevertheless, these girls have done a better job at achieving a merry Christmas than their father has. With no flesh-and-blood father and no omnipotent Father Christmas, the girls' ability to achieve

holiday indulgence through their own agency whittles away at both patriarchal authority in the family and the patriarchal tradition of the holiday, and it affords the girls a degree of power. By not participating in the Santa Claus myth and by exposing it to some degree as a myth, the March girls' story provides an alternative view, which tears down the two imaginings of the Santa Claus figure that had been circulating in the nineteenth century: that he exists to serve the child and that he passes moral judgment on the child. Instead, *Little Women* leaves only the child.

*Little Women* contains a second Christmas scene after a full year has passed for the March family. After a hard year of struggling with Beth's illness at home and Mr. March's illness in Washington, Christmas arrives as an especially joyous occasion. There is no talk of lack or want this year, and the small but comfortable gifts the family has exchanged are mentioned casually, suggesting that the stress of affording gifts that had stung so deeply the previous year is no longer a preoccupation. Beth is warm in her mother's gift of crimson merino wrapper, Amy admires her engraved copy of the Madonna and Child in a pretty frame, Meg has her first silk dress from Mr. Lawrence, and Marmee has a new brooch from the girls. There is a fine dinner and plans for a festive sleigh ride. Missing is any mention of the poor or needy. It seems that the charitable spirit marked in the first Christmas celebration has so adequately attended to the ethical responsibility that one should assume on the holiday that the girls are allowed to enjoy a second Christmas without worry.[15] The day is so ideal that the narrator explains, "Now and then, in this workaday world, things do happen in the delightful storybook fashion, and what a comfort that is. Half an hour after everyone had said that

they were so happy they could only hold one drop more, the drop came" (284). The final drop and last Christmas present of the day proves to be the arrival of Mr. March. While the girls are overjoyed at their father's return, he is, as the text indicates, only the final drop. The first Christmas passage shows that the girls can thrive and enjoy the Christmas holiday on their own. The father, of any type, is not needed.

*Little Women* strikes out against particular aspects of the Christmas holiday and its representative, Santa Claus, with critiques of commercialism, which had reached the point of being overwhelming by the 1860s (Schmidt 130), of unearned luxury, and especially of paternal authority. Without a Santa Claus present or even mentioned, the text communicates that the true meaning of the holiday for children and young adults lies in sources, namely family, friendships, and self-sacrificing, self-reliant hard work, outside of the Santa Claus figure. The girls' choices, influenced by the moral voice of their mother, lead to a usurping of the Santa Claus role as they themselves become the gift bearers, without expectation of anything in return, in the first Christmas scene. They are rewarded by Mr. Lawrence, who may seem a stand-in father and in this case a stand-in Santa Claus; however, his kind gestures are the effect of the girls' own actions, which suggests their power rather than his; it is not the other way around. The girls are not influenced to do good in the hopes of receiving a reward. In Alcott's realistic text, there is no room, or need, for the paternal Father Christmas. While *Little Women* by no means banished the Santa Claus figure from the children's Christmas canon, the text successfully struck absolute moral judgment and omnipotence from his character, a move that empowers the child's authority over the holiday and that anticipates trends in

the Christmas literature of the twentieth century. Moreover, the actions of the March girls on Christmas infuse the holiday with a moral fiber, which has come to evoke the true spirit of Christmas.

**"Yes, Virginia": Anticipating the Christmas Spirit of the Twentieth Century**

In 1897 another piece, catalogued as a classic for children though it was originally published as an editorial in the *New York Sun* rather than in a more conventional children's form, returns to Santa Claus as the ideal representative of the holiday, and though the editorial treats Santa Claus very differently than *Little Women*, it continues to develop Alcott's notion of a true Christmas spirit over pure materiality. The now famous piece responds to a letter from young Virginia O'Hanlon, defending Santa Claus to skeptics. What Moore and Nast do for Santa Claus's physical appearance and demeanor in the nineteenth century, the editorial does for his nontangible identity leading into the twentieth century. As commercial representations of the holiday proliferated in the 1880s and '90s, due in no small part to the rise of mass market forums such as department stores and holiday cards (Schmidt 135-42), evolving Christmas traditions received criticism for affording too much power to and lavishing too much attention on the child, thus resulting in concerns about generations of greedy and idle Americans as well as concerns about consumerism. In the *Sun's* editorial, however, the value of Santa Claus and Christmas receive a boost, lauding the stuff of the spirit over the material and commercial trappings of the holiday.

Originally published on September 21, 1897, the editorial ran alongside the letter that prompted it, a short missive from eight-year-old Virginia seeking the truth about Santa Claus. The letter contained only four brief sentences: "Dear Editor, I am 8 years old. Some of my friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in the *Sun* it's so. Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus? Virginia O'Hanlon. 115 West Ninety-Fifth Street." In his reply, the anonymous editor, identified to his readers after his death in 1906 as Francis (Frank) Church, makes an impassioned defense of fantasy and things unseen and the joy of those things over the practical trappings of tangible reality. [16] The editorial begins with a dismissal of the rumors that prompted Virginia to send her letter. "Virginia, your little friends are wrong," Church writes. What follows is a harsh condemnation of those pragmatists who would argue that Santa Claus is not real because he cannot be seen. Church writes that those people

> have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

After this opening, Church offers his now famous and widely quoted line, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

Rather than discussing Santa Claus as a tangible figure, Church disembodies him and casts him as a force akin to "love and generosity and devotion," which not only exist, but "abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy." Without Santa Claus, he writes, life would be "dreary indeed" with "no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence." This alignment of Santa with values rather than with physicality became a common move in explanations of Santa Claus in the twentieth century (e.g., in the 1947 film *Miracle on 34th Street*, among other texts). Church continues, "You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus [….] Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world." He then aligns Santa Claus with the other forces, including "faith, fancy, poetry, love, [and] romance," that "can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond" what is known only through seeing. He assures her that "nothing else" could be more "real and abiding." Church's argument here about the existence of truths beyond physical grasp is a frequent tactic used in the defense of fantasy, magic, and, indeed, religion. Nissenbaum observes the similarity between Church's editorial and arguments for God's existence, noting that the late nineteenth century was "a period of vexing religious doubt for many middle-class Americans, and one characteristic solution was to think that God must exist simply because people so badly needed Him to; without God, human life would be simply unendurable" (88). In the editorial, Church "stake[s] out terrain that many of his adult

readers would have found familiar from sermons they heard in church" (88). The editorial finally concludes: "Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood." In this connection to God, though, Santa Claus does not resemble that fearful judge of the good and the wicked. Rather, he is the essence of all things beautiful, kind, and wonderful, without which the world would be unbearable. In Church's editorial, Santa Claus, like God, must exist because people, both adults and children, need him to exist. To argue that we access such a force through childhood and that such a force is most closely aligned with children and childhood locates childhood as an extremely powerful ideal.

This ideal is likely what moved readers so poignantly that they voiced their pleasure in reading the piece and influenced its inclusion in the Christmas canon. According to W. Joseph Campbell, the editorial was "obscure in first appearance, incongruous in timing, and almost an afterthought in placements. The editorial prompted no immediate comment or reaction from other newspapers" (44). However, the piece struck a chord with audiences, and "that it ever gained iconic status is a testimony to the persistence and admiration of its readers" who wrote into the *Sun* for its reprint. Readers, Campbell notes, responded to the editorial as "'a fine relief from the commercialism and unsentimental greed' of the Christmas season and 'a ray of hope on the path to human understanding in our troubled times.' The editorial was also seen as a way for parents to answer children's inquiries about Santa Claus, and be truthful in doing so." Such responses from the readers demonstrate interest in and hunger for the ideals that Church

promulgates in his defense of Santa Claus. Church's editorial could have easily fallen into obscurity and would have done so had adult readers not intervened. Santa Claus, and this ever benevolent, always wondrous Santa Claus in particular, is something they wanted and something that they actively sought to promote. It is telling, as noted earlier in this chapter, that "arguably the best-known verses ever written by an American" are Moore's "An Account" (Burrows and Wallace 462-63) and that "American journalism's best-known editorial" (Campbell 42) is "Yes, Virginia." Moore and those who drew from his work gave audiences Santa Claus's physicality. Church, and the adult readers who championed his editorial, gave audiences his spirit. Combined, the figure became an American fantasy and emblem of childhood that many adults felt warranted vigorous preservation. Going into the twentieth century, then, both Santa Claus and the child's special connection to him had gained lofty places in American culture.

**Failure and Redemption in the Twentieth-Century Christmas Canon**

The response to Church's editorial indicates how strongly the optimistic and redeeming message of the editorial resonated with adult readers. As the twentieth century progressed, literature in the holiday canon continued to return to this message, significantly adding weary, troubled, and imperfect adult male characters sorely in need of "Yes, Virginia"'s message in order to find respite and redemption on Christmas. Throughout the twentieth century, adult characters have been consistently positioned as being in need of help or salvation, a trend established by the text that created Santa's ninth and best-known reindeer, Rudolph. Charged by Montgomery Ward with crafting

in-house marketing material that would replace the coloring books that the retailer had earlier purchased and distributed to children at Christmastime, Robert L. May composed the text of *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* in 1939. While *Rudolph* undoubtedly owes both its origins and its popularity to advertising, the text's tacit compliance with consumer culture comes so thoroughly robed in the values of the American Christmas that it has not been condemned as a piece that degrades "the true meaning of Christmas," but rather situated as one that reinforces it. [17] In *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture*, sociologist James Barnett offers the now often-quoted observation that Rudolph is the one exception to his claim, "Since [Nast's] time there have been no important additions to the folk figures of Christmas" (104). Indeed, the text exhibits the qualities of works that have secured their positions in the American Christmas canon, including extension of "An Account"'s tradition, appeal to childhood sensibilities, and, increasingly important moving into the twentieth century, redemptive power for adult readers, in this case both through help for the adult figure Santa Claus and through a popularized authorial history colored with sentimental pull and hopeful determination.

Though *Rudolph* is May's original creation, the text is extremely derivative, and thus May, like other Christmas authors before him, invents new material for American Christmas mythology while building on previous tradition. May draws heavily from the story of "An Account" in his expansion of the reindeer gang that Moore recorded in his poem, and May even borrows the poem's form, mimicking the structure, rhyme scheme, and even some of the wording (though his execution is considerably more clumsy). May owed so much to Moore's poem that he presented his creation to Montgomery Ward

under the title "The Day Before Christmas, or Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." It was Ward that shortened the title to simply "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" (Crump 349). The first lines, "'Twas the day before Christmas, and all through the hills / The reindeer were playing…enjoying the spills," clearly mimic Moore's text, and May's poem ends with the familiar, "You may hear them call, as they drive out of sight: / 'Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!'" In between this familiar opening and closing, May extends the fantasy by successfully adding a new character to the literature, and forever expanding Moore's cast of eight reindeer to nine.

Not only does the setting begin with established Christmas lore, but the story also draws on conventions familiar to children's literature by centering the story on the outcast figure, a move that works to align the text with child readers.[18] Rudolph's peers ridicule him and exclude him from their games because he is different. While all the brown-nosed young reindeer are busy at play, "every so often they'd stop to call names / At one little deer not allowed in their games:-- / 'Ha ha! Look at Rudolph! His nose is a sight!' / 'It's red as a beet!' 'Twice as big!' 'Twice as bright!' / While Rudolph just wept. What else could he do? / He knew that the things they were saying were true!" Though the young reindeer poke fun at Rudolph, he is capable of being resilient and optimistic in the face of trouble:

> Although he was lonesome, he always was good… / Obeying his parents as good reindeer should! / That's why, on this day, Rudolph almost felt playful:-- / He hoped that from Santa (soon driving his sleighful / of presents and candy and dollies and toys / For good little animals, good

girls and boys) / He'd get just as much…and this is what pleased him / As the happier, handsomer reindeer who teased him.

Keeping in mind the advertising bent behind the story, the text here serves its purpose in suggesting that happiness lies in the fun of material trinkets and that consumption acts as a great equalizer, blind to weaknesses or handicaps.[19] Like the gifts in "An Account," though, the emphasis on joyful play rather than greedy consumption strikes a happy compromise between those who would bemoan the consumerism of the holiday and advertisers who push consumption as an essential component of Christmas. The text also harkens back to "An Account" by excluding any mention of Santa Claus as the arbiter of judgment; instead, he is on the side of all children, good or bad, red-nosed or brown, bringing them gifts regardless of behavior.

Like many other outcast characters in children's literature, Rudolph's seeming weakness becomes his strength, and he is called upon to help not just anyone, but the emblem of the holiday and paternal authority himself. On this particular Christmas night, a thick fog hangs in the sky, causing great trouble for Santa and his eight reindeer and threatening "The horrible fear that some children might waken / Before his complete Christmas trip had been taken." When Santa enters Rudolph's room to deliver his present, he is greeted by the glow of Rudolph's red nose, which brings him to "the greatest idea in all history!" Santa goes to Rudolph and asks for his assistance: "'And you,' he told Rudolph, 'may yet save the day! / Your wonderful forehead may yet pave the way / For a wonderful triumph! It actually might!'" Thus Rudolph, a small and undesirable reindeer, is commissioned by Santa, an iconic and powerful figure. In fact,

Santa admits, "I need you […] to help me tonight… / To lead all my deer on the rest of our flight." As discussed earlier in this chapter, *Little Women*'s Christmas passages pose the idea that the father, of any sort, is fallible and in need of salvation, and that the child can be stronger than the father and succeed where he has failed. In *Rudolph*, Santa's shortcomings are undoubtedly milder than Mr. March's, and rather than rendering the father unnecessary, the text instead positions Father Christmas as someone who occasionally needs help; the child's power complements his to provide the aid that is needed. In this case, the adult Santa Claus simply needs logistical help in maneuvering through the fog, but when read in conjunction with May's biography, which will be examined later in this section, the help the father needs is of a deeper, more emotional and existential kind. Rudolph's guiding light, therefore, becomes a metaphor for the beacon that leads adults through psychological and philosophical darkness. Moreover, the simple help that Rudolph lends with the guiding light of his nose anticipates later texts of the twentieth century in which adult figures need serious moral help or salvation, which the child-empowered Christmas can provide.

Rudolph's initial flight is a huge success, and every present is delivered to the proper child on time. Back in Rudolph's hometown, word has spread of his new post:

> Then gathered outside to await his return. / And were they excited, astonished, to learn / That Rudolph, the ugliest deer of them all, / (Rudolph the Red-nose…bashful and small… / The funny faced fellow they always called names, / And practically never allowed in their games) / Was now to be envied by all, far and near. / For no greater honor can

> come to a deer / Than riding with Santa and guiding his sleigh! / The number-one job, on the number-one day!

When Rudolph finally comes in for a landing in front of his "handsomer playmates," the others regret ever having teased him, especially when they hear about his value from Santa Claus: "They felt even sorrier they had been bad / When Santa said:--'Rudolph, I never have had / A deer quite so brave or so brilliant as you / At fighting black fog, and at guiding me through. / By YOU last night's journey was actually bossed. / Without you, I'm certain we'd all have been lost!'" Not only, then, is Rudolph celebrated for facilitating the delivery of presents, but he is also now the envy of the other reindeer. Following the familiar format of children's literature, the story transforms the misfit into the hero and shows him to be more desirable than his uniformly unextraordinary, though more attractive, peers.

Near the end of the poem, all the other reindeer celebrate Rudolph and ask for a speech, and here, Rudolph keeps his speech very short, saying simply, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night." This is, of course, the farewell that Moore assigns to Santa Claus in his poem (with the word "Merry" substituted for Moore's original "Happy"). By transferring these words to Rudolph, May gives his new character a position of power right alongside Santa Claus, going as far as to afford the tiny misfit reindeer the same language authority as Santa Claus. May features the line a second time at the end of the poem in an intimate aside to his young audience, charging them to

> Be listening, this Christmas! […] The very first sound that you'll hear on the roof / (Provided there's fog) will be Rudolph's small hoof. / And soon

> after that (if you're still as a mouse) / You may hear a 'swish' as he flies 'round the house, / And gives enough light to give Santa a view / Of you and your room. / And when they're all through, / You may hear them call as they drive out of sight:-- / 'MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL AND TO ALL A GOODNIGHT!'

This direct address to the child audience reinforces the close relationship between child and Santa Claus established throughout the poem by Rudolph and Santa's interactions. This second use of the "Merry Christmas to all" line also identifies "them," both Santa and Rudolph, as the speakers. Though "An Account" successfully links Santa Claus, Christmas, and the human father to the service of the child, the father only is witness to Santa Claus, and Santa Claus alone utters the text's final words. May's text reaches back to those final words, but reassigns the perspective to the child audience and the childlike character Rudolph, giving Rudolph a voice alongside Santa Claus's. This maintenance of tradition, alongside the increasing empowerment of the child in his position as guide to Santa Claus, has had much to do with the story's ability to join the Christmas canon.

A brief look at the less successful *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* (1902) by L. Frank Baum emphasizes the importance of adherence to "An Account"'s tradition along with the elevation of child characters at work in *Rudolph*. Baum's fantasy, which came just four years after Church's "Virginia" editorial but more than three decades before *Rudolph,* is still readily available to readers and is even included in some Christmas boxed sets, such as the Penguin Christmas Classics set.[20] However, characters from this story such as Ak, Weekum, and the Awgwas have not entered the register as

Rudolph has and are now fairly obscure. The text follows "Neclaus," as he is first called, from infancy in the Forest of Burzee among the immortal Fairies, Knooks, Ryls and Nymphs to his life in the Laughing Valley and his ventures into the world of mortal humans. As it traces Claus's development, the text convincingly builds Claus up as a man who is inherently good, with a strong capacity for care and love. However, describing the forces behind Claus's sentiments and motivations shows a growth in the character as a man rather than underscoring his position as a static and permanent holiday fixture, an emblem of guarded tradition, which has been deemed so important in the American Christmas. Though the Santa Claus figure has proven to be a malleable one, stretched and expanded over time, successful instantiations have consistently recalled the image put forth in "An Account" and have been satisfied to present Santa Claus always as a grown patriarch. Establishing Santa Claus's birth and development seems to undermine the eternal quality of his nature present in more popular texts of the Christmas canon.

In addition to altering fundamental qualities of the Santa Claus figure, Baum's text also estranges essential features of the holiday from their traditional roots rather than reinforcing popularized staples of the Christmas celebration. For example, we learn that Christmas Eve became the night for present delivery by choice of the Prince of the Knooks, whose laws govern Claus's use of the reindeer. When Claus returns the deer a minute late from his first excursion with them, a council is held among immortal leaders to determine whether Claus should be allowed to continue using the deer to venture forth into the world of humans and deliver presents. The Prince agrees to let Claus do so, but

he commands that the presents must be delivered on Christmas Eve. In a significant move away from conventional tellings, we learn that Claus has no prior knowledge of Christmas. In fact, he must ask, "When is Christmas Eve?" (146). When he finds out that it is only ten days away, Claus worries about how little time that gives him to prepare enough toys, and thinks, "Then I can not use the deer this year…for I shall not have time enough to make my sackful of toys" (146). Ak explains, "The shrewd Prince foresaw that…and therefore named Christmas Eve as the day you might use the deer, knowing it would cause you to lose an entire year." The Christmas date and Santa Claus's connection to it, in Baum's rendition, have nothing to do with tradition or religion, but instead, are set by a make-believe prince in a make-believe land because he is angry at Claus for flouting his rules. Details such as these, which constitute bizarre departures and unfamiliar additions, proved too different and too inventive for a holiday connected so forcefully with tradition. *Rudolph* taps into that tradition and has therefore become a successful addition to the canon, but *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* veers from it and has not gained the same central place in Christmas literature.

Baum's story has also failed to enter the Christmas canon of children's literature because it disempowers children, alienates them from the Santa Claus figure, and shifts the power dynamic of adult/child squarely to the adults' corner. Throughout the story, Baum situates children as pathetic, forgotten, and helpless characters, who need the attentions of a kindly man to rescue them from their own miserable states. The few children from whom we hear in the story are flat and unlikeable. Mayrie, whose brother receives a toy while she must wait, is a whiny little girl, who is, by modern standards,

negatively represented through her speech patterns (e.g., "I—I—I wants a t—t—tat [cat] now!" [77]), which are perhaps meant to be accurate representations of a young child's communication skills, but come across as a lack of control over grammar and pronunciation, locating the child as beneath authoritative power structures. Bessie, the Lord's daughter, is a demanding and obtrusive girl. Every other Christmas text discussed to this point that has successfully joined the Christmas canon elevates the child in some way to a unique position: "An Account" situates the child as the special recipient of Christmas and Santa Claus (and the father through whom we access him) as a figure to delight and please the child; *Little Women* gives children (and girls especially) the power to assume the role of Santa Claus themselves; "Yes, Virginia" links children to a Santa Claus figure so ideal that he shares the benevolence of an ever-kind God; and *Rudolph* makes the outcast child the savior of Christmas and Santa Claus's right-hand man. Baum, however, fails to incorporate the child in an empowering way, and in fact, his child characters are (at least by modern standards) disagreeable, simple, and dependent upon Santa Claus for their happiness. The effect on twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences and readers of Christmas literature is alienating, and indeed out of form for Baum, whose most famous work is one of empowerment and self-reliance as demonstrated by the unlikeliest of characters, the young, orphaned Dorothy Gale.

*Rudolph*, on the other hand, was an immediate hit and continues to work in the core of Christmas iconography. In 1939, Montgomery Ward distributed 2.4 million copies of the booklet, and, as has been emphasized, May's success in constructing Rudolph comes from his empowerment of the child and his reliance on tradition, both of

the Christmas canon and of the children's literature corpus. Rudolph blends Moore's familiar text, existing expectations and conventions of children's literature, and the ideals of a hopeful Christmas spirit to introduce, permanently, a new character into the American Christmas canon, right alongside the beloved Santa Claus.[21] Moreover, Rudolph's success comes also because of its redemptive power, not just for Rudolph who is relieved from his life as an outcast, but for the author, himself a quietly struggling father. The redemptive aspect of Christmas works in varying degrees throughout the literature of the nineteenth century, with "An Account" throwing the father into the relief of joy and magic, *Little Women* providing the March girls the ability to subvert oppressive power structures, and "Yes, Virginia" offering Santa Claus as a figure capable of combating the "skepticism of a skeptical age." *Rudolph* moves the need for help and salvation, on many levels, to a central place in the story, significantly positioning the adult—both Father Christmas and the human father—as among those in need of assistance.

May's story is as compelling as Rudolph's. Nate Bloom, author of a pop culture article on the poem and subsequent song with input from "Rudolph" songwriter Johnny Marks's family, has noted, "Both Marks and May put out some contradictory or incomplete stories about the Rudolph song/poem and about their respective personal biographies." It is, therefore, difficult at times to distinguish fact from desired fact, but most versions of May's story go as follows. May, by his own admission, was a shy boy and felt he had "always been a loser" ("Rudolph and I"). By the time he was thirty-five, he had a very ill wife and mounting debt, and he was stuck in a modest copywriting job,

"describing men's white shirts" rather than "writing the great American novel, as I'd once hoped." These were the circumstances when his boss called him in to assign him the task of writing up a short Christmas booklet, requesting an animal as the main character. Inspired both by existing Christmas stories and by his four-year-old daughter Barbara, who loved visiting the deer at the zoo, he settled on a reindeer. While his boss was skeptical of the initial idea, May pressed on, enlisting the help of Denver Gillen, a friend from the art department, and continued input from Barbara. May's wife, Evelyn, died in July, leaving May a single father to a little girl. His boss offered to reassign the project, but May felt that "I needed Rudolph now more than ever." He not only sought to throw himself into the work as a refuge, but he also took comfort in his own message:

> Today children all over the world read and hear about the little deer who started out in life as a loser, just as I did. But they learn that when he gave himself for others, his handicap became the very means through which he achieved happiness. My reward is knowing that every year, when Christmas rolls around, Rudolph still brings that message to millions both young and old.

Taken with May's biography, Rudolph's ability to cut through the darkness by virtue of his own imperfections and steadfast spirit operates as a metaphor for the father's efforts to navigate through a difficult period, using his own humble talents, and provide a joyful life for his daughter despite the circumstances. Just as the popularized story of Moore being struck by inspiration while on a snowy sleigh ride home to his children after a day of charitable giving, of the loving anecdotes about Nast and his children/grandchildren,

and of the interjections of affective response from Church as he penned his reply to Virginia have come to be desirable accompaniments to their respective texts, so too has May's biography infused *Rudolph* with the sentimentality and sense of paternal struggle and redemption that is so wanted in Christmas literature, especially in the twentieth century.

For his trouble, May was able to enjoy the immediate success of his book's multimillion distribution in 1939, and then he celebrated his success again in 1947 when Montgomery Ward's chair, Sewell Avery, turned the rights over to him.[22] Subsequent book sales and the song that developed from the text ensured financial stability for May and his family, a welcome relief from the debt May faced while caring for his terminally sick wife on a copywriter's salary.[23] Restad claims that this financial comfort for the Mays was Avery's aim in turning over the rights. However, an NPR piece on the story reports that the reasons for the transfer "aren't exactly clear," but that "[May's] daughter tells us that the bosses never thought Rudolph had potential as more than a holiday promotion" (Pupovac). That same piece also suggests as Avery's motivation something similar to the financial comfort that Restad claims, but infuses into it the sentimental desire with which so many Christmas authorial biographies have now been treated, noting, "we'd like to think, for the sake of this cute little Christmas tale, that [Avery's] humanity won him over."

The narrative that has come to be associated with Rudolph's writing and May's background, whether true to the letter or embellished, plays perfectly to the American Christmas: a male character, downtrodden and fatigued by work, life, and unfortunate

turns of fate, plods on without losing his faith (religious or secular), though he may be tempted to. On Christmas, a force intervenes, and the character is saved. We are to understand that the true reward is newfound hope and joy and affirmation of the faith he had clung to, but, conveniently for the commercial world, there is economic reward as well and the enjoyment of material pleasures. It is *Rudolph's* narrative, it is May's narrative, and it is the narrative of other core Christmas figures such as George Bailey in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). *Rudolph* also begins to insert Santa Claus himself into this narrative, positioning him not only as a figure who brings help and salvation but as someone who sometimes is in need of those things as well, and it is the child (or child-oriented Christmas) that can provide them.

**A Deeper Redemption Still: Twentieth-Century Christmas and the Grinch's Transformation**

In *Rudolph* the help that Father Christmas needs is practical help in driving his sleigh through a foggy night. Popularized stories of *Rudolph's* writer have also suggested that he, a widowed father to a young daughter, sought help from Rudolph, turning to his work on the text in hopes of better days to come. With the publication of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957), Dr. Seuss raises the stakes for the type of help that the central male figure needs by positioning the Grinch as a sour, solipsistic, self-isolated crank in need of complete transformation and salvation. [24] As Thomas Burns puts it, the Grinch's problem is that he is unsympathetic to and "alienated from his fellow man" (198-99).[25] These "antihumanitarian feelings" constitute a much larger

problem than Santa's difficulty navigating his sleigh through the fog, and a more internal, seemingly irredeemable problem than the external circumstances faced by *Rudolph's* author, May. However, canonical Christmas literature has not balked at such troubled, even corrupt, adult male characters, and has even come to embrace them as one of the holiday's common features. Along with the central positioning of the adult male in need of salvation, the *Grinch* factors in reliance on tradition and allegiance with/empowerment of children, all of which are factors that have secured the *Grinch's* place in the child's holiday canon.

Burns locates the *Grinch's* clear integration of tradition as pivotal to the story's success, noting that Seuss relies on previous texts by Moore and Dickens to create "a story in which the two most proven themes in the popular Christmas tradition, the Scrooge and Santa Claus themes, are united in a single character in a single expression" (197-98). In addition, the story's illustrations are replete with visual icons of the holiday—snow-capped Who-houses, holly wreaths, ornamented Christmas trees, children snuggled in their beds—and the text, like *Rudolph*, draws on "An Account"'s form, with Seuss employing a similar rhyme scheme to Moore's. Furthermore, the *Grinch's* pivotal scene, in which the Grinch enacts his "WONDERFUL, AWFUL IDEA," works as a version of "An Account" in reverse. In physical appearance, the Grinch is tall and gaunt, especially in relation to the Whos, a clear opposite of Moore's Santa Claus, who is "chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf." In action, Moore's Santa Claus carries a bundle of toys on his back for his important work of filling the stockings. The Grinch loads his sleigh with empty sacks that he will stuff with the Whos'

Christmas toys, decorations, and feast. Even the minute details of the Grinch's excursion recall "An Account." For instance, Moore writes, "Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse," while Seuss notes, "And the one speck of food / that he left in the house / was a crumb that was even too small for a mouse." At both large scale and small, then, Seuss injects his mid-twentieth-century text with allusion to the nineteenth-century atmosphere popularized by Moore and extended by others such as Nast and Church, which facilitates the Grinch's initiation into the canon.

One of the most significant inversions in Seuss's reverse-"An Account" scene is the change from the adult witness of Santa Claus to the child witness. In "An Account," it is the father who witnesses Santa Claus's joyful and generous spirit, and his delight in leaving gifts for the children. When Santa Claus interacts with his observer, he does so with "a wink of his eye and a twist of his head" so that the father might know there is "nothing to dread," and both human father and Father Christmas become keepers of the child's Christmas joy. In the *Grinch*, it is not the father but the child, Cindy-Lou Who, who witnesses the "Santa Claus" Grinch on his visit, and the moment the child gains access to is not one of merry giving, but one of deceit and theft, a moment of utter failure and moral decay on the part of the adult male figure. Cindy-Lou, a small girl "not more than two," is the only Who the Grinch interacts with before his transformation, and Burns makes the important observation that all of "Whoville is a children's world … While Whoville contains adults, these adults are strictly background characters who even as adults are childlike in stature compared to the larger figure of the ogre, the Grinch" (200). The childlike characters in the *Grinch*, not unlike the March girls in *Little*

*Women*, are able to celebrate Christmas without Santa Claus, and seem to take a more effectual position than the "father" figure. When Christmas Day arrives and there are no gifts, no decorations, and no feast, the Grinch believes the "Whos down in Who-ville will all cry BOO-HOO." Instead, the Whos join hands in "merry" song, and the Grinch is stunned to find that "He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME! / Somehow or other, it came just the same!" The Grinch mistakes Christmas for a hedonistic celebration that "come[s] from a store," but the childlike Whos know the holiday "means a little bit more."[26] The Whos' commercial-free, joyous celebration inspires the Grinch's "small heart" and provokes his transformation so thoroughly that he returns the gifts and joins the Christmas celebration, effectively morphing into Santa Claus. Thus, the Grinch is completely changed and redeemed from his solipsistic and "antihumanitarian" existence by his experience with the childlike world of the Whos and their Christmas spirit.

The Whos' impact on the Grinch demonstrates that by the time of the *Grinch's* writing, the transfer of Christmas authority from adult to child had been completed. Moreover, the book solidifies weakness in central adult male figures, even father figures and Santa Claus figures, as a common feature in the tradition of Christmas literature. No longer merely the absent and economically careless father in *Little Women*, the logistically impaired Santa Claus of *Rudolph*, or even the bereaved and world-weary Mr. May, the Grinch is actively malicious in the execution of his plan to steal Christmas. However, even a figure so ill-intentioned and seemingly inherently bad is not beyond the redeeming power of the child-oriented Christmas, positioning the child not just

alongside the male authority as *Rudolph* does, but as much stronger than him with the ability to turn the skeptical and the vile into the joyful. This move reverses another canonical text, the "Yes, Virginia" editorial, as it is not the child but the "father," the adult male in the *Grinch*, who is the great skeptic. In the editorial, the child asks about Santa Claus and the meaning of Christmas, and Church's response implies that she has been influenced by skeptical friends in a skeptical age and is in need of wisdom from a wiser adult. Virginia seeks advice from her father, and he directs her to another male authority figure, a faceless, omniscient editor of the *Sun* (Papa says, "If you see it in the *Sun*, it's so"), who defends the third male authority, Santa Claus, in an apologia. The "Virginia" editorial aligns Christmas with children and childhood ideals, but the message comes firmly from a voice of male authority. In Seuss's text, however, the central adult male, who assumes the identity of Santa Claus, is the one who is lost, and the child is Christmas's keeper and the voice of influence. It may be reaching too far to say that in the *Grinch*, omniscient, omnipotent paternal authority is dead, but it is certainly weakened and misaligned, though not beyond redemption.

**Pitying the Father: *The Polar Express* and the Child as Christmas Authority**

While the *Grinch* redeems its exaggerated example of the corrupt adult male character in canonical children's Christmas literature, the disillusioned adult figure has persisted as a mainstay of the literature beyond the *Grinch* and into the late twentieth century, and in some ways, the literature even becomes more resigned to the adult's corrosion. In Seuss's text, the childlike Whos possess the capacity to understand

Christmas's true meaning and hold the power associated with the holiday's ideals, including the power to redeem the fallen man. However, the Grinch is able to get some power back through his transformation. He brings the presents, essentially becoming Santa Claus, and he gains the position of authority at the head of the holiday table. The child-oriented Christmas is responsible for the Grinch's transformation, but after his salvation, he takes an active role in the holiday in a triumphant conclusion. The prognosis for the adult is more pessimistic in Chris Van Allsburg's Caldecott-winning *The Polar Express*. Compared to the events in the *Grinch*, the adult fall from Christmas grace comes in less dramatic form; rather than displaying the adult in an act of malice, *The Polar Express* indicates that the adult's power to access Christmas slips away with time and that only the rare true believer can avoid that fate. As has been the case for all other texts in the child's Christmas canon, *The Polar Express* demonstrates clear integration of tradition and a strong emphasis on the child. Perhaps the biggest change, then, is not in the way that Christmas literature represents the child, though the child's role and power have undeniably expanded, but in the way that it represents the adult.

*The Polar Express* begins with lines that evoke both "An Account" and "Yes, Virginia," though this story pushes further to locate the authority of the holiday with the child. The book begins with the narrator's recollection of a Christmas Eve "many years ago." Like the adult speaker of "An Account," this speaker, now represented as a boy, is nestled in his bed, but because he is already working in the tradition of "An Account," he knows to anticipate Santa Claus's coming. He remembers, "I did not rustle the sheets. I breathed slowly and silently. I was listening for a sound […] the ringing bells of

Santa's sleigh." At the same time, the opening revisits the skepticism behind Virginia's question to the *Sun* nearly a century earlier. The narrator's friend has told him that he would "never hear" the sleigh bells because "There is no Santa." The boy insists that his friend is wrong, and he does in fact hear a sound, but it is not the sleigh bells that he expects. Instead, it is the "hissing steam and squeaking metal" of a train outside his window.

In a reversal of the journey presented in "An Account," the narrator of *The Polar Express* travels on the train, packed with other children, to the North Pole where he encounters Santa Claus, a grand and striking figure who looms over the North Pole's diminutive elves and child visitors in Van Allsburg's illustrations. From amongst all the children, Santa selects the narrator to receive the first gift of Christmas. This scene shows an intimate exchange between the boy and Santa. He sits on Santa's knee, confides what he would like, and receives a hug and smile from Santa along with the gift he requests, not a "commercial" item from Santa's big bag (though he "knew I could have any gift I could imagine") but a bell from the reindeer's harness. Later in the story, the boy experiences another personalized exchange with Santa Claus. After Santa gives him the bell, the boy stows the present in his pocket and boards the train only to find that the bell has fallen out. He is severely disappointed to have lost the gift. On Christmas morning, however, the boy's sister, Sarah, finds one last present after all the others have been opened. Inside the box is the reindeer's silver bell along with a note that reads, "Found this on the seat of my sleigh. Fix that hole in your pocket." The letter is signed "Mr. C."

The bell becomes a symbol of the child's connection to Christmas. On that Christmas morning, both the narrator and his sister delight in its jingling, but neither of their parents can hear the sound. The mother laments, "Oh…that's too bad," and the father adds, "Yes…it's broken." On the book's final page, the narrator, now returned to the "present" moment, muses, "At one time most of my friends could hear the bell, but as years passed, it fell silent for all of them. Even Sarah found one Christmas that she could no longer hear its sweet sound. Though I've grown old, the bell still rings for me as it does for all who truly believe." In these final lines, the text offers a way by which individuals may carry the joy of Christmas throughout their lives, but there is also sad resignation to the idea that most individuals will not follow through. Instead of maintaining access to the Christmas power of childhood, most adults forsake that power and are, as a result, to be pitied. Such a presentation of the adult differs greatly from the adult featured in "An Account," who works as Santa's first observer, his reporter, and his ally in the child's Christmas delight. Instead, the adult in this late twentieth-century text is often a hardened and disenchanted nonbeliever.

**Conclusion**

*The Polar Express* is a child's story, an experience from childhood, that represents the child, not the father, as the special witness to Santa Claus, but the final line reminds readers that it is also an adult's story. The narrator is a grown man, looking back on life. In this respect, *The Polar Express* is not alone. None of the texts in the child's Christmas canon surveyed in this chapter incorporates a child as the first-person

narrator, though several twentieth- and twenty-first-century texts for other holidays do. This difference highlights the unusually high profile of the adult in the children's Christmas canon. Adults are ever-present in children's literature, and texts from several other holidays explore the power dynamics between children and adults, as well as the ways that adults have shaped holidays. However, adults are not often the speaker, nor are they frequently the central characters in other holiday texts as they are in Christmas texts, and this change indicates that Christmas is about the adult, specifically about the adult male's journey. Christmas is child-oriented, and for Christmas literature to be successful, it must align with and empower the child, but, with a few exceptions such as in *Little Women*, children in these texts are static, one-dimensional, and strangely peripheral, while the adult male, even in absence or struggle, is always central.

Quoted in the introduction to this project, Claude Lévi-Strauss claims in "Father Christmas Executed" that we should not ask why children like Father Christmas, for the answer to that question can be settled readily enough. Santa Claus brings toys and treats, he fulfills wishes, he engenders hope and joy, he's on children's side, and he stands in the place of the benevolent, omnipotent, and omnipresent adult when perhaps there is none elsewhere in the child's life. In *The Psychology of Santa*, Carole Slotterback, who has studied children's letters to Santa, observes, "Children's views of Santa are complex and multifaceted: not just a bringer of presents, he is also a grandfather, a father, an authority figure, godlike, a social figure" (86). Children often project onto him an omnipotent state of being as evidenced in their Christmas letter requests, which, Slotterback notes, "range from making it snow to watching over sick relatives, to making

parents stop fighting" and could even include the request that Santa Claus intervene in significant global events (86). Children reveal to Santa Claus their deepest secrets, desires, and fears. However, Slotterback's "real-life" observations clash a bit with the Santa Claus of the child's Christmas canon, especially as that canon extended into the twentieth century to reveal Santa Claus and the adult male figures with whom he has been conflated as variously complicated, struggling, fallen, and permanently disillusioned. Returning to Léví-Strauss, then, who argues that rather than addressing the child's interest in Santa, we should ask "why adults invented him in the first place" (39), the answer there begins to become clearer too. Cultural historians such as Nissenbaum have delineated Santa Claus's practical purposes in taming and domesticating Christmas, but at a personal level, Santa Claus and the fantasy forms by which he comes provide adults with a medium to explore the anxieties of adult life, including expectations of omniscience and omnipotence that can never really be. Debates about audience and authorship have been endemic to the study of children's literature, but more than any other type of children's literature, Christmas literature is for adults.

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Notes

[1] Since its unsigned publication in 1823, there has been much debate over the authorship of "The Night before Christmas," with historians, family, and fans variously claiming Clement C. Moore or Henry Livingston Jr. as the true writer. Newspapers began printing Moore's name alongside the poem in the mid-1830s, and Moore himself included "The Night before Christmas" in a book of his poems published in 1844. However, as Don Foster explains in *Author Unknown: On the Trail of Anonymous*, Livingston's relatives and several respected New York historians have identified Livingston as the author. Nevertheless, the vast majority of reprints continue to name Moore as the author, likely owing in no small part to the legend that has cropped up in conjunction with his writing of the poem. Popular lore recounts that Moore wrote the poem for his children on Christmas Eve of 1822 while "traveling home from Greenwich Village, in Manhattan, where he had bought a turkey to donate to the poor during the holiday season" (http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/nation/jb_nation_moore_1.html). This image of a kindly father and a charitable man, leaning over pen and paper in an ideal Christmas setting, plays perfectly to

nostalgic sensibilities of the holiday and its origins. Because Moore has remained the de facto author in popular reference to the poem, I use his name as the author's as well, while acknowledging the validity of counter-arguments such as those of Foster.

[2] According to the American Antiquarian Society, which offers readers the ability to view this book in its entirety online, this text was published as a small, softcover book with eight hand-colored plates illustrating the work.

The wrapper of the book boasts that this installment is one of "a series of books, adapted to the capacity of young children; and adorned with elegant cuts, engraved in a method entirely new. The designs, as well as the matter which accompanies them, are original" (http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Christmas/childrensfriend.html).

[3]Leigh Eric Schmidt observes in *Consumer Rights: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, gifts, including "confections, cakes, devotional works, children's books, annual keepsakes, and toys" (123), were given on New Year's Day instead of on Christmas. The 1820s and '30s, however, began to see more fluidity between the holidays, and advertisements mentioned Christmas as well as New Year's Day in their seasonal promotions. *Children's Friend*, which includes reference to New Year's Day in the title but locates Christmas Eve as the night on which Santa Claus delivers his gifts, operated as a "social mirror" (123) and participated in the shifting commercial focus on Christmas.

[4] As noted in the brief mention of Paulding's *A Christmas Gift from Fairyland*, the Christmas holiday and Santa Claus in particular have served as the subjects of inventive literary form. In the case of Paulding's book, the invention came in the expansion of fantasy literature for American audiences, and in the case of *Children's Friend*, the invention came in the novel use of lithographed illustrations. The holiday thus operates not only as a staple in but also as a pioneer in the formal possibilities for American literature for young people.

[5] The original poem has subsequently been published in many formats and updates to the language have been employed. All quotations from the poem in this chapter are from the 1823 text, unless otherwise specified.

[6] Some scholars have debated whether the monikers Father Christmas and Santa Claus can be used interchangeably. In *Who Is Father Christmas?*, Shirley Harrison discusses the difficulty of establishing Father Christmas's origins, and she questions whether the multiple instantiations of the figure—such as Father Christmas, St. Nicholas, the Christkindl, and Santa Claus—are really the same figure. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that modern British and American versions of the figure have two primary influences: the Roman god Saturn and the Christian St. Nicholas. For the purposes of this chapter, I often default to the term Santa Claus as that is the most popularly used name in the American tradition. However, when specific texts specify an alternate term, I use that term.

[7] Citing the work of influential psychiatrist and physician Arnold Gesell, Carole Slotterbock reports that it is not uncommon for children, especially very young children (under the age of three), to go through a period in which they fear Santa Claus, particularly physical manifestations of the man such as those they might encounter in shopping centers. Though these fears are likely those of being thrust into close company with a costumed stranger, there are pieces of legend and myth in the precursors to the American Santa Claus that are fearful. "An Account"'s clear efforts to overturn those fearful elements again comment on the poem's goal of forging a new kind of Santa Claus.

[8] There is an established literary tradition of male authors composing letters "from Santa Claus" to their children. Mark Twain penned a letter to his daughter in 1875 as Santa Claus (which he addressed as being from the Palace of St. Nicholas in the moon), and J. R. R. Tolkien wrote letters to his children every year between 1920 and 1943 as Father Christmas.

[9] In *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday*, Karal Anne Marling underscores the absence of women in the media of the holiday: "Popular culture—the movies, TV—is heavily invested in denying that women and Christmas have any special relationship at all. Jimmy Stewart and the Grinch are the Christmas heroes; Mrs. Claus is relegated to the photo booth in the department-store Toyland. When the manipulation of 'stuff' takes precedence over the use of words and documents, when traditional women's skills at shopping or cooking or home decorating take center stage, the whole subject falls off the radar screen of 'important' scholarship" (xi). This absence extends into children's literature as well.

[10] Nast did take some of his own liberties with the figure, particularly to push social and political causes. In an illustration published by *Harper's Weekly* on January 3, 1863, for instance, Nast features a Santa Claus in a blue jacket with stars and red-and-white striped pants visiting Union soldiers. He also featured domestic Christmas scenes and images of the Christ Child (Christkindchen), in a nod to his German roots.
[11] Santa Claus's "Naughty or Nice" list has remained a part of cultural lore throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The concept was popularized in John Frederick Coots and Haven Gillespie's "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," which was first performed in 1934. The song warns audiences to mind their behavior because Santa Claus is "making a list, / checking it twice; / Gonna find out who's naughty or nice." The list endows Santa Claus with the power to judge morality and levy appropriate gift or punishment, evoking that authoritarian, even God-like or God-associated quality present in pre-Moore representations of St. Nicholas and Christmas. In *Alice in Blunderland*, a title in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's popular Alice series, Alice even makes this comparison. After she and her friends have prepared and mailed a care package to a classmate suffering abuse at the hands of her father, Alice's friend Dawn remarks, "I'll bet we'll go to heaven for this," to which Alice responds, "Are we going to die?" Dawn clarifies, "I mean when we do die, we'll go to heaven. God will write it down in his book […] He puts those kinds of things down on one side of the page and the bad things on the other." After hearing this explanation, Alice thinks, "It sounded sort of like Santa Claus to me" (127).
[12] Alcott also composed several short stories about Christmas. Stephen Hines has collected twenty stories, which are believed to be all of her Christmas pieces, in *Louisa May Alcott's Christmas Treasury* (David C. Cook, 2002).
[13] The relationship between Christmas and war has been well studied. See for example Joe Perry's *Christmas in Germany: A Cultural History* (U of North Carolina P, 2010), Christine Agius's "Christmas and War" in *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture* (ed. Sheila Whiteley, Edinburgh University Press, 2008), and Stanley Weintraub's *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce* (Free Press, 2001). Moreover, many authors and artists driving the concept of the American Santa Claus have experience with war. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, both Thomas Nast and Frank Church were Civil War correspondents. Theodore Seuss Geisel produced a series of World War II political cartoons, and, though the influential *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (1965) is not covered in this chapter, Charles Schulz served in World War II.
[14] Alcott scholars have frequently drawn comparisons between Louisa May Alcott's fictional father figures and her own father, Bronson Alcott, a cerebral man who often dwelt on ideals at the expense of practicalities. John Matteson provides an extensive study of Bronson and Louisa's relationship in *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father* (Norton, 2007), noting, "even in his own daughter's work, Bronson is represented as a compromised figure, sometimes caricatured for the sake of comedy and sometimes wholly absent when circumstances cry out for his presence" (7).
[15] In "Charitable (Mis)Givings and the Aesthetics of Poverty," Monika Elbert discusses Alcott's ambivalent and often contradictory attitude towards poverty and the poor in both her fiction and her life. Elbert questions the acts of charity such as the one in the first Christmas passage of *Little Women*, arguing that such moments "often ended up being more a lesson in good manners than in real empathy or social awareness" (24). "In the Alcott canon," she continues, "middle-class children who learn to give are the victors in society as they thrive and get repaid for their beneficence, and material rewards beget more material rewards" (25).
[16] W. Joseph Campbell's "The Grudging Emergence of American Journalism's Classic Editorial: New Details About 'Is There A Santa Claus?'" suggests that the enduring impulse to view Church's response as an impassioned defense stems from readers' reactions to the writing rather than to any particular affinity for the subject on the part of the author. Church wrote the piece quickly, perhaps after some hemming and hawing, as part of a typical workday. Church himself never had children, was an introverted and private man, and never spoke out or left any writings expressing feelings on his now famous editorial (Campbell 53-55). This part of the history, however, is usually glossed over, or in the case of the 2009 short animated film, revised to present an author profoundly affected by Virginia's letter and inspired in his response. The film portrays Church as a crotchety and world-worn newsman who, after some prodding from an old acquaintance, deliberates intently and then feverishly pens his response late at night, becoming a more charitable and kind man himself as a result. As in idealizations of Moore as a father composing his poem

for his children on a snowy Christmas Eve sleigh ride, embellishments of Church's sentiment for his editorial are desired in popular lore of the holiday.

[17] In fact, May's writing of *Rudolph* fell during a period in which advertising was having a particularly noticeable impact on the iconography of Christmas. May wrote his text at the same time that artist Haddon Sundblom was employed by Coca-Cola to craft images of Santa Claus (from 1931-1966) in order to attract more children to the product. According to Cara Okleshen, Stacey Menzel Baker, and Robert Mittelstaedt's "Santa Claus Does More Than Deliver Toys: Advertising's Commercialization of the Collective Memory of Americans," in the early decades of the twentieth century, "Coke wanted to increase sales to children but, because it [sic] the early days it was believed that Coca-Cola used coca (a narcotic plant), it was taboo to direct advertising at children under the age of twelve …. So, Coca-Cola decided to show a friendly Santa drinking Coke served by children or enjoying a Coca-Cola after a hard night's work of delivering toys" (224). The campaign was widely popular both in promoting the beverage and in solidifying popular nineteenth-century representations from the words of Moore and Church and the images of Nast, while adding a few further details such as universalizing the red color of Santa's suit and stretching his elf-like frame into that of an adult.

[18] Both critical examinations of the book and popular articles note the similarities between Moore's "Rudolph" and Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" (Crump 350).

[19] While Rudolph takes comfort in the homogenizing effect of material gifting, Halloween literature presents those effects as threatening to selfhood, a concept discussed in the Halloween chapter of this dissertation.

[20] Baum penned a short story sequel to the novel entitled "A Kidnapped Santa Claus" (published in *The Delineator* in December of 1904), which suggests that his version of Santa Claus has maintained at least some presence in printings and adaptations since, though not with the same rigor as the canonical texts covered in this chapter.

[21] Restad also attributes *Rudolph's* success to its affirmation of the American dream at a time when Depression-weary consumers had lost some heart: "As a story of an outcast youngster and written during the Great Depression, Rudolph's adventure ratified the American dream in terms of merit and acceptance rather than money. Rudolph saved Christmas and earned the esteem of his own reindeer community. The message: A worthy soul, given the opening, can turn a liability into an asset. Success will surely follow" (165). This analysis adds a useful layer to understanding the immediate success of the text, but it does not necessarily account for the story's staying power.

[22] Ward halted production of the text during World War II, but then released another 3.6 million copies in 1946 (Restad 165, Crump 349). However, *Rudolph* was not forgotten in the interim. In that time, Max Fleischer, a respected filmmaker known for his pioneering work in animation, "produced an eight-minute animated cartoon 'short' version of the story for theaters, backed by the Detroit-based Jam Handy Company" (Crump 349).

[23] The song debuted in 1949, performed by Gene Autry and written by Johnny Marks, whom Restad identifies as a friend of May's though many other sources identify him as May's brother-in-law (NPR, Bloom).

[24] While not as compelling as the biographical moments behind Moore's "An Account" or May's *Rudolph*, frequent comparisons have been made between Seuss and the Grinch in the tradition of conflating the male author with the fictional Christmas figure that he has produced. For instance, "Bob Edwards pointed out on his National Public Radio profile of Dr. Seuss, [that] Seuss and the Grinch share the same age, and Seuss lived at the top of Mt. Soledad while the Grinch inhabited a cave at the top of Mt. Crumpet," and Seuss admitted that he saw much of himself in the Grinch (Pond).

[25] Burns's "Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*: Its Recent Acceptance into the American Popular Tradition" examines the welcoming of the animated 1966 film into American holiday culture. Because the film adheres so closely to the original text (Dr. Seuss worked as a produced on the film and wrote the songs added), Burns's observations apply to the 1957 text as well.

[26] As was the case in *Little Women*, *The Grinch* allows material enjoyment after the realization of the moral message. In *Dr. Seuss: American Icon*, Philip Nel discusses Seuss's complex relationship to commercial culture as a former advertiser and the force behind a monetarily successful literary empire. Nel points out, "As a former advertising man, Seuss may well have viewed the financial success of the

*Grinch* as a moral success: the more people who see [Chuck] Jones's [animated] *Grinch* or read Seuss's *Grinch*, the more who receive Seuss's message. As his World War II cartoons and political books demonstrated, when writing as a propagandist, Seuss wished to persuade as many people as he could. He might have enjoyed the irony of having written a successful commercial against commercialism" (131).

# CHAPTER VII

# CONCLUSION

The holiday literature studied in this dissertation engages many of the topics at stake in children's literature in general: authorship and audience, peer relationships, expressions of and limitations to power, identity exploration, education and didacticism, play and fantasy, subversion and rebellion, negotiations of otherness (namely gender, race, nationality, religion, and class), interaction with parents, idealizations of childhood, and manipulations of childhood. However, holiday literature provides a unique frame through which to explore evolutions in those topics because we return to holidays year after year. Thus, the wide range of children's holiday literature covered in this project, spanning nearly two centuries and several genres, offers a basis for comparing those issues, at least within a holiday context. Birthday literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, for instance, has permitted children a greater degree of individuality and self-centered attention than literature of the nineteenth century. In the same vein, Halloween literature has increasingly allowed the child to participate in creative play and institutional subversion throughout the twentieth century. Fourth of July literature licenses the child to critique nation rather than readily accept nation as arbiter of identity. While such holiday literature expands children's liberties (ironically so in the case of some Fourth of July literature), even if such liberties present problems, literature of other holidays reinforces the persistent heavy-handedness of adult control, interestingly offering just as much, sometimes even more, adult voice in contemporary literature than in the nineteenth-century literature. For example, Valentine's Day

literature has developed strong and overt didactic messages on how to interact with peers and community as well as on how to align oneself with one's gender. In contemporary literature, those messages sometimes eclipse juvenile excitement over the holiday, which is present in nineteenth-century texts. Christmas children's literature has proven to be a canvas for the exploration of authoritative and paternal roles, including the anxieties of omnipotence and failure involved in those roles.

Even as children's literature of each holiday has taken on its own trajectory to engage the cultural maxims deemed appropriate for that day, certain trends remain consistent across the board: children's literature for each holiday has been plentiful for at least the last one hundred years, and in many cases longer; the literature establishes holidays as important events in children's lives; children's literature consistently provides observable sites of the creation, expansion, and/or rejection of holiday tradition; children's literature is responsible for mainstreaming many of the emblems of holiday. Taken together, these trends suggest that adults have relied in large part upon children and their literature to dictate the features of holiday celebrations and the cultural identities tied up in them. Of course, this observation does not ignore the complex relationships between children's literature and the forces that may drive its production and success/failure (economic, educational, political, domestic, sentimental); however, while adults author, publish, advertise, and purchase children's holiday material, they are dependent on the child audience to receive it and on children's literary forms to produce it (including notably innovative and experimental literary forms). Overall, the success of mainstreaming holidays through children's texts indicates that children's literature has

been and continues to be the most effectual vehicle for communicating the desired terms of American holiday.

Children's literature does not just give us a new way to view holidays. Holidays also give us new ways to view children's literature. The spread of time, audience, and genre in this dissertation is meant to emphasize the ubiquity of holidays in children's literature, and understanding the complex history of holidays, much like understanding the complex histories of constructs such as gender, race, or education, can shed new light on a text. I offer brief discussion of passages from two additional texts here to make this point: Eleanor Estes's chapter book *The Witch Family* (1960) and Laurie Halse Anderson's young adult novel *Speak* (1999). These books are very different. The former is a domestic fantasy celebrating the creativity of elementary school-aged children, the latter an edgy realistic novel about rape. However, attention to the holiday material allows us to see overlaps in the texts, when none may have been evident before, and both novels make similar arguments about holidays: holidays are extremely important in young people's lives; holiday settings carry loaded cultural import; and there is a persistent impulse to present the young, innocent child as the special keeper of holiday, a unique role that fades away with age.

In *The Witch Family*, the holiday material focuses primarily on Halloween, while also including scenes from Easter, a birthday party, and brief mention of Christmas. As I argue in this dissertation's third major chapter, the Halloween backdrop offers an apt setting to support the kind of interest in subversion evident throughout *The Witch Family*. Claudia Nelson has noted that the text permits the child protagonist "to explore

the possibilities of rebelling against one's parent figure" (232), and I would add that the text also opens the possibilities of rebelling against education (through the classroom scenes), government (through reference to US politics), and religion (through the Easter material). The book's main character is an "almost" seven-year-old "ordinary real girl" named Amy who, along with her friend Clarissa, co-opts the Old Witch character from her mother's stories (Estes 1). Amy's first act is to "banquish" (i.e., banish) the Old Witch to a witch house atop a faraway hill because the witch has been wicked. Per Amy's order, the witch is to stay there and improve her behavior or else she will not be able to celebrate Halloween. Amy advances the book's plot through her own tales, drawings, and letters, which monitor the witch's behavior, record her exploits, and expand her witch family to include Weeny Witch Baby and Little Witch Girl (named Hannah). Dawn Heinecken argues that these narrative techniques establish the novel's premise as "the relationship between a child author and her characters" (261). In the context of children's holiday literature at large, this positioning of the child as "author" of a central holiday character highlights the child's importance in determining the direction of holidays, doing so with a particular closeness to and knowledge of holiday that eludes adults.

The text makes this point explicitly in a moment that contrasts the mother's perspective with Amy's on Halloween night. Amy's mother finds the girl asleep at her drawing table after a night of trick-or-treating. Two minutes before, the mother had instructed Amy to get ready for bed because she would be up after those two minutes had passed to turn off the lights. Amy ignores her mother, falling asleep in the middle of

her witch family pictures. She dreams that Hannah's broom takes her to the witch house where she passes a lonely night and then a harrowing day at witch school. The dream is as real to Amy as any other part of her life. Amy's mother, however, merely finds the girl asleep:

> [S]he took [Amy's] battered witch mask and witch hat off, looked long into the radiant face, and kissed her on the rounded top of her little blond head. Those two minutes had been as any other two minutes to Mama. She did not know that the extra radiance that shone on Amy's face was from the two great rides she had had, one on a broomstick, the other on golden Malachi [the bee Amy appoints as emissary to communicate with the witch family]. (208).

This passage emphasizes that Amy has access to a whole world of Halloween revelry that her mother does not, and it implies that Amy's access to that world provides her with richer and more elastic ways of experiencing "real" and everyday life than those of adults. As such, Amy has the unique ability to reflect on, reinforce, and/or reject the constructs of adult life.

The holiday fantasy Amy channels in *The Witch Family* does not come without complications, a point Heinecken notes in her observation that "Amy oscillates between a position of power to powerlessness" (268). Amy gets the idea of Old Witch from her mother; Amy, at times, is afraid of her holiday fantasies; and in her dream, Amy longs to return home to the safety and comfort of her mother. Here, as in other holiday texts, the adult, in some form, is close at hand. Nevertheless, Estes's book draws a direct

relationship between child and holiday like so much other holiday literature over the last two hundred years does. The dynamics of that relationship are not always the same, and holiday literature variously positions the child as eager celebrant, pliable receptacle, transformative agent, cultural critic, or imaginative force. However, it is precisely this perceived flexibility of childhood, as well as the potential flexibility of children's literary forms, that has made children's literature the ideal tool for communicating holidays, evolving them from undesirable instantiations of the past, and molding them to meet present and future concerns. Though it does so variously, children's holiday literature over the last two centuries suggests that adults lose the flexibility of childhood as they grow older and are, therefore, reliant on children, persistently malleable cultural tools, and their literature to introduce, reinforce, or change cultural maxims, which are most acutely concentrated and clearly observed through holidays.

As unlikely a companion as it may seem, Anderson's *Speak* includes a reflection very similar to the above quoted passage from *The Witch Family*. Like many novels that follow a character from the beginning to the end the school year, *Speak* makes frequent mention of the holidays that occur throughout the course of the year. The protagonist and narrator, Melinda, even remarks, "We need more holidays to keep the social studies teachers on track" (7), after noticing that American history classes are always designed to correspond with holidays (e.g., Christopher Columbus for Columbus Day, Pilgrims for Thanksgiving). The novel includes scenes set on Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Valentine's Day, and those scenes are consistently melancholic, emphasizing that after the trauma of being raped by a schoolmate at a summer party,

Melinda considers herself to be completely alienated from all social and cultural institutions, as well as wholly disillusioned from any lingering joy, innocence, or carefree spirit of childhood. Melinda expresses these feelings when she drags her family's Christmas tree from the basement to decorate it and thinks,

> There is something about Christmas that requires a rug rat. Little kids make Christmas fun. I wonder if we could rent one for the holidays. When I was tiny we would buy a real tree and stay up late drinking hot chocolate and finding just the right place for the special decorations. It seems like my parents gave up the magic when I figured out the Santa lie. Maybe I shouldn't have told them I knew where the presents really came from. It broke their hearts. (70)

Here again is the deeply held belief that children have the special ability to access holidays, which is lost as childhood passes. I make this point most directly in this project's Christmas chapter, and Melinda too makes this observation about Christmas, but as *The Witch Family* and other scenes from *Speak* emphasize, the desired connection between child and holiday is observable in children's literature for all holidays. For Melinda, the absence of the valued and often-depicted childhood connection to Christmas and other holidays adds new emphasis to the story's central themes—Melinda's loss of innocence, her disempowerment, and her alienation. Attention to the holiday material thus allows us to read Melinda's experience with rape and her subsequent disillusionment as a struggle not only with her personal identity but also with her place in all social and cultural systems.

At first blush, it may seem strange that there is so much holiday material in *Speak*, just as it may seem an odd choice for Walter Dean Myers to emphasize the Fourth of July at the beginning of Steve's trial in *Monster* (discussed in chapter five). Stories of rape trauma and inner-city violence seem wholly incongruous with popular presentations of the nostalgic, sentimental, and joyful holiday. However, the history of children's holiday literature has demonstrated that holidays serve as moments that either expand or limit children's power to define and express themselves within private and public spaces. Incorporating holiday material into young adult novels such as *Speak* and *Monster*, therefore, is not so strange at all, and noting the holiday backgrounds in so many children's texts prepares us to consider them in light of the deep cultural history that comes with holiday. Just as the Fourth of July setting in *Monster* encourages a reading of Steve's character in relation to centuries-old national history, so too does the Halloween background of *The Witch Family* invite a study of Amy's relationship to broad social, domestic, educational, and economic institutions, which are of particular interest in Halloween literature. Likewise, the varied holiday scenes in *Speak* and Melinda's estrangement from them encourage us to consider her abrupt departure from childhood, where holiday magically resides, and her crippling feelings of exclusion from all collective experience. Taken together, then, *The Witch Family* and *Speak* reveal the symbiotic relationship between holidays and children's literature, observable since the publication of "An Account" in 1823. While we may note that holidays have needed children's literature for their mainstreaming and evolution, we may also gain useful

perspective on children's literature through attention to the preloaded cultural gravitas that holidays bring to a text.

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Given the prominence of holiday material in children's literature as well as the importance of children's literature to the mainstreaming and evolution of holidays, there is much potential for future research in this area. This dissertation operates as a survey of five holidays, intentionally broad in time period and genre. Even with breadth as the goal, limitations of time and space have necessitated omitting some major holidays, notably Thanksgiving and Easter, both of which are as visible in the children's literature corpus as many of the holidays included here. An expansion of this project in preparation for publication would include chapters on both those holidays.

All of the holidays considered here have also proven complex enough to spur additional articles, and some are sufficiently rich in primary material to warrant their own monographs. For the purposes of the dissertation, I have organized each chapter around a unifying element such as costumes in the Halloween chapter or Santa Claus in the Christmas chapter. The focus on those elements has meant excluding texts with different emphases. Footnotes in the Halloween and Fourth of July chapters indicate additional subjects for each of those holidays such as monsters/witches/ghosts, irreverent and macabre humor, and fright/horror in Halloween literature, and fireworks as a trope of rebellion and historical retellings in Fourth of July literature. Lorinda Cohoon's article on boyhood patriotic identity, "Festive Citizenships: Independence Celebrations in New England Children's Periodicals and Series Books," which informs my Fourth of July

chapter, leaves room for a companion piece on girlhood citizenships as presented in the holiday literature. Similar observations may be made for other holidays. For example, there is a large selection of children's birthday literature concentrated on selecting and giving gifts, including Maud Lindsay's very short story "The Birthday Present" (1918), Lavinia Davis's *The Wild Birthday Cake* (1949, illus. Hildegard Woodward), and Charlotte Zolotow's *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present* (1962, illus. Maurice Sendak). Future articles or books might also take an international approach. As I indicate in the introduction, there are several examples of British birthday and Christmas texts that could easily fit into conversation alongside American children's texts on such holidays. As a British import, Valentine's Day is also a holiday to consider in a trans-Atlantic context. Other possibilities include comparative studies of national anniversaries in line with the Fourth of July, as well as explorations of Christmas literature in countries with less affluence and less emphasis on material culture than in the United States or in countries in which Epiphany or St. Nicholas's Feast Day eclipse Christmas as the seasonal gift-giving occasion.

Holiday literature also lends itself particularly well to archival studies. I have accessed several archives electronically for this project, including the American Antiquarian Society, the University of Florida's Baldwin Library, the University of Southern Mississippi's de Grummond Collection, and the University of Minnesota's Kerlan Collection. Librarian Mary Elizabeth Land has surveyed the children's holiday material at the Baldwin Library as the 2008 recipient of the Bechtel Fellowship. In her article on the experience, Land notes that tracing even minor holidays such as April

Fool's Day allows for unique observation of changes in attitude towards children and children's literature. Archival work would not only turn up additional material for major holidays, but it could also lead to interesting texts on minor recommitment holidays of nation, family, and religion, as well as on minor tension management holidays in the child's calendar. Such work may additionally reveal past significance of holidays such as May Day that have now become almost entirely obscure, as well as offer insights on points of origin for holidays introduced only recently. Continuing the archival recovery of holiday children's literature thus offers the possibility to contribute new material to cultural studies of public and private celebrations as well as to understandings of literature produced for children.

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