

The Portrayal of Antagonistic Mothers in *One Piece, The Promised Neverland, and Diabolik Lovers*

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ABSTRACT

Unconventional characters have always piqued people's interests, and that includes characters in *anime*. Mother is a role that is so familiar in the society, with certain characteristics expected of them. Certain mothers in *anime* acts differently than what is usually expected of them as mothers. This study is conducted to analyse the portrayal of the three antagonists in Japanese *anime* series *One Piece*, *The Promised Neverland*, and *Diabolik Lovers* respectively: Charlotte Linlin, Isabella, and Sakamaki Cordelia that can be considered unmotherly. The study is done using theories regarding good and bad mothers provided by A. E. Kaplan (1992), Huppertz and Goodwin (n.d.), and H. L. Hadley (2018). The analysis shows how the three mothers deviated from their role as a nurturing mother, showing actions that proved the three mothers to be destructive towards their children. The writer concludes that the three mothers show how mothers are people capable of emotions other than gentleness and care, they are capable of malice and hate, calculating and cruel as well be it biological mothers or foster mothers.

Keywords: anime; good mothers; bad mothers

INTRODUCTION

Anime is a style of animation originating in Japan that is characterized by stark colorful graphics depicting vibrant characters in action-filled plots often with fantastic or futuristic themes (Merriam-Webster, 1985). According to Clements (2013), anime not only includes cartoon film, but also media such as Claymation, stop-motion puppetry, and sand animation. The plots themselves can be adapted from Japanese *manga*, light novels, or original stories. *Anime* has been a part of Japanese culture for years and has since then spread worldwide to the West and other countries in Asia. Because of the diversity of the plot and genre, *anime* has become a big cultural object that is loved by many people. Different from other styles of animations, *anime* has more complex stories and sometimes dark content, which makes it very distinguishable from those of Western animations such as Mickey Mouse. Several easy examples of *anime* series that have been famous worldwide are *Pokemon!*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Doraemon*, and *Naruto*. Some countries have dubbed those *anime* series to suit the national languages to make it easier to understand on television, but *anime* still manages to become popular because of its colourful plot and animation style that can pull people of different ages and generations to watch them.

The three *anime* series the researcher is going to discuss may sound completely different, but they all have one similarity which will be the focus of this paper: the existence of female antagonists that also play the role of a mother. They are also in the list of 10 worst mothers in the anime according to CBR.com. *One Piece* is originally a comic written by Oda Eiichiro in 1997, later adapted as *anime*. *One Piece* is a *shounen anime* which focuses on the journey of Monkey D. Luffy, a young man wishing to be the King of Pirates in the fictional world governed by the World Government and swarmed with pirates of all kinds of beliefs and morals. In *One Piece*, specifically the Whole Cake Island Arc, Charlotte Linlin, or known by

her epithet “Big Mom” is finally shown in person after several moments of foreshadowing in the *anime*. Her pirate crew is special, in the sense that most of the crew members are actually her biological children. She has 85 children, with 43 husbands, which she discarded after she gave birth to their children. She also marries off her children to other influential allies to bolster her power. She is a famous character in the *One Piece* community, because even though she gave birth and raised all of her children as the matriarch of Charlotte's family, she does not raise them with love, and only raises them for the sake of strengthening her pirate crew. She has no qualms in mocking her own child's physical appearance, nor does she have any hesitation in killing her children if she deems them useless.

Diabolik Lovers is an anime adaptation of a Japanese visual novel franchise written by Kanasugi Hiroko in 2015, with us focusing on Komori Yui's point of view as her life becomes entangled with the handsome vampire boys after her priest father sent her to live with them. Among the characters introduced in the series, one of them sticks out for being a character that left a deep scar on the three characters of *Diabolik Lovers*, and that is Sakamaki Cordelia. As the mother of three vampire boys that live with Yui, she shows no hesitation in inflicting physical and emotional pain towards her children to make them obey her. She is one of the main reasons her children became who they were in the story, with tendencies that makes Yui sympathize with the boys. Despite her no longer being alive in the current timeline, she has left such a deep impact on them, even until the present time, forming the children's questionable personalities.

The Promised Neverland is a sci-fi *anime*, the original story written by Kaiu Shirai in 2016, that revolves around the children of Grace Field House, a self-contained orphanage, and how their idyllic life changed to a plan of escape because of a secret they found. *The Promised Neverland* is a newer *anime* than the previous two, yet it quickly became a booming trend among the *anime* lovers because of the infamous female antagonist, “Mama” Isabella. Isabella is a mother as well as a caretaker in Grace Field House, and a character loved by the children, including the three oldest ones, which are also the main leads, until they discovered that their orphanage is a place for Mamas to nurture the children to be sacrificed to demons outside the orphanage. Isabella is an expert of mind games and strategy, sending messages to the children that they cannot escape the orphanage while she is on watch, even going as far as to bring in another person to assist her in caretaking the orphanage. Isabella is a complex character, in the sense that despite her supposed to be the mother for young, innocent children, she shows no hesitation in sacrificing the very same children she has raised for years. Even when her actual biological child schemed against her, she did not show as much as a flinch, instead she was cool until almost the very end.

Mother is “a female parent”, and in verb form, it is “to treat a person with great kindness and love and try to protect them from anything dangerous or difficult” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). However, Charlotte Linlin, Sakamaki Cordelia, and Isabella acted differently than the definition of the mother itself. The three female antagonists have their own motives, their own histories, and their own beliefs. However, despite being a mother character in their respective anime series, they are undoubtedly antagonistic towards their children in a not-motherly way, which triggers the researcher's interest in analysing them deeper. In this study the researcher wants to know how the three mothers are portrayed in each respective anime that can be considered as unmotherly.

To analyse these three characters' portrayal, there will be several theories used. Mainly, theories from E. Ann Kaplan's *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppertz's *The good mother in theory and research: an overview*, and Heidi Lyn Hadley's *Good Mother/Bad Mother: The Representation of Mothers in Printz-Award-Winning Literature*. E. Ann Kaplan, an author famous for her works regarding

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cultural and women's studies and a professor of Stony Brook State University of New York, wrote how mothers are portrayed in many sources, including movies and news. There are many different portrayals of mothers over the years, but as of around the 1980s, according to E. Ann Kaplan, there are several kinds of "good" and "bad" mothers. A trait of "good" mothers that is highlighted is finding fulfilment in motherhood, in a way that they prioritize their child or children over anything else, including their job. Kaplan has also explained more about traits or actions of a "bad" mother, such as those who are absent from the lives of their children. They are portrayed negatively, and in some cases, shown to display regret later on. Susan Goodwin, a professor of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, and Kate Huppertz, an associate professor in Sociology at Western Sydney University, have also written an overview about a good mother in theory. According to Sharon Hays (1996), "a good mother would never simply put her child aside for her own convenience. And placing material wealth or power on a higher plane than the well-being of children is strictly forbidden" (Hays 1996: 150). Heidi Lyn Hadley, a PhD student in the department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia, has wrote a research paper regarding good mothers and bad mothers in award-winning young adult literature using Carl Jung's archetypes to identify a good mother and a bad mother in those works. Hadley puts mothers into categories of "good" and "bad" mothers based on whether their actions are "nurturing" or "destructive". Hadley has mentioned in her paper that one characteristic of a good mother is willingness to follow traditional gender roles: "'good' mothers are the ones who prepare meals, whether they have careers or not, and this act of food preparation by 'good' mothers was almost bizarrely universal," (Hadley, 2018). Moreover, Hadley has also emphasized how bad mothers act: selfish and unfeeling. These destructive mothers make choices based on their own desires and whims.

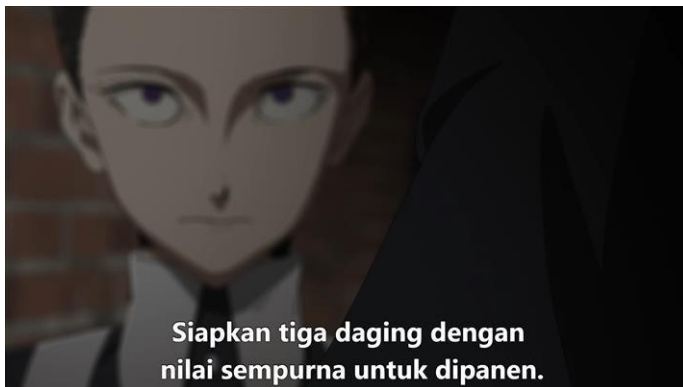
ANALYSIS

The analysis of the portrayal of the unmotherly conduct is organized in 3 subchapters. The first subchapter will analyse the portrayal of Isabella from *The Promised Neverland*. The second subchapter will analyse the portrayal of Charlotte Linlin from *One Piece*. The third subchapter will analyse the portrayal of Sakamaki Cordelia from *Diabolik Lovers*. The subchapters are based on the portrayal of each mother.

Isabella as a Goal-Driven Mother

Isabella, a caretaker of the Grace Field House, an orphanage filled with children from babies until 12-year-olds, who is considered to be the mother for the orphans, is actually a cruel person capable of sacrificing the children for her goal. Her survival, which is her ultimate goal, drives her to put her children in danger.

To be able to survive, Isabella has been consciously and willingly sending the children she raised to their deaths as demons' food for years. In the first episode, she tells the others that one of the children she raised, Conny, is going to be adopted by another family, meaning that she would be out of the orphanage. However, by some kind of accident, Conny is found out to be dead and going to be presented to the demons owning the orphanage. The terrible discovery of all for the children, is the fact that their beloved foster mother is a co-conspirator of the deaths of the other children. Isabella has been working under the demons all this time, "killing" her children. The next picture shows a conversation between one of the demons and Isabella.



Picture subtitle: Prepare the three highest quality meat the best you can to be harvested.

Source: *The Promised Neverland* episode 1.

Isabella turns out to be a vassal for the demons, and this scene shows that Isabella is actually not the caring mother the children believed her to be, but a cruel mother, who will not hesitate to put their children in their deathbed for her own goal, no matter what it is. Isabella pretends to be a mother for all the children to make them trust her, to make them believe that they were raised in love and care. Kaplan explains that good mothers will always prioritize their children over anything else, and bad mothers will do the opposite, which is to put their own needs first before the children. Hadley also emphasizes on how bad mothers are unfeeling, and destructive mothers are mothers who make decisions based on their own needs. From this alone, it shows how terrible Isabella is as a mother, because the harm she has put her children through is not just physical or mental harm, but death itself. This scene also proves that Isabella has little to no concern for her children's safety. Rather, she is the one to be considered dangerous for the children's safety.

Isabella has to use force, such as inflicting pain to the children, to make sure they obey her so that they do not escape. Isabella shows no qualms in putting her children through physical pain to reach her goal. In episode eight, Isabella and the children cannot not reach an agreement as to who should concede. So, Emma tries to hold Isabella down as Norman takes the tools they hid to escape, but Isabella breaks Emma's foot to stop both Norman and Emma.



Source: *The Promised Neverland* episode 8.

Isabella shows her destructiveness as a mother by harming her child herself to prevent them from escaping the orphanage. Kaplan has explained that a bad mother is a mother who puts her children in harm's way, but Isabella goes even further by actually doing the harm herself. This might possibly put her more than just a bad mother, but an extremely terrible mother. She may not be Emma's biological mother, but considering how she put herself as Emma's mother over the years of raising her, her cruelty might as well be thought of as damage

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done by her biological mother. The damage she has done to Emma is enough to delay her possible “shipping”, because the “shipping” is done once every two months. She does it to give her a reason to ship Norman instead, to discourage the other children from escaping by killing one of the brains of the group and to break the spirit of the children. Such calculation to reach her goal, even at the expense of her foster children, sets her apart from the good mothers.

She finally openly expresses her view of the children as well in the same episode: she views them as products. In a sense, she also justifies her actions towards the children by saying that they disobey her first, causing her to do this far. She puts the blame on the children to put them into even more emotional turmoil.



Picture subtitle: You children didn't want to give up, so I had to do this.

Source: *The Promised Neverland* episode 8.

She openly expresses how she only views the children as a product to satisfy the demons, which is a contrast of how a good mother should be in theory: loving towards her children wholeheartedly. She only raises the children as cattle for her superior, and she views the children as products. She also justifies her harming Emma in the last picture, instead blaming the children for not obeying her. She is the one doing the harming, yet she puts her children in emotional turmoil to break the spirit of the children by breaking Emma's foot and “shipping” Norman. In conclusion, Isabella pretends to be a good foster mother for the children, so that they have no idea that Isabella is actually working with the demons to send the children to their deaths, and to reach that goal, she doesn't hesitate to use deception and physical force.

Charlotte Linlin as an Egotistical Mother

Charlotte Linlin, the matriarch and the leader of her family and pirate crew, Big Mom Pirates, is feared by her children for actions she has done in the story, and the actions are by no means gentle or nurturing. She proves herself to be less of a mother, and more of a tyrannical boss for her children to fear and obey.

Charlotte Linlin has taken her child's lifespan by force to quell her anger. Charlotte Linlin has the power to take the lifespan of other people in the form of their souls if they have any ounce of fear towards her. This is one of the reasons why her children fear her so much, because she uses her power according to her whim, even towards her children. Charlotte Linlin is very prone to rampages if her appetite is not sated, and during one of her hungry rampages because her dessert time is taken from her, she takes some of the lifespan of one of her sons, Moscato, rendering him unconscious for a while, as shown in episode 790 of the series.



Source: *One Piece* episode 790.

This action shows how little she cares for her children's life, ignoring her son's plea and instead takes 40 years of Moscatto's lifespan. She is fully aware of the danger of her ability, yet she uses it on her children. She might have been unconsciously doing it because of her hunger, but she still shows a characteristic of a bad mother, which is selfishness. She cares more for her own needs than her children, and to fulfil her whims, she is willing to go as far as to harm her children in the process. Charlotte Linlin is a destructive mother, literally. Moreover, she takes the lifespan of her child over a petty reason like a ruined dessert. She cares more for her appetite than her children's wellbeing, to the level of her having to take 40 years of her son's life in the midst of her anger. For her, 40 years of her son's life are worth less than her hunger for dessert. Worst of all, even after taking her son's lifespan, it does not sate her anger at all, making it a complete waste of sacrifice forced onto her son. She has stolen her son's valuable lifespan in the midst of her anger, yet it does nothing to help her calm down at all. Even when Moscatto begs for his life in tears, she does not care at all for her son's fear. It highlights how egoistic she can be, and how she reacts when things do not according to her will. It also shows the value of her children's life in her eyes. The value of dessert is above his son's life, which is a huge form of selfishness on Charlotte Linlin's part as a mother.

Charlotte Linlin also shows no qualms about abusing her children to show her power. An example of the abuse she had done towards her children is from one of her children, Chiffon's testimony in episode 820. When Chiffon is talking with the main character's friends about Charlotte Linlin, she explains that Chiffon's twin, Lola, refused an arranged marriage by her mother, and decided to run away. Chiffon, being Lola's twin, is abused by her mother because of the physical resemblance and her mother's disappointment towards Lola.



Picture subtitle: Get that damn face out of my sight!

Source: *One Piece* episode 820.

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For petty reasons such as physical resemblance, she verbally and physically abuses Chiffon, causing an emotional scar that turns Chiffon's loyalty away from Charlotte Linlin. For Charlotte Linlin, her goal is more important than her children's feelings and Charlotte Linlin raises her children as an asset instead of her children. She has, again, shown a clear indication of a terrible mother by harming her children for her own selfishness. Different from Isabella, Charlotte is the biological mother of Chiffon. Yet, she abuses her children without hesitation, showing her destructive nature as a mother. In conclusion, Charlotte Linlin treats her children as no more than an extension of her tool, her objects, to do what she wants, and she does not shower her children with love, instead with cruelty and tyranny to make them obey her as her subordinates, highlighting her egoistic personality.

Sakamaki Cordelia as a Whimsical Mother

Sakamaki Cordelia, the mother of Sakamaki Ayato, Kanato, and Laito in *Diabolik Lovers*, is a whimsical mother who has left such a deep wound on her children. Despite appearing only in several episodes, she is a mother of a strong character that has left a terrible scar on her children, making them the way they are now. Sakamaki Cordelia willingly threatens her children to make her obey her, causing her children to fear and hate her. Cordelia threatens her oldest son, Ayato, whenever he does not want to do what she told him to do, and her level of threat is not on a level of taking children's toys away from them. In episode 7, when Ayato openly complains that he is tired of studying all the time, Cordelia forces him to do so anyway.



First picture subtitle: Worthless boys
Source: *Diabolik Lovers* episode 7.



Second picture subtitle: must spend eternity at the cold, damp bottom of the lake.
Source: *Diabolik Lovers* episode 7.



Third picture subtitle: all alone, where no one help them.

Source: *Diabolik Lovers* episode 7.

Cordelia does not care for her children's feelings and happiness, and instead forces them to do what she wants them to do for her own sake. She forces Ayato to study all the time so he becomes the best, to lift up her name as well. She does not tell him to study purely for his sake, but more for her own pleasure, to be the favourite wife of her husband, who has several wives. Cordelia shows precisely what a good mother should not do: care more about their goal than their own children. Cordelia does not think an ounce of her children's feelings, and cares more about her position as the second wife. It shows how she only thinks of her children as an extension for her to do what she wants, instead of caring for them as her actual children. Cordelia showed how little she cared for her sons as characters, and instead only deemed them as her assets for her own pleasure. When things did not go her way, she forced her way with crude words and cold commands. She failed to show motherly love towards her children, and instead only left them with emotional scars. In conclusion, Sakamaki Cordelia is a selfish, whimsical mother who raised her children not to love them, but to please herself and to reach her goal. She did not even bother to pretend to be affectionate to gain their trust, instead just ruling over them with iron first, making sure that her words are absolute.

CONCLUSION

After conducting a thorough research, the writer finds that the three mothers show different actions than what is expected of their role as mothers. These three mothers show actions that can be classified as not-mothering for their own goals. Despite the fact that mothers are expected to be unconditionally loving and caring, they prioritize their own ambitions and safety over their children. They even can be said to be antagonistic towards their own children. They show the characteristics of an evil person in fiction, which are mostly goal-driven, regardless of the method and sacrifices needed, calculating, and cold in general. They may also be selfish and whimsical. The three characters are mothers for the children, even though Isabella is technically a foster mother for the children of the orphanage. They show how mothers can be unmotherly, no matter whether they are biological mothers or not. They show how mothers can be selfish, cruel, and calculating as well. Mothers are not just gentleness and love, but also anger, coldness, and forcefulness. Mothers, as it turns out, are not just women full of love and compassion. Mothers are also women capable of malice and hate, calculating and cruel as well.

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