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The representation of mothers and the gendered social structure of nineteenth-century children's literature

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Language has the capacity to create fictional worlds and to describe real-life social structures. In this paper, we explore gendered social structures in a corpus of nineteenth-century children's fiction. We describe these structures in terms of the frequent nouns that are used to label people in the texts of the corpus. Through a bottom-up categorisation of these nouns into four groups, we find, in line with previous studies, textual evidence of a society that is unequal and that is divided into a private and a public sphere. Our study focuses in particular on mothers, the most frequent character type in children's fiction. The representation of mothers includes abstract qualities, such as a mother's love, as well as concrete behaviours, such as mothers taking their children into their arms. Both types of qualities contribute to the depiction of mothers as an anchor point for the private sphere.

Keywords: corpus stylistics, gender, norms, general nouns, Victorian literature

1. Introduction

Mothers occupy an important place in children's lives. As Fraustino and Coats (2016: 3) put it, "[l]iving or dead, present or absent, sadly dysfunctional or merrily adequate, the figure of the mother bears enormous freight across a child's emotional and intellectual life". In this article, we investigate how mothers and motherhood are represented in a corpus of nineteenth-century children's fiction. Victorians placed great emphasis on the domestic sphere and "[m]otherhood was the cornerstone of the social structure" (McKnight 1997: 5). Yet, even though maternity "has been annexed to formulations of gender, the private sphere, and the consolidation of the bourgeois values" (Klaver & Rosenman 2008: 1), it is one of the less studied aspects of the Victorian era. In this article, we approach moth-

erhood as a part of the social structure, which is largely based on and defined by gender differences among individuals (Armstrong 1987). Children's fiction introduces children to such social norms and the gendered structures of society: since it addresses topics and presents settings that connect to the experience of the child reader, it is not surprising that mothers will be frequently referred to in children's literature. This is not to say that every time mothers are mentioned they are characters involved in the story: protagonists in children's fiction are often shown as independent or even orphaned. In this paper, we therefore examine the representation of mothers within the gendered social structures of fictional worlds.

Instead of studying portrayals of individual mothers in detail, we are looking for textual patterns that are shared across a number of texts. In this way, we can discover the general qualities of motherhood and take account of the social spaces in which mothers operate. To be able to take such a distanced view, we have used methods from corpus linguistics to analyse a selection of 71 children's books that were published between 1826 and 1911. Through the focus on language and general patterns of how qualities of motherhood are represented, our findings contribute to revealing implicit ideologies in children's literature. The study of common language patterns is also the study of links between fiction and the real world. In Section 2, we first provide an outline of how norms and ideologies are relevant to the study of children's literature. In Section 3, we explain our methodology. In Section 4, we discuss the representation of mothers in children's fiction first within the wider social context before gradually focussing on specific examples.

2.   Norms and ideologies

The idealisation of motherhood was "an unquestionable part of the Victorian landscape" (Klaver & Rosenman 2008: 2). It was an essential part of the domestic ideal that paved the way for an ideology of separate spheres. Maternity anchored "key cultural oppositions such as masculine versus feminine, bourgeois versus working class" (ibid.). The role of mothers was thus defined through social interactions, economic developments and class differences, maternal health and prospects of early death, but also social and cultural ideologies. McKnight (1997: 1) notes:

> [Victorian mothers] experienced relentless and impossible pressures and expectations, the traces of which linger in some present-day notions of motherhood. Conduct books for wives and mothers; popular periodical articles on motherhood; [...] and medical guidebooks for mothers [...] proliferated in Victorian

England, and all emphasized the awesome responsibilities of motherhood while defining mothering in increasingly complex, contradictory ways.

Middle-class domesticity determined the female ideal. Mothers were seen primarily as moral guardians; children's physical and intellectual needs were catered for by nannies and governesses. The "nuclear family, a social organization with a mother rather than a father as its center" (Armstrong 1987) formed a counterpoint to the quickly developing economic order with its primarily male labour. The division into public and private spheres distinguished between "the realm of morality and emotion and the realm of rational activity, particularly conceived as market forces" (Davidoff & Hall 1987:13). As such, gender divided the world into "two mutually exclusive worlds of information": political/public and domestic/private (Armstrong 1987).

While the cultural ideology emphasised self-sacrificing mothers, the range of mothers in fiction often includes "dead, unimportant, ineffective, or destructive" examples (Thaden 2013:4; Dever 1998; Shuttleworth 1992). Research into mothers or types of maternal behaviour in nineteenth-century children's literature include Kim's study (2016) of Juliana Ewing's *Six to Sixteen* on rewriting maternal legacy, Morse's study (2008) of Stretton's drunken mother, Regaignon's study (2008) of infant doping in Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*, and Pfeiffer's study (2016) of "othermothering". Through their domestic role, mothers support other family members and the whole social structure. As Shuttleworth (1992:32) points out: "Ideals of motherhood [...] helped [...] maintain the gendered social hierarchy".[1]

Research into gender and children's literature involves various approaches and theoretical frameworks. Linguistic analyses have been relatively scarce. Major contributions in this area have been made by Malmkjær and Knowles (1996), who discuss ideologies present in nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's books, and Sunderland (2011), who specifically studies language and gender. Malmkjær and Knowles' (1996) study is based on a small corpus of children's books while they also use more extensive corpus resources for comparisons. They draw on Halliday's (1978) idea of language as a powerful socialising agent (Halliday 1985), focussing on discourse participants and "the things participants 'do' to each other" (Malmkjær & Knowles 1996:34). Additionally, they conduct collocation analyses. They note that *father* frequently co-occurs with *my* and *his* and words such as

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1. For discussions of the representation of gender in nineteenth-century children's fiction see, for example, Reynolds (1990, 2002). For an overview of gender topics in children's literature beyond the nineteenth century, see Hateley (2011) or Simons (2009). Generally, attention has been largely focused on female representation, or rather underrepresentation; however, representations of masculinities have also been considered (Arnold 1980; Bristow 1991; Adams 1995; Stephens & Stephens 2002).

words, wisdom, and *courage*. They find that *mother* is nearly as frequent as *father*, and common collocates of *mother* are *father* and *poor*. Malmkjær & Knowles (1996: 85) explain that "*poor mother* either indicates an appeal made to the young hero by his father [...] or a memory of how youth and rashness caused hurt to this venerated symbol of the institution". The authors mainly analyse gender in relation to "the young hero" (Malmkjær & Knowles 1996: 88) and they examine maleness in the school story and adventure story, and in relation to companionship. Sunderland (2011) is interested in the way language represents gender relations in children's fiction. She does not work with corpora but gives an in-depth overview of previous studies and looks at reading schemes and gender representation within them. She notes, for instance, how *Dad* is foregrounded compared to *Mum*. Sunderland and McGlashan (2012) specifically look at picture books which feature two-Mum and two-Dad families. One of the chapters in Sunderland (2011) is devoted to the *Harry Potter* series, which is representative of a current trend. *Harry Potter* books have attracted the attention of other linguists, too, and there is an increasing number of corpus studies in this area. Hunt (2015) studies gender and agency in the *Harry Potter* series, Eberhart (2017) examines the gendered representation of speech in the same series and Chiranorawanit and Sripicharn (2020) study the depiction of Mrs Weasley as a mother in *Harry Potter* series.

This article's attention to the representation of gender also builds on critical approaches to ideology in children's literature. McCallum and Stephens (2010: 360) describe the neutral meaning of 'ideology' as "a system of beliefs which a society shares and uses to make sense of the world and which are therefore immanent in the texts produced by that society". In this neutral meaning, McCallum and Stephens (2010: 360) view ideology as essential to "make social life possible". They argue that children "must learn to understand and negotiate the various signifying codes used by society to order itself" – and they see language as "the principal code" (McCallum & Stephens 2010: 360). A similar point is made by Hollindale (1988), who unpacks how the various ideological levels operate in children's books: from authors' explicitly and implicitly expressed ideologies to the child reader's situated understanding. Although the study of children's literature is yet to fully embrace the methodological toolbox of corpus linguistics, on a theoretical level we can already make clear connections. In corpus linguistics, there is an extensive body of research on social, cultural and historical discourses, and how language is used to label, represent and negotiate aspects of our social reality (Mahlberg 2014). What McCallum and Stephens (2010) refer to as the neutral meaning of ideology is, in corpus linguistic terms, described as norms and shared meanings (Hanks 2013). As Stubbs (2002: 166) argues, "we can fully understand only a small fraction of the social world". As a result, we must rely on expectations and assumptions about what is normal. Norms, shared meanings and common

knowledge about how the world works are created and shaped by language and the discourses of a society.

As McCallum and Stephens (2010) argue, language is crucial for children to make sense of the world and take an active part in it. To describe the contribution that children's literature makes in this regard, we draw on Stubbs (2002: 147), who observes that "[s]peakers usually do not express themselves in 'their own words', but in words which are endlessly recycled in their speech community" (Stubbs 2002: 147). Fiction provides children with an inventory of social meanings and words that they can recycle in their own social interactions. In this sense, children's literature is one of the many discourses that children experience. Children's literature can tackle social problems as a theme when, for instance, gender roles are directly addressed by the story (Hollindale's 1988); social values and structures may be communicated implicitly (Hollindale's 1988). Authors and readers tend to be "largely unaware" of such implicit ideologies, as they "often require sophisticated reading of the text's language" (McCallum & Stephens 2010: 360). These implicit elements of the narrative discourse are this article's main concern: we are interested in common words and meanings that occur repeatedly across a number of texts. It is a fundamental observation of corpus linguistics that such repetitions tend to be difficult to notice by reading alone. Corpus methods enable the analysis of such meanings through reference to frequency data and contextual analysis with the help of concordances, as we will explain in the following section.

3.   A corpus approach

The methods of corpus linguistics are based on the observation and assessment of frequency data. They identify linguistic patterns that are shared across a specific corpus of texts. The way in which a corpus is constructed therefore defines what types of social meanings can be described. When the corpus under investigation contains literary language, corpus research is often referred to as 'corpus stylistics' (McIntyre & Walker 2019). We outline the corpus used in this study in Section 3.1. To analyse the representation of mothers and gendered social structures, we focus on the fictional people that make up the societies in the texts of the corpus. Texts create fictional worlds, and these are organised in social structures. To identify the gendered features of these fictional worlds, our investigation focuses on nouns that refer to people. These nouns enable us to identify character types and norms of the gendered social system that these characters operate in. Instead of individual fictional people, our interest lies in the more general population across fictional worlds. We look at nouns that are neither book nor author specific. Crucial to our approach is the concept of 'general nouns', in the sense of high-frequency

nouns with local textual functions (Mahlberg 2005). A particular group of general nouns are 'people nouns' that indicate how texts deal with personalities, personal relationships, aspects of social life and the organisation and conventions of society. In this sense, frequent nouns also characterise groups of texts (Mahlberg 2005: 164). Although frequency is a criterion for the definition of general nouns, frequency cannot be an absolute threshold; general nouns are defined also by their distribution and 'local textual functions', i.e., the functions that the nouns fulfil in specific sets of texts – in our study a corpus of children's fiction. We start from a broad view of frequent nouns that we further narrow down to the specific case of the word *mother*. While quantitative criteria define our selection of nouns to look at, our study involves qualitative analyses of examples in context, too. We outline our methods in Section 3.2.

Our corpus stylistic approach relates to work in cultural analytics and distant reading. Underwood et al. (2018) study trends of the ways in which gender shapes characterisation in English-language fiction from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. Using the BookNLP pipeline, this study looks at words that describe male and female characters. It finds, for instance, that the gendered description of characters becomes more blurred over time. Kraicer and Piper (2018) study contemporary novels (published between 2001 and 2015) and describe the social positions of fictional characters in two main ways. They look at visibility in terms of frequency rankings of characters (which are based on how often characters are mentioned in a novel), and at connectivity (which is based on the co-occurrence of characters within the space of a sentence). For individual characters, they find that women are less visible: they are mentioned not as often as men. In terms of social networks, mixed gender pairings are more common than same-gender connections.

By using BookNLP, Underwood et al. (2018) and Kraicer and Piper (2018) identify characters automatically, which enables them to deal with much larger amounts of data and to give more weight to frequency measures, distributions and predictive models. Our interest is in a big picture view, too: our view lies beyond the individual text and is geared towards patterns shared across texts and authors. But our focus is also more specific. We are interested in the representation of one specific type of female character – mothers – and the social structures within which mothers operate. These structures can be described in terms of other types of people, for which not only their gender but also other social roles and contexts are relevant. We have chosen an approach that accepts the limitations of a smaller data set and that, as such, allows us to introduce a qualitative perspective. In corpus linguistics, an important tool for qualitative analysis and 'closer' reading is the concordance. The analysis of concordance lines can contribute to 'ad hoc' or bottom-up categorisations (cf. Mahlberg 2005; Sinclair 1991). Automatic tag-

ging and classification will not always be able to pick up the level of detail needed for a specific research question, as automatic processes will have to focus on 'surface meaning' (Baker et al. 2020). As McEnery et al. (2019: 80) put it: "[w]hile the allure of the complex and automatic is understandably real, the power of the simple approach, in the right context, should not be overlooked". Importantly, both large-scale, more automatised approaches and our corpus stylistic approach have their limitations and advantages. They provide complementary perspectives on similar problems.

3.1   The 19th Century Children's Literature (ChiLit) corpus

The 19th Century Children's Literature (ChiLit) corpus was specifically compiled for this research. All texts in ChiLit have been sourced from Project Gutenberg. ChiLit is now available through the CLiC interface (Mahlberg et al. 2020). It contains 71 texts by 38 authors. The earliest text was published in 1826 (*The Rival Crusoes* by Strickland) and the latest in 1911 (*Peter and Wendy* by Barrie). The selection of texts was largely guided by Hunt's authoritative *Children's Literature: An Anthology 1801–1902* (Hunt 2001) and *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (Hunt 1995). For the selection of texts for ChiLit, we adopted three of Hunt's (2001) selection principles: to cover "a reasonable representation of what was written for and read widely by English-speaking children in the nineteenth century"; choosing "historically significant, or good examples of their kind" (particularly in terms of the newly emerging genres, e.g., fantasy or school story) and ensuring that the books selected are "readable today" (Hunt 2001: xv–xvi). Additionally, we checked that all the books selected for ChiLit have been recently reprinted (at least once after 2010). Unlike Hunt's anthology and other reference works, ChiLit includes only books written by British authors. It also excludes translations, retelling of myths, legends and other folklore texts, nursery rhymes, classic fairy tales and poetry in general. In ChiLit, we aimed at a balanced representation of female and male authors. This was only partially achieved: the number of books is similar (35 by female and 36 by male writers), but the total number of words differs more substantially (women writers take up 1.9 million words while men writers have 2.5 million words). The representation is also unbalanced in the overall selection of authors included: there are 14 female and 24 male authors.[2]

2. For a full list of books in the corpus see the blog post https://blog.bham.ac.uk/glareproject /2018/02/14/chilit-the-glare-19th-century-childrens-literature-corpus-in-clic/ or the CLiC web app (https://clic.bham.ac.uk/).

Many books that we think of as children's books today were also read by adults when they were first published in the nineteenth century. Authors like Oscar Wilde, W. M. Thackeray, or George MacDonald were writing for both audiences. What constitutes children's literature is not a straightforward matter:

> The definition of children's literature is an immensely complex and variable one, and generally rests upon authorial intention (however deduced), or the reader 'implied' in the text (however deduced), rather than a factual examination of which books were or are marketed for, adopted by, or imposed upon children. As if that were not tricky enough, as childhood changes, books that were once for adults are read by children and vice versa. (Hunt 2001: xvi)

The authors included in ChiLit are largely middle-class authors writing for a middle-class audience, not least because literacy and access to literature was limited. Capturing what was written for and read by children in the nineteenth century is complicated. In schools, an influential evangelical "passionate suspicion of imaginative literature" (Altick 1957: 109) meant that reading lessons relied mainly on The Bible. For children to gain access to contemporary books, lending libraries like Mudie's played an important role (see Hammond 2002; Altick 1957). Later in the century, when printing techniques became more advanced and book production cheaper, books became more affordable. Books in ChiLit that were among the bestsellers of the time include *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), or Hughes's (1857) *Tom Brown's School Days*. The distinction between books for boys and girls started to become clearer only towards the end of the nineteenth century (Lundin 1994: 33). According to an 1888 survey of reading interests of adolescent, mostly middle-class, schoolboys, *Robinson Crusoe* was the most popular book of the time, with a huge number of editions (Rose 2001: 107; Salmon 1888: 15). Because of its publication date, *Robinson Crusoe* falls outside of ChiLit, but we still capture its impact as a literary phenomenon through the inclusion of titles such as Ballantyne's *Coral Island* or Strickland's *The Rival Crusoes*, adventure books that were inspired by Defoe's book and were also extremely popular (Carpenter 1984). ChiLit further includes adventure stories by Marryat and Henty, as examples of socially and ideologically influential texts (Walvin 1982: 128).

3.2   Method

Our analysis begins with the selection of the most frequent people nouns in ChiLit. We then group the nouns according to their meanings, and compare the gender distribution across these groups. To study individual examples and specifically patterns around the noun *mother* we draw on concordance lines, clusters

and collocations. The main tool we use to support our analysis is CLiC. We also draw on other tools that we explain in the relevant sections. In this study, we use the term 'people nouns' to capture all nouns that refer to people (e.g., *man, woman*), people-like characters (e.g., *witch, fairy*), and groups of people (e.g., *family, army*).[3] Unlike other studies we discussed above, our 'people nouns' explicitly exclude proper names. To capture people nouns, we started from a frequency list of all words in ChiLit. We only include people nouns that occur at least 30 times across the whole corpus, in at least two texts by different authors, which gives us 395 noun forms in total (singular and plural forms are treated separately). Table 1 shows the 50 most frequent people nouns. Among these 50 nouns we find only 15 referring to female characters; in the table, these appear in bold. Without going into any further detail, Table 1 already shows that women take up less space or have less 'visibility' in the sense of Kraicer and Piper (2018).

In our classification, we treat gender as binary, as this is in line with most public representations of gender in the nineteenth century (see also the approach by Underwood et al. 2018). Nouns that are used for both genders are classified as 'unspecific & inclusive', for example *child* or *people*. The gender classification takes into account inherent semantics (*queen* and *king*), morphology (*abbot* and *abbess*), and general knowledge; for example, we classify *army* as male, as this would have been the typical pattern for the nineteenth century. Still, in the texts, many of the nouns in the 'unspecific & inclusive' category can be heavily biased towards the male category. The nouns *teacher, editor, leader* refer more often to men than women.

In Table 1, nouns referring to female characters appear in bold. An asterisk marks nouns that also appear in other word classes or with meanings other than 'people' meanings. The table gives the total number of occurrences. The 'Distr.' column shows how these words are distributed across the corpus.

The initial selection of nouns as well as the classification were done manually. Each of the nouns was examined in a sample of concordance lines to determine its dominant meaning in ChiLit. Words that can potentially occur in different word classes or be polysemous (e.g., *miss, guide, patient, chief, youth, witness*) were analysed in detail (see the words marked with an asterisk in Table 1): a word was included in our list of 'people nouns' if the frequency of occurrence of the meaning relevant to our study reached our frequency threshold of 30. For instance, the word *general* occurs 607 times in total, and in a sample of 300 lines it appears 69

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3. Nouns referring to nationalities (e.g., *Englishman*), ethnicities (e.g., *gipsies*) and other specific categories of society (e.g., *Christians*) were excluded. We also excluded more abstract nouns like *nation, generation, government* but kept specific collective nouns like *tribe* or *committee*.

Table 1. The fifty most frequent 'people nouns'

Noun	Freq.	Distr.	Noun	Freq.	Distr.	Noun	Freq.	Distr.
Mr	5238	55	**girl**	**1423**	**59**	**girls**	**850**	**48**
man	4775	67	Dr	1417	24	son	790	60
Sir	3660	61	doctor	1311	42	**nurse**	**743**	**47**
father	3251	63	**queen**	**1293**	**45**	person	726	63
boy	3226	64	friend	1222	63	**wife**	**721**	**63**
mother	**3193**	**65**	brother	1196	61	baby	702	53
Mrs	**3049**	**45**	lord	1137	56	**sister**	**683**	**48**
people	2855	65	papa	1073	24	**mamma**	**624**	**25**
men	2764	64	**woman**	**1070**	**62**	fairy	618	35
king	2732	56	fellow	1025	61	general*	607	60
children	2416	66	prince	1007	42	**aunt**	**595**	**40**
boys	2168	58	friends	1004	64	**ladies**	**582**	**51**
lady	**1908**	**58**	gentleman	1003	61	enemy	529	49
miss*	**1885**	**58**	party	985	56	fellows	512	50
captain	1645	46	**princess**	**978**	**29**	army	504	39
master	1595	62	uncle	944	39	chief*	469	53
child	1539	64	family	893	59			

times as a noun with the meaning 'military officer', so it was included in our list. In contrast, the word *native* occurs 279 times, but in only 27 cases as a noun and therefore was not included. Once we identified people nouns in this way, we categorised the nouns into five meaning groups, i.e., groups built bottom-up, based on the set of 395 nouns. In order to group nouns together, we considered their functions in the fictional texts to name and label types of people and relationships between them. These groups are to some extent similar to groupings that could have been achieved by automatic classification, for instance with the help of the USAS semantic tagger (Archer et al. 2002). Our aim, however, was not a general classification, but one focused on the corpus under analysis, as we will explain in more detail in Section 4.

4.   The representation of mothers

Our approach enables us to account for the representation of mothers in three regards: the social worlds mothers inhabit (Section 4.1), the social ties that are linguistically manifested (Section 4.2) and the abstract and concrete qualities of motherhood (Section 4.3).

4.1   The social worlds mothers inhabit

Our aim was to group the 395 people nouns in such a way that we have a useful starting point to describe the contexts in which mothers operate. The five meaning groups we arrived at are: 'general people nouns', 'family nouns', 'social nouns', 'occupation nouns' and a group collecting 'others', as illustrated by Table 2. General people nouns include nouns like *man, children, people*. These nouns are similar to the 'general nouns' discussed in Mahlberg (2005). We grouped the noun *mother* with nouns like *sister, father, brother, mamma* as 'family nouns'. The table lists all nouns in the 'general people nouns' group and provides examples for the other four groups, while indicating the total number of noun types that are captured by each category. For the 'social nouns', there are 19 nouns referring to male characters, 14 referring to female characters, and 34 that do not specify gender. Social nouns include titles and forms of address (*Mr, Miss, Sir, lady*), as well as nouns that reflect relationships between people, words like *friend* or *foe*. Examples of 'occupation nouns' are *nurse* and *soldiers*. This group further contains collective nouns like *army* and nouns that can be used as a form of address, such as *doctor* or *captain*, but primarily refer to an occupation. Related to the noun *doctor* is the title *Dr*. We included the former in 'occupation' as it can stand on its own and the latter in 'social nouns' in analogy to *Mr*. which is always followed by a proper name. We included *king* and other terms for nobility in the 'occupation' group. Any nouns that did not clearly fit these four groups are covered by 'other'. The group 'other' is thus rather heterogenous. It contains non-human characters such as *fairy* or *goblin*, as well as evaluative terms like *hero* or *coward*, group nouns such as *crowds*, or temporary relationships such as *guest*.

The groups are not intended to be carved in stone but are defined on the basis of the corpus we are working with. The boundaries between the meaning groups are fuzzy. For example, we include *slave* and *prisoner* among 'social nouns', as they do not fit easily with 'occupation nouns', where a greater degree of choice (at least for the mainly middle-class occupations) might be claimed. Important for our considerations was to capture the set of nouns derived from the corpus rather than use more general categories that could have been generated automatically. With the USAS tagger, for instance, our 'general people nouns' would be 'S2 –

People', a subclass of the semantic domain 'Social actions, states and processes'; this group is relatively straightforward, as general nouns can almost be considered a 'closed class'. Equally, the tag 'S4 – Kin' would be a good equivalent of our 'family nouns'. Especially our 'occupation nouns', however, are covered by various semantic tags; e.g., *captain* can take the tag 'G3 – Warfare' or 'M4 – Sailing', governess can be 'P1 – Education', and *nurse* 'B3 – Medicines'. While for general semantic taggers that deal with large corpora, specific tags are preferrable, for our purpose – a group collecting 'occupations' will be more useful, as we will show below (see also Mahlberg & McIntyre [2011] for a discussion of semantic tagging for the analysis of fiction).

These noun groups present the way people are referred to in ChiLit. The labels can be very general (the group of general nouns) or name specific roles within the society. One character can be referred to in multiple ways and play multiple roles: the *king* is a *man* but can also be a *father*. The number of nouns used for general references almost appear like a closed set and family relations are also more clearly delimited, whereas, at the other end, nouns referring to occupations and the group 'other' are in principle open. Social nouns are somewhere in-between; some of the relationships are shaped by occupations or family status, but also through other social groups. As such, the five meaning groups for ChiLit present a picture of fictional worlds and their societies where family, social relationships and occupations are crucial. A different choice of corpus, however, can give us different groupings. In the group 'other', we included, for instance, *witch* and *magician. Witch* occurs most frequently as a character with magic powers (derogatory meanings referring to women or references to witch hunts are infrequent). An argument for including *magician* in the group 'occupation' instead is provided by occurrences such as "A Magician he was by trade" (Nesbit's *Nine Unlikely Tales*). We opted for grouping *witch* and *magician* together to point to the types of stories we find in children's literature. Still, in ChiLit, magic and the supernatural are not so prominent to warrant a separate group entirely. For a corpus with a substantial amount of stories about witches and wizards of the type that have become widely popular since *Harry Potter*, groupings to compare wizarding and non-wizarding social structures would have been another route for an analysis.

Our meaning groups enable us to look at the social structures in ChiLit in terms of both token and type frequencies. Tokens are the running words in the corpus. For example, the noun *boy* occurs 3,226 times in the corpus; this is the token frequency of the noun. As a type, *boy* is counted only once. Figure 1 provides the token frequencies for the four groups 'general', 'family', 'social' and 'occupation': it shows how often the words assigned to these groups occur in the text. The figure only focuses on male and female nouns; it does not include nouns like

Table 2. Examples for the five meaning groups of 'people nouns' based on the initial selection of 395 nouns. The nouns are ordered based on their frequency, words underlined occur in less than half of the texts in ChiLit, words in bold occur among the top 50 most frequent nouns. Total (types) indicates the number of different nouns in a category. *Lord* is included here as an aristocratic title, it also frequently occurs in religious references such as *Lord Jesus* or exclamations *My Lord!*

	Male	Female	Unspecific & inclusive
General people nouns	**man**	**girl**	**people**
	boy	**woman**	**children**
	men	**girls**	**child**
	boys	**women**	**person**
			persons
Total (types)	4	4	5
Family nouns	**father**	**mother**	**family**
	brother	wife	**baby**
	<u>papa</u>	**sister**	cousin
	uncle	<u>mamma</u>	parents
	son	**aunt**	<u>cousins</u>
	brothers	**daughter**	<u>babies</u>
	husband	<u>sisters</u>	families
Total (types)	14	19	12
Social Nouns	**Mr**	**Mrs**	**friend**
	Sir	**Lady**	**friends**
	<u>Master</u>	**Miss***	<u>Majesty</u>
	<u>Dr</u>	ladies	companion
	fellow	<u>widow</u>	stranger
	gentleman		enemies
Total (types)	19	14	34
Occupation Nouns	**king**	**queen**	servants
	captain	<u>**princess**</u>	cook
	doctor	**nurse**	<u>poet</u>
	lord*	<u>governess</u>	<u>gardener</u>
	prince	maid	<u>author</u>
Total (types)	120	13	23
Other	<u>host</u>	<u>maiden/s</u>	**fairy**
	<u>magician</u>	<u>witch</u>	<u>savages</u>
	<u>blackguard</u>	<u>hostess</u>	fool
Total (types)	10	4	100

people or *baby* that do not specify gender. The figure clearly shows that ChiLit is a men's world – at least as far as our selection of nouns goes. For all four groups, the token count for male nouns is higher than for female nouns. To some extent, these counts will be a result of the higher frequency of male characters.

Adding the type frequencies into the mix, as included in Table 2, will further make the qualitative difference between the groups clearer. For the 'general people nouns', there are 4 types each for male and female characters, giving a balanced pictures of pairs (*man/men – woman/women, boy/boys – girl/girls*). The tokens then illustrate the gender imbalance in the fictional worlds. For 'occupation nouns', the imbalance is already clear from the types (see Table 2). Men have a much wider range of occupational choices. These occupations take men into the world outside the home (see also our discussion of fathers in Section 4.3). Women, in contrast, tend to have their place at the heart of the family. The group of 'family' nouns is the only group where the difference in token frequencies between genders is less pronounced. In terms of types, the group has five more types for women than for men, and not all female noun types have a male counterpart. There is *grandmama, aunts, wives, sister-in-law, godmother* for which the frequency of occurrence of their male noun counterpart does not reach our threshold and *grannie* and *auntie* with no corpus-attested male counterparts. Of the male nouns, *daddy* and *grandson* occur more frequently than their female counterparts. This distribution of types contributes to the representation of spheres, where female characters are more concerned with home life, but also emotional work. Affectionate terms like *grannie* and *auntie* for female characters suggest that this emotional work extends beyond the relationship between children and parents to a wider network. Although the difference in our data is small, it points towards a qualitative difference that relates to the distinction between the private and public spheres and the interpersonal relations between the fictional characters, which we will look at in more detail in the following sections. The picture we see is mainly a middle-class view of society, and texts that are more concerned with working class life may give greater variety of occupations for female characters.
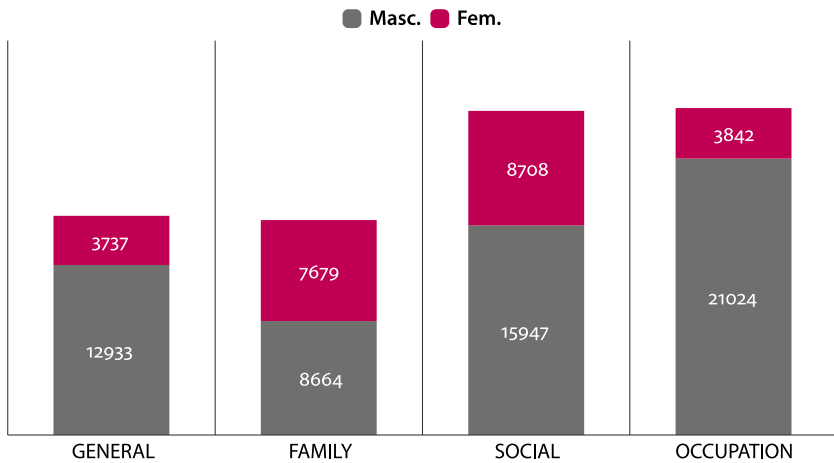
Figure 1. 'People nouns' and their token distribution across the noun groups: 'General', 'Family', 'Social' and 'Occupation'

4.2   Linguistic and social ties

To gain more detailed insights into the ways in which people behave in the fictional worlds in ChiLit, in this section, we look at clusters, i.e., repeated sequences of words (also called *n*-grams) such as *that his father had* or *the enemy and then*. Word clusters may reveal common behaviours of fictional characters that are shared across texts (Mahlberg 2013, Čermáková & Mahlberg 2022). We focus on 4-word clusters that occur at least 5 times in ChiLit. Of these, we only look at clusters that contain at least one of our people nouns. With these criteria we identify 931 different clusters. Table 3 shows the top 10.

The most frequent cluster, *the king and queen*, occurs 71 times and in 10 texts. But there are also clusters that refer to specific characters and occur in one text only, as *the Earl of Evesham* in Henty's *Winning His Spurs* and *the little old lady* in Ewing's *Mrs Overtheway's Remembrances*. Of our 395 people nouns, 124 occur in 4-word clusters. Table 4 shows 11 nouns that are found in more than 30 cluster types. The noun *man* occurs in most clusters, which relates to its properties as a general noun. The cluster *a man who had*, for instance, exemplifies functions of general nouns in descriptive contexts (Mahlberg 2005).

Table 3. The ten most frequent 4-word clusters that contain a people noun, with frequency of occurrences and distribution across the number of different texts

Cluster	Frequency	Distribution
the king and queen	71	10
his father and mother	47	15
the earl of evesham	43	1
the men of the	43	8
the little old lady	40	1
mr and mrs campbell	39	1
the captain of the	38	22
men of the mountains	37	1
the king of the	37	15
the man in the	33	15

Table 4. Nouns occurring in 30+ types of 'people' clusters

Noun	No. of different clusters the noun occurs in	Examples of clusters
man	96	he was a man, a man who had
king	61	of the king of, said the king and
mr	44	a letter to mr, as soon as mr
children	42	all the children were, children looked at each
father	40	his father and mother, his father who had
mrs	39	my dear said mrs, to write to mrs
mother	39	to his mother and, when her mother had
boy	37	a little boy and, be a good boy
doctor	34	said the doctor and, the doctor and the
men	31	of the men who, some of the men
people	31	the people of the, the people in the

The frequency of the family nouns *father* and *mother* in 4-word clusters is to some extent due to the fact that these nouns occur together in binomials, as in the cluster *his father and mother*. Binomials are coordinated word pairs belonging to the same word class, in our case nouns. Linguistic studies of binomials often focus on the degree of reversibility of binomials, i.e., the potential to change the order of the two elements (e.g., Molin 2014, Čermáková 2021; Goldberg & Crystal 2021). Of interest to our study is that binomials reflect interpersonal relationships between characters in the fictional worlds. Our data contain 52 clusters with binomials, 13 of which are forms with *father and mother*:

> *dear father and mother*
> *father and mother she*
> *father and mother who*
> *the father and mother*
> *father and mother would*
> *father and mother had*
> *father and mother were*
> *father and mother and*
> *your father and mother*
> *her father and mother*
> *my father and mother*
> *his father and mother*
> *their fathers and mothers*

This list shows that the most frequent family nouns are also the most frequent nouns to occur in binomials. Especially the cluster *father and mother would/had/were* indicates how parents are regarded or act as a unit. Figure 2 illustrates the ten examples of the cluster *father and mother had* in a concordance, which shows that the cluster is typically preceded by a possessive (*her, my, his*).

1	father turned, and made for Charing Cross. ¶ That night the	father and mother had	a great deal to talk about. ¶ "Poor things!" said the	wid
2	had never seemed to belong to anyone even when her	father and mother had	been alive. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers	secret
3	was fifteen years of age when this story begins. My	father and mother had	both been dead for years, and I boarded with my	moonfleet
4	on until she was nearly seventeen years of age. Her	father and mother had	by that time got so used to the odd state	wind
5	white with snow and rosy with sunrise. ¶ But when her	father and mother had	died, leaving her cousin to take care of the kingdom	dragons
6	for her lover, she had hard living at home. Her	father and mother had	her two young brothers to maintain, as well as themselves	peasant
7	nnie had been surrounded by comforts and luxuries, and her	father and mother had	lived in a large house, and kept a carriage, and	girls
8	ry frowning. She frowned because she remembered that her	father and mother had	never talked to her about anything in particular. Certainly th	secret
9	of those comforts. As far as he could see, his	father and mother had	no trends; he and his family were in a dismal	peasant
10	aptain Lumley all that had occurred, the resolution which his	father and mother had	taken, and their being then on board the timber-ship, and	canada

Figure 2. All ten examples of the 4-word cluster *father and mother had*

To display the nouns that are found together in 4-word clusters, Figure 3 displays them as networks, created with VosViewer and Gephi. The weight between the nodes (i.e., the thickness of the line) is based on the frequency with which two nodes co-occur. The colours group together nouns that are interconnected.[4] The strongest connection in the network is between *mother* and *father*. While *father* does not co-occur with other nouns, *mother* co-occurs with other family members (*sister* and *aunt*). Another strong pair is *king* and *queen*, but these nouns are found together less frequently than *mother* and *father*. There are a few other family nouns that are connected: *wife* and *daughter, aunt* and *uncle, brother* and *sister*. Family nouns also connect with general nouns: *man* and *wife, wife* and *child, woman* and *child*. There are pairs between general nouns (*man* and *woman*), and pairs of social nouns (*lady* and *gentleman*). While the group of 'occupation' nouns is the biggest group of nouns, relationships in this group are less frequent. There is *king* and *queen* as well as *prince* and *princess*, but these are 'occupation' nouns with implied family meanings ('husband' and 'wife', 'mother' and 'father'). For the 'occupation' group we find only the pairs *soldier* and *sailor*, and *captain* and *guard*. Overall, there are 29 nouns that appear as independent nodes, and 25 connected nouns. While there are 3 family nouns that do not have a link (*baby, family* and *son*), family nouns are still relatively more connected than nouns of the public sphere. In short, the relationships reflected in the clusters provide further support for our main meaning groups as characterising the social structures in ChiLit.

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4.   We started with all 931 clusters as input for VosViewer 1.6.11 (https://www.vosviewer.com/) which uses the Apache NLP Open Library tagger to identify noun phrases, so *young lady* or *royal family* are noun phrases. While our clusters do not use lemmatisation, VosViewer collates singular and plural forms. The tagger captures all nouns; we therefore removed nouns that are not people nouns (e.g., *house, arm*) along with proper nouns. VosViewer clustered the resulting set of nouns into groups. We then processed the output with Gephi 0.9.2 (https://gephi .org/) arranging the nodes with the Fruchterman-Reingold layout algorithm (Fruchterman & Reingold 1991). The VosViewer identified 10 'clusters', i.e., groups of nouns where two or more nouns were found to be linked, as indicated by colours. To make the visualisation more accessible, Figure 4 only shows noun phrases that occur 30+ times (token frequencies).
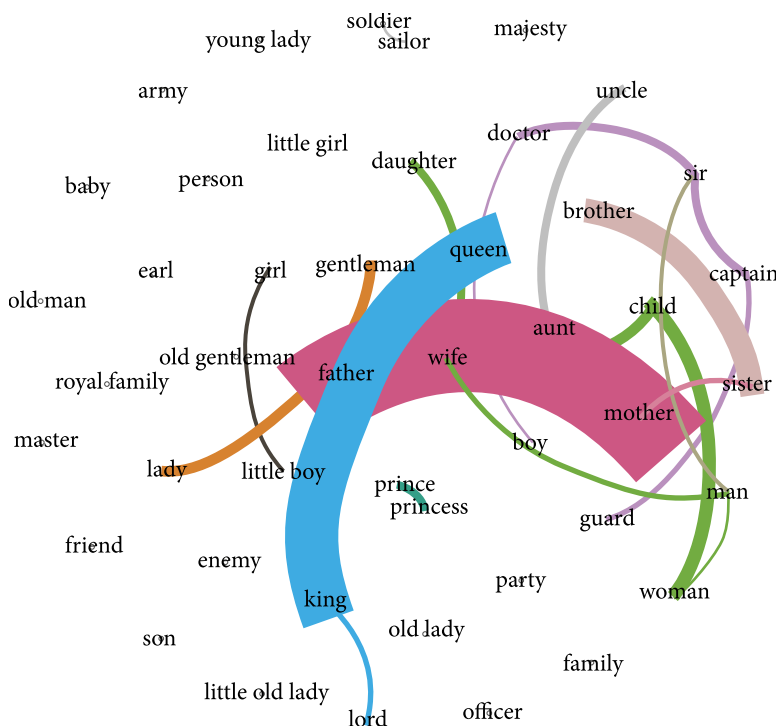
Figure 3. Relationships between people nouns in 4-word clusters

4.3   Abstract and concrete qualities of motherhood

In addition to the connection between *father* and *mother*, the 4-word clusters also illustrate the connection between parents and their children. The parents are *someone's* father and mother. Linguistically, this is manifested by possessive forms. For both nouns, more than half of the occurrences come with a possessive determiner or a proper name with possessive *'s*, such as *Dolly's father*. This is also visible in the clusters, where some explicitly contain possessive determiners *your/ her/my/his/their father(s) and mother(s)*. The concordance for *father and mother had* in Figure 2, in Section 4.2 above, has already shown the repeated occurrence of possessive relations, where nine of the ten lines contain a possessive. However, it is not just the description of a connection that matters, but also its nature. And here we find differences between mothers and fathers.

Examples where the noun *mother* is preceded by the indefinite article provide another way of gaining insights into the nature of motherhood. The grammatical indefiniteness suggests a general or abstract quality of motherhood, as in *like a*

mother, as a mother, but also other indefinite patterns, such as *any mother* or *no mother*.[5]

(1)   … and when she was ill she sent her dinners and many nice, comfortable things, and was **like a mother** to her.   (Sewell, *Black Beauty*)

(2)   […] she had loved Eric and Vernon **as a mother** does her own children
(Farrar, *Eric, Or, Little by Little, A Tale of Roslyn School*)

(3)   She will teach you more kindly, patiently, and tenderly than **any mother**, if you want to learn her trade.   (Kingsley, *Madame How and Lady Why*)

(4)   […] and **no mother** in the world **could** have found it in her heart to keep them away from so much happiness   (Yonge, *The Heir of Redclyffe*)

These examples carry an implicit evaluation and suggest a notion of 'universal motherhood' that is generally understood and widely shared. This notion is also expressed with the plural form *mothers* (Example (5)).

(5)   Mrs. Peterson was such a nice good mother! All **mothers** are more or less, but Mrs. Peterson was nice and good all *more* and no *less*.
(MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin*)

We find similar examples for the noun *father* that describe general qualities and expectations (Examples (6) and (7)).

(6)   Alan, the elder by thirteen years, had been like **a father** to the little boy, show-ing judgment and self-denial that marked him of a high cast of character.
(Yonge, *The Daisy Chain*)

(7)   […] and who was comforting him as **a father** might.   (Farrar, *Eric*)

A distinction between mothers and fathers becomes apparent in the pattern *a mother's* vs *a father's* with the female pattern being relatively more frequent than its male equivalent (5.3 per million words vs 1.8 per million words). The con-cordances in Figure 4 and 5 show all occurrences respectively. While the patterns indicate that fathers care about their children, for mothers there is more emphasis on the emotional work. A father's feelings and emotions are rather limited – we find *anxiety* (lines 1 and 2), general references to *feelings* (line 3) and *kindness* (line 6) (all Figure 4). A mother's emotional work is referred to as *love* (five times,

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5. While most of the occurrences of *no mother* refer to the fact that a child is motherless, there is a specific pattern when *no mother* is followed by a modal verb (*could/would*) that refers to the abstract qualities that mothers should or should not have, see Example (4).

lines 12 to 18),[6] *fears* (line 2), *feelings* (lines 3 to 6), 'heart yearnings' (line 8) but also reflected by *kiss* (line 10), *smile* (line 21) and *tender influence* (line 22) (all Figure 5). Ideals of Victorian motherhood stress the importance of a mother's role as a homemaker and children's moral guardian and supervisor (see Section 2) – which is illustrated in line 1 (*a mother's careful supervision*), line 7 (*a mother's first duty*)[7] and line 23 (*a mother's training*) (Figure 5). We do not find corresponding examples for *a father's*.

1	Dr. Grimstone, "a sweet letter, Richard, breathing in every line	a father's	anxiety and concern for your welfare" ¶ Paul was a little	vice
2	sure you will try and say it; you will pity	a father's	anxiety and master your own feelings. Where _is_ my little	girls
3	a wife and dear children at home, and I know	a father's	feelings; now get you into that cab, and I'll take	beauty
4	well;" _Merchant of Venice._ ¶ "He will not blush, that has	a father's	heart, To take in childish plays a childish part; But	vice
5	be a child again soon, Eric, in the courts of	a Father's	house." ¶ Eric could not speak. These words startled him; he	eric
6	he laid me down as tenderly as—O mother, it	a father's	kindness be like his, I have truly somewhat to regain	dove
7	andoned, should hear such words of unequivocal condemnation from	a father's	lips without a pang of shame!" ¶ Paul was only just	vice
8	would become bitterness with my Ebbo were I to give	a father's	power to one whom he would not love." ¶ " Then were	dove

Figure 4. Concordance lines for the node *a father's*

1	like a seal's, and his dress bore plain evidence of	a mother's	careful supervision, having all the urcreased trimness and specklessness rarely	vice
2	I can not overcome, and there is no arguing with	a mother's	fears and a mother's love." ¶ "You were quite as uneasy	canada
3	goodness in Miss Jessamine, for what can she know of	a mother's	feelings? And I'm sure most people seem to think that	jackanapes
4	many good points but for my own part I have	a mother's	feelings, and I can never look at a confirmed bachelor	prince
5	be for you to decide, my dear Emily. I know	a mother's	feelings, and respect them." ¶ "I can not decide at once	canada
6	relieve them." ¶ "Yes, indeed, it must be terrible, William, to	a mother's	feelings; but perhaps these savages will be off to-morrow, and	masterman
7	replied, 'and I would give worlds to see it; but	a mother's	first duty is the nest, and it is quite impossible	overtheway
8	you have good cause; you little know the yearnings of	a mother's	heart; the very suggestion of such a hope has thrown	canada
9	one influence to counteract their education in pride and violence—	a mother's	influence, indeed, but her authority was studiously taken from her	dove
10	to call you my son,' and ended by giving him	a mother's	kiss. ¶ 'I wish I could tell you half,' said Guy	redclyffe
11	They are," he snarled, " Silence all," he called gloatingly, "for	a mother's	last words to her children." At this moment Wendy was	pan
12	they quickly joined Mrs. Trevor, who embraced her nephew with	a mother's	love: and amid all that nameless questioning of delightful trifles	eric
13	said Tootles, hitting Nibs with a pillow. "Do you like	a mother's	love, Nibs?" ¶ "I do just," said Nibs, hitting back. ¶ "You	pan
14	come to the part that Peter hated. ¶ I do like	a mother's	love," said Tootles, hitting Nibs with a pillow, "Do you	pan
15	Ah, now we are rewarded for our sublime faith in	a mother's	love,' So up they flew to their mummy and daddy	pan
16	instead of smacked. ¶ So great indeed was their faith in	a mother's	love that they felt they could afford to be callous	pan
17	Nibs?" ¶ "I'm frightfully anxious." ¶ " If you knew how great is	a mother's	love, " Wendy told them triumphantly, "you would have no fear	pan
18	and there is no arguing with a mother's fears and	a mother's	love." ¶ "You were quite as uneasy, my dear aunt, when	canada
19	for nearly three years, and no doubt the loss of	a mother's	loving tact, which can check the heedless merriment before it	vice
20	now. ¶ "Good little boy"—she said tauntingly—"it is such	a mother's	pet! It will be good then, and go and ask	toadylion
21	with blood; the sky above grew blue, and tender as	a mother's	smile; a bird began to pipe his morning song, and	quatermain
22	shows his best side at home; the softening shadows of	a mother's	tender influence play over him, and tone down the roughness	eric
23	as well as with representations of his child's need of	a mother's	training, and the twins' equal want of fatherly guidance, dilating	dove
24	her hair by the drawing-room fire—a disorderly proceeding which	a mother's	wish could justify. The young lady was very lovely, though	wind

Figure 5. Concordance lines for *a mother's*

6. *A mother's love* is a specific theme running through Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. Out of the seven occurrences it occurs five times in *Peter and Wendy*.

7. This example refers to mothers in the animal kingdom.

While *a mother's* finds mostly abstract properties of motherhood, in the context of *mother's* we can also see patterns of very concrete descriptions. One of the collocates in the concordance of *mother's* is the noun *arms* (see Figure 6). These patterns describe the physical manifestation of a mother's love – *arms* provide a safe and comfortable space to be in. There is evidence of this pattern for *father's*, too, but less prominently so (see Figure 7).[8]

1	ng with laughter. For the baby's world was his	mother's	arms; and the drizzling rain, and the dreary me	wind
2	Mother, mother!" shouted Phil, darting into his	mother's	arms. ¶ But Griselda drew back into the shado	cuckoo
3	with which an infant lays itself to sleep in its	mother's	arms, do I lay myself down in the arms of	quatermain
4	In a moment more William was pressed in his	mother's	arms. ¶ "I am glad that you are come back, Re	masterman
5	of, "Mamma, Mamma!" threw herself into her	mother's	arms. ¶ It was a moment or two before Mrs. H	clive
6	loor, and the next moment Eric sprang into his	mother's	arms. ¶ "O mother, mother!" ¶ "My own darling	eric
7	hat a boat would carry them, perhaps, to their	mother's	arms. Oliver knew what Mildred was thinking o	settlers
8	most as if she wished to throw herself into her	mother's	arms, she cried, "Mother! mother!" ¶ The wom	jessica
9	e dreamed that the white boy was put into his	mother's	arms, who wept for joy, and the white man op	canada

Figure 6. Examples of concordance lines for *mother's arms*

1	ler long lost child,—and then gave him to his	father's	arms; ¶ "How this has happened, and by what	canada
2	in a few minutes was fast asleep again in his	father's	arms. The storm now abated, and as the day	masterman
3	die," said the princess, as he lifted her to her	father's	arms, "you see my grandmother knows all ab	princess
4	ist then speak. He had thrown himself into his	father's	extended arms, and given ease to the fulness	rival

Figure 7. Examples of concordance lines for *father's arms*

In Figure 6 and Figure 7, we used the KWICGrouper function in CLiC to display the collocates. This function allows users to group concordance lines that share collocates within an adjustable span. The grouping is particularly helpful to identify patterns with structural variation, as we find for *mother* and *arms* (see Figure 8).[9] Figure 8 shows examples of emotional displays in which *arms* play an

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8. To assess the collocational strength, we used AntConc (Anthony 2019), span −5/5, Log-likelihood measure: 22.8 for *mother's* + *arms*, 10.4 for *father's* + *arms*.

9. The different colours in the figures (see also Figure 10) are the result of grouping collocates with the KWICGrouper. Figure 8 contains examples of lines where *arms* occurs in the context of *mother* and where the lines illustrate the display of emotions. The sample was manually selected with the help of the tag column in CLiC, indicated by the tick symbol at the end of the concordance lines in Figure 8. For more detail on KWIGrouping and using tag columns to support the analysis of concordances, see Mahlberg et al. (2021).

important role: children 'rush' (line 2) into their mother's arms or 'fling' (lines 3, 4) and 'put' (line 1, 5, 6) their arms around her.

1	om, and put her arms round her mother's neck.	"Mother	darling," she said, in a half whisper, "it's really	brass			✓
2	prise, Charlie rushed into their arms. ¶ "My dear	mother,	my dear girls, this is an unexpected pleasure, in	clive			✓
3	tearful eyes, and flung himself in her arms, and	mother	and son wept in a long embrace. "Only two mo	eric			✓
4	em, and little Michael flung his arms round her.	"Mother,"	he cried, "I'm glad of you. "They were the last	pan			✓
5	and Louis helped his sister to try to revive their	mother.	He put his arms about her neck, and his tears	peasant			✓
6	she could say nothing. ¶ Suddenly she went to	Mother	and put her arms round her and began to cry	railway			✓

Figure 8. A concordance sample of *arms* and *mother*, where children put their arms around their mothers

A mother's duty and love towards her children is presented as an innate universal capacity associated with motherhood, even in less exemplary cases of motherhood. 'Bad' mothers are not frequent in ChiLit. One such rare example is in Stretton's *Jessica's First Prayer*. Stretton was known for drawing attention to poor urban children and her "street-arab" stories highlight "negligent, often drunken and morally corrupt mothers" (Morse 2008:102). Jessica's mother embodies the worst of her kind: "According to both middle-class ideology and working-class social history […] the one East End mother who could not be tolerated or forgiven is the drunk" (Morse 2008:106). But even this mother seems to have a sense of her role, as becomes apparent when she negotiates her relationship with her daughter Jessica, which illustrates how mothers and children are meant to be inseparable (Example (8)):

(8)   "If you stay, I stay," said her mother, in a tone of obstinacy, setting her elbows firmly upon the arms of the chair, and planting her feet on the floor; "or, if I go, you go. I'd like to know who'd have the heart to separate a mother from her own child!"

The concordance examples for *mother* provide exemplification for what Davidoff and Hall (1987:13) refer to as "the realm of morality and emotion", and what Underwood et al. (2018:19) describe as the 'feminine' language of thought and emotion. To take a closer look at the private and domestic sphere, which is typically seen as the place for mothers, we searched for *home* as a collocate of both *mother* and *father*.[10] *Home* is a significant collocate for both *mother* and *father*; however, its meanings are substantially different. In the concordance for *mother*, there are patterns that describe movement to the home: *returning* (line 19), *writ-*

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10.   The collocational strength for *mother + home* is 302.8 and *father + home* is 625.3.

ing (lines 21 and 22), *running* (lines 24, 57, 58) home. These lines suggest that *home* is the place of the character's mother (see Figure 9).

19	their way thither." ¶ On Cuthbert's returning home and telling his	mother	all that had passed, she shook her head, but said	winning
20	choking. ¶ "Then he ought to be taken home to his	mother."	¶ "His mother's dead," said Bobbie, "and his father's in Northumberland	railway
21	spent the time after dinner in writing home to his	mother,	and so was in a better frame of mind; and	tombrown
22	and he wrote the most flourishing letters home to his	mother,	full of his own success and the unspeakable delights of	tombrown
23	that, if he had really been brought home to his	mother	by Mrs. Crump, she would say something to him about	wind
24	done to the corn, instead of running home to his	mother,	he ran away into the wood and lost himself. Don't	wind
25	ounces each, which Tom bore home In rapture to his	mother	as a precious gift, and which she received like a	tombrown
57	been starved! how dreadful! But, Lizzy, run home to your	mother;	don't delay a moment longer—she is sorry you have	leila
58	game is over. You had better run home to your	mother	and tell her how much you've enjoyed yourself," ¶ When Albert-next-door	seekers
59	anything. ¶ "Here, you two youngsters be off home to your	mother;	said the Badger kindly. "I'll send some one with you	willows
60	book. "And now you had better go home to your	mother;	when you've found the riddle, you can come again." ¶ If	wind

Figure 9. Examples from the set of 61 lines for a concordance of *mother* with *home* as a collocate

While this pattern shows mothers as an anchor point, fathers, in contrast, are described as actively moving between the home and the outside world of work (Examples (9) and (10)). The regularity of this movement is reflected in a specific pattern that includes *when* or *till*, indicating how time in family life is determined by the father's activity. The family waits for the father to come home. His home-coming is presented as a milestone in family life (see Figure 10).

(9) But when his **father** came home from the Stock Exchange, where he spent his days in considering 7⅝ and 10–3/32 […]   (Nesbit, *Nine Unlikely Tales*)

(10) […] I lived with grandmother up in Cheshire, but she is dead now, and **father** is just come home from sea, […]   (Yonge, *The Daisy Chain*)

Another factor relevant to the representation of mothers that we can only briefly touch upon within the space of this paper is the gender of the authors of the books in ChiLit. If we compare the frequency of *mother* across the two sub-corpora of books by male authors and those by female authors, some trends seem to emerge. For individual books, the highest relative frequency (in relation to the text length) of *mother* occurs in books written by female authors: Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, Stretton's *Little Meg's Children* and *Jessica's First Prayer – Jessica's Mother* and Yonge's *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest*.[11] The only books where the

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11. In Nesbit's *The Railway Children* the normalised frequency per 10,000 words is 65.5, in Stretton's *Little Meg's Children* it is 37.95 and in *Jessica's First Prayer – Jessica's Mother* it is 27.5, in Yonge's *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* it is 26.2. In Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* 31.4 the normalised frequency is similarly high. However, this is a short text of only 954 words and the raw frequency of *mother* is 3.

1	chance of meeting visitors, and distressed and harassed when her	father	brought home some of his casual dinner guests, and was	reddclyffe
2	but remember Diamond, having seen him when he and his	father	brought the ladies home, So she believed him, and went	wind
3	hutches we shall want," Edwin thought gaily. But when his	father	came home from the Stock Exchange, where he spent his	nlikely
4	said no, it wouldn't be right; we must wait till	Father	came home. Then H. O. said, very suddenly and plainly	seekers
5	because. Love makes the only myness" said Diamond. ¶When his	father	came home to have his dinner, and change Diamond for	wind
6	he said, 'but it won't be in dock till night.	Father	can't be at home afore to-morrow morning at the soonest	meg
7	our attic. I promised mother I wouldn't go away till	father	comes home. Don't be angry, please.'¶ I'm not angry, child	meg
8	But, pray God, let Robbie stay with me till	father	comes home; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'¶ Meg rose from	meg
9	her I'd never let nobody come into my room till	father	comes home. I couldn't help you, and Mrs Blossom, and	meg
10	asked Him a hundred times to let me live till	father	comes home, or to let me take baby along with	meg
11	of it." ¶"Cannot we take care of her here till	father	comes home?" said Oliver, seeing that neighbour Good looked perplexed	settlers
12	stay here." ¶"Neighbour Good will take care of us till	father	comes home," said Oliver: "and the woman looks so ill	settlers
13	to be sure to take care of the children till	father	comes home,' she answered, steadying her voice; 'and I'll do	meg
14	shouldn't call the police: it seems a pity. Wait till	Father	comes home; ¶ The robber agreed to this, and gave his	seekers
15	always?" ¶ "No," said Mother, "the worst will be over when	Father	comes home to us." ¶ "I wish I could comfort you	railway
16	I couldn't ever do that. We'll get along somehow till	father	comes home.' ¶ 'Where is it you live?' inquired Mrs Blossom	meg
17	saying she was getting on very well, and she expected	father	home to-day or to-morrow. When she went in and out	meg
18	and show her how to take care of them, till	father	was at home? The day passed almost as happily as	meg
19	they had indulged in sometimes in the palmy days when	father	was at home. The door was divided in the middle	meg
20	Robin's blue cap. which never saw the light except when	father	was at home. She had nearly emptied the box, when	meg
21	some of the chestnuts--and we sat and wondered when	Father	would come home, and what he would say to us	seekers

Figure 10. The pattern *till/when father* […] *home*

word *mother* does not occur at all are three fantasy books by male authors: Carroll's *Alice* books, Farrow's *Adventures in Wallypug-Land* and three short texts by Beatrix Potter. The noun *mother* also occurs less frequently in adventure stories, such as Falkner's *Moonfleet*, Marryat's *The Children of the New Forest* or Stevenson's *Kidnapped*.[12] Still, even in the sub-corpus of male authors, *mother* is the most frequent female noun.

5.   Conclusions

In this paper, we set out to shed light on children's fiction as a particular type of literature and to focus on the representation of the people who form social structures in the worlds of those texts. Like other quantitative studies, ours provides textual evidence for a general gender imbalance in fiction. Unlike other studies, however, we focus on a particular type of character in fiction for children. Mothers are the most frequently occurring female character in our corpus of children's literature. By taking a corpus approach to identify patterns of the discursive rep-

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12. In Stevenson's *Kidnapped* the relative frequency is 0.98, in Falkner's *Moonfleet* and Marryat's *The Children of the New Forest* it is 0.98. *Mother* also occurs with very low frequencies in Kenneth's *The Wind in the Willows* (0.85), Anstey's *Vice Versa* (0.74) and Kenneth's *The Golden Age* (0.28), where it occurs only once.

resentation of mothers, we make an important contribution to research into children's fiction. While ideals and ideologies are viewed as crucial elements of fiction for children, so far scholarship on children's literature has largely approached them through careful reading. We have shown how the understanding of norms and shared meanings in corpus linguistic terms opens up connections to concerns in criticism on children's literature. The tools we used are not limited to our interest in mothers but can be applied to other areas of fiction for children, too. Our approach points the way for a fresh view on familiar topics.

By looking at mothers as part of the societies represented in the fictional worlds in our corpus, we were able to show a detailed picture of the various layers of society as constituted by the people that populate them. In particular, we provided textual evidence for what is described as the division between the private and the public sphere. The linguistic patterns reveal that fathers are allowed to move between the public and the private sphere, with their main role in work outside the home. The duties of mothers lead to networks within the private sphere, as shown through family connections, with the strongest textual connection being between mothers and fathers. The textual patterns also describe the qualities of motherhood. Within their social spaces, mothers do important emotional work. This is shown in abstract qualities, such as the love that mothers offer, but also in very concrete physical terms, as children find a safe place in their mothers' arms. Importantly, while fathers appear to be more active in leaving home, mothers provide an anchor point, a place to 'go home to', not only for children, but also for fathers.

Literary criticism often discusses ideals or female roles, but the type of concrete links between abstract qualities and physical behaviour we studied would be difficult to systematically find with close reading alone. Looking at patterns in concordances makes it possible to see the cumulative evidence across a number of texts. It was important to our study to not lose the qualitative dimension of the analysis. It is the combination of quantitative and qualitative that makes it possible to connect textual detail with a view of the bigger picture. As we have argued, for future research there is still much room to further develop complementary approaches of automatic retrieval and detailed textual analysis to mutual benefit. Discursively constructed categories are unstable and generalisations may only hold for a particular dataset. Therefore, we argue that general categorisations may not always present a way forward. Particularly with regard to gender development over time, categorisation into 'female' and 'male' will be an oversimplification (Mandell 2019; D'Ignazio & Klein 2020). In our study, the binary approach is shown to textually relate to the private and public spheres of the nineteenth-century middle-classes.

The way in which corpus linguistics approaches language and society is relevant to the real-world impact of children's literature. Through the exposure to gendered textual patterns, young readers learn about the world. In this sense, fiction for children is not only fiction. It is a linguistic resource – an inventory of words and patterns that children can 'recycle', as Stubbs (2002) calls it, to take an active part in the world. It is therefore even more important that we have methods to become aware of the textual detail and hence the linguistic tools that children have at their hands.

Funding

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Publication history