

# MALORIE'S MATERNAL INSTINCT IN JOSH MALERMAN'S BIRD BOX

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## MALORIE'S MATERNAL INSTINCT IN JOSH MALERMAN'S *BIRD BOX*

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**Abstract.** This study is entitled Malorie's Maternal Instinct in Josh Malerman's *Bird Box*. This study analyzes how Malorie's maternal instinct shown in Josh Malerman's *Bird Box*. The objective of the study is to find out the kinds and the impacts on her children in the novel. The data are taken from the novel *Bird Box* by Josh Malerman, *Bird Box* as the data source. Qualitative method is used to analyze the novel. Because maternal instinct relates to psychological problem, this study uses psychological approach. The psychological theory used is Teresa Heffernan's Motherhood as the theory. The result of this research shows that Malorie has five maternal instinct. These aspects are nurturing, protective, sacrifice, resilience and strength, as well as complexity and imperfection. The impacts also shown are strength, discipline, and survival skills. Malorie's maternal instinct is based on her connection with her children, Boy and Girl. However, Malorie's journey shows that a maternal instinct while imperfect, scary, and sometimes mean is a strong and unbreakable force of love and strength. Malorie is finally able to demonstrate which shows that being her maternal instinct can also help them and her children get through difficult times.

**Keywords :** discipline, maternal instinct, motherhood, sacrifice, strength, survival

### INTRODUCTION

Using knowledge from earlier on motherhood, it investigates how various cultural perspectives and historical settings perceive the maternal instinct. This study will examine particular instances from literature and everyday life that illustrate the efficacy of maternal behavior and its consequences. According to Claudia Serban (2024), this means that mothers are also idealized insofar as, for Husserl, they count as unrivalled models from the outset, since their instinctive orientation toward their children, insofar as it is likely to develop into love, is supposed to make them act like good mothers. This study makes the case that the maternal instinct is not simply a biological reality but also a significant component of stories about survival, identity, and humanity by examining the interaction between instincts, emotions, and social expectations. It will be able to understand the maternal instinct's great relevance as a universal yet intensely personal feeling thanks to this through approach.

A common motif in literature is the maternal instinct, which is defined as the innate desire or emotional bond that propels women to care for, defend, and even give up something for their children. In addition, psychological studies also examine the influence of maternal instinct on child development. Emma Donoghue's "Room" (2010) shows Ma embodying the protective aspects of maternal instinct as she raises her son in captivity. The novel explores the psychological complexities of a mother's role in extreme situations, showing how maternal instinct can drive a mother to do anything to ensure the safety and survival of her children.

Malerman's depiction of maternal instinct is both touching and complex. Sarah L. Courteau (2015) argues that "Malerman's depiction of Malorie's burning love for her children amidst chaos serves as a powerful commentary on the lengths to which a mother will go to protect her offspring". This perspective aligns with contemporary discussions in feminist literature that challenge traditional notions of motherhood, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of maternal instinct in the face of adversity.

Malorie's journey as a mother is filled with challenges that test her instincts and resolve. The novel depicts her fierce determination to protect her children, a Boy and a Girl, in a world that threatens her physically and psychologically. As Malorie navigates this perilous life, her maternal instincts emerge as a powerful force, pushing her to make difficult decisions for the safety of her children. This theme resonates with psychological research findings, which show that maternal instincts are deeply rooted in evolutionary biology and are essential to the survival of offspring (Hrdy, S.B, 2011).

Sarah Ruddick in *Mother Thought: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989:83) explores the dark side of motherhood and argues that survival-focused motherhood often requires suppressing traditional maternal instincts to ensure safety. The psychological pressures of her role, with its constant accompanying guilt and self-doubt, are revealed by Malorie's internal conflict in *Bird Box* (2014). Based on the explanation above, the reason for choosing the topic of Malorie's maternal instinct in the novel *Bird Box* is because this topic is very interesting to discuss in which there are many meanings in each role and value of maternal instinct in the novel *Bird Box*. This study is intended to analyze Malorie's maternal instinct and the impacts of her maternal instinct on her children.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study refers to theories relevant to Teresa Heffernan's motherhood. Teresa Heffernan's motherhood (2008) in Syahira (2024: 18) view of the role of motherhood in literature explores the deep maternal instinct, sacrifice, and survival skills that women, as mothers, must employ to protect and nurture their children. Heffernan's study of motherhood's maternal instinct, which shows women protecting and raising their children in a world devastated by disaster, offers a valuable framework for analyzing the depiction of mothers in terms of maternal instinct values.

Teresa Heffernan's theory of motherhood posits that maternal instinct is not simply an innate biological drive, but a powerful dynamic force that can shape narrative and character development, particularly in post-apocalyptic fiction. In these bleak and desolate settings, depictions of a mother's instinctive drive to protect her child underscore a strong and unbreakable bond, in stark contrast to the chaos around her. Depictions of maternal instinct in such narratives serve as 7 beacons of hope and humanity, highlighting the tireless dedication and sacrifice of mothers to ensure the

survival and well-being of their children. These depictions often serve as poignant reminders of the enduring nature of love and care, even in the midst of the collapse of civilization (Heffernan, 2008, p. 29 in Syahira et al, 2024:19).

In this theory, Heffernan creates the situations where mothers have to go to. They do everything possible to protect their children, even when it's dangerous. They face challenges in their environment and have little chance of success. This strong commitment shows survival and a deep expression of the inherent bond between mother and child. The intensity of maternal instinct depicted in these stories illuminates the human ability to be strong and determined. Whether it's scavenging for mothers in post-apocalyptic stories have to deal with problems like finding food, finding safe places to live, and dealing with dangerous situations. Worlds show how far a parent will go to protect their child. This shows that a mother's instinct is very strong.

According to (Heffernan, 2008) in Syahira (2024: 19), the depiction of maternal instinct in post-apocalyptic narratives often goes beyond mere survival, delving deeper into the emotional and psychological realm. These stories explore how the bond between mother and child can provide emotional support and a sense of purpose, binding characters together amidst widespread despair. Heffernan's theory highlights that this bond is about protecting and nurturing hope and fostering a sense of continuity in a fragmented world. Maternal instinct becomes a key element in these narratives, symbolizing the enduring power of love and the indomitable human spirit that endures even in the bleakest of circumstances.

## METHOD

This study examines the representation of Malorie's maternal instinct in Josh Malerman's *Bird Box*, using a qualitative method. This method is effective in exploring a mother's experience in extreme conditions by providing in-depth analysis of textual data. As Creswell (2014) notes, qualitative research aims to uncover the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social or human issues, highlighting the intricate nature of human experience. This method facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the psychological dimensions of Malorie's journey. This study use Teresa Heffernan's motherhood.

The primary data is taken from *Bird Box* written by Josh Malerman, is used as the data source which was published in 2014 and has 273 pages with Harper Voyager as the publication. The data taken from the novel *Bird Box* are in the form of words, phrases, sentences or group of sentences relating to the topic of analysis. The data are collected by reading the novel thoroughly and repeatedly to understand the storyline, characterization of the main character, Malorie and situational context related to the maternal instinct. After collecting the data, the analysis is conducted by interpreting the selected text according to the theoretical framework and drawing conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes how Malorie's maternal instinct shown in Josh Malerman's *Bird Box* that focuses on to find out the kinds of Malorie's maternal instinct and its impacts on her children.

### Nurturing

*Bird Box*, Josh Malerman explores the depths of maternal instinct through the character of Malorie, whose nurturing nature is both a survival mechanism and a testament to the primal bond between mother and child. The novel shows parenting not as a passive act of caring, but as an aggressive, calculated effort to ensure survival in a world where the smallest mistake can lead to madness or death. Malorie's nurturing instincts are driven by desperation, fear, and a strong determination to protect her children, whom she calls "Boy" and "Girl." This section looks at how Malerman shows that parenting is a complex instinct that includes physical protection, shaping how children think and feel, and being strong for them.

One of the most striking aspects of Malorie's upbringing is her strict training of the children to rely solely on their hearing. From they are born, she conditions them to stay awake with their eyes closed, using harsh methods to strengthen this behaviour. She shows the brutal but necessary measures Malorie takes to ensure her children's survival. The fact that she only feeds them after they do what she says shows that in this dystopian world, nurturing is all about getting what you want by following rules. That's why she love and care depend on following rules to survive. Malorie's education includes not just physical discipline, but also psychological conditioning. She teaches the children to correctly identify sounds, helping them develop better hearing even though they can't see. This training is essential because when they're on the river, being able to detect danger is the only way they can stay safe.

Malorie reflects how nurturing is not just about keeping children alive. It's also about teaching them the skills they need to survive in a difficult world. Malorie's methods are strange and even a little cruel, but they are necessary. Malorie has another side to her parenting. She feels torn between protecting her children and wanting them to have a normal childhood. She feels bad about not letting them have basic experiences, like looking at the sky or playing without rules.

### Protective

Josh Malerman explores the theme of maternal instinct through the character of Malorie, whose protective nature becomes a driving force in the story. The novel describes a world where an invisible creature makes people go crazy and kill themselves when they see it. Malorie's protective instinct is natural. It's a response that helps mothers protect their children. It's also a survival mechanism. It's been shaped by extreme circumstances. Her actions, decisions, and mental struggles show how far a mother will go to protect her children in a dangerous world.

Malorie's protective's instinct show up when she makes her sons and daughters do lots of training. From the time they were babies, she trained them to rely on hearing rather than sight. She made sure they never removed their blindfolds. This training is very difficult, but it's necessary because in their world a single look could mean death. For instance, Malorie recalls how she would strike the children's arms if they opened their eyes upon waking, reinforcing the habit of keeping them closed. Malorie tells how bad the situation is. She can't show mercy because she needs to survive.

The children's ability to navigate the world without seeing, as seen during their river trip, shows that Malorie did a good job preparing them for the horrors out there. She also makes sure that they follow a daily routine. She teaches them to fetch water from the well, memorizing the path through touch and sound. When the Girl complains about the uneven ground, Malorie withholds food until she complies. These moments highlight the paradox of Malorie's love: her cruelty is a form of protection, 15 ensuring the

children can survive without her if necessary. Malorie's protective instincts make her want to make many personal sacrifices. She is willing to do many things to keep her children safe. This includes feeling tired all the time, feeling lonely, and being afraid all the time. During their escape down the river, she rows blindly despite her injured shoulder, refusing to stop even when the pain becomes unbearable. She is determined because she knows that if they hesitate, they could all die.

### **Sacrificial Love**

Sacrificial love is an important part of Malorie's motherly instincts in *Bird Box*. Malerman sees this in her never ending efforts to protect her children, even if it means putting herself in danger. From the moment Malorie discovers her pregnancy, her life becomes full of hard choices. She has to make sure her unborn child and her two children, whom she calls "Boy" and "Girl," survive. She makes sacrifices not just physically, but also emotionally. She pushes aside her own fears and sadness to create a sense of stability for her children in a world where even looking outside can mean insanity or death. One of the most striking examples of Malorie's sacrificial love is her decision to undertake the perilous journey down the river blindfolded with her children. The river represents both hope and great danger. It is the only way to safety, but there are many dangers along the way. Malorie is having a hard time deciding whether to wait for better conditions or to go on the trip right away.

Malorie makes sacrifices that go beyond just staying alive. She tries not to show her own feelings so that she can control the situation and make sure that everyone follows the rules, because she knows that if she doesn't pay attention, something bad could happen. Her strict training methods, like hitting the children when they misbehave or making them get water on their own, aren't meant to be cruel. Her inner conflict is clear when she thinks about blinding her children forever to stop them from looking outside. She doesn't end up doing it, but thinking about it shows how far she would go to protect them.

### **Resilience and Strength**

Josh Malerman creates the character Malorie as a strong and determined person as she faces the constant challenges of a world that is falling apart. The novel is set in a reality where an unseen force causes people to go crazy and die. It makes readers feel like they are in a dangerous and stressful situation. Malorie's journey is about more than just surviving. It explores deep topics like motherhood, responsibility, and how far a parent will go to protect their children. Malorie is a resilience and strength. She deals with scary things in her everyday life. Every day brings new dangers, and the emotional impact of her surroundings is very hard for her to deal with. But she doesn't change her mind. Malerman captures her determination in the lines.

Those quotation shows that is a good example of Malorie's journey because it is demanding and uncertain, but also vital. Even when she feels afraid and unsure, she keeps going because she wants to protect her children. The rowing scene, where she is blindfolded, represents her courage and determination in the face of uncertainty. A deep sense of responsibility defines Malorie's character. In a world where it's hard to find safety, Malorie's strength protects her children. She represents a delicate balance—a protector who is determined but also scared. Her emotional strength doesn't make her weak and makes her more determined to ensure her children's survival. Her strength comes from love and responsibility, and it's not just a personal trait but a vital necessity.

### Complexity and Imperfection

*Bird Box* looks at the idea of seeing, using immediate visual denial to create new possibilities. The story shows identity as something that can change. It is shaped by Malorie's choice not to see or her forced inability to see. The story shows that being blind is not a weakness. However, the main character's struggle to fully accept her blindness outside of a supportive social environment shows that there's still a lot of work to do to overcome societal prejudice and the deeply entrenched ableism that still exists. Malorie is a very human portrayal of motherhood, highlighting her struggles with fear, uncertainty, and self-doubt. Far from a perfect mother, she reflects the emotional complexities that come with nurturing and protecting in a broken world. Malorie's journey through the postapocalyptic landscape reveals that the maternal instinct is messy, fraught with ambiguity, and yet incredibly resilient.

Fear defined her daily existence, but did not dictate her actions. Instead, fear drives her determination to protect her children. In her, Malerman grasps the reality that courage is not the absence of fear, but the courage to act through it. Malorie feels torn between her instinct to protect her children and the difficult situations they must deal with. She often doubts her own abilities. These moments show her true nature as a person. Many parents, even when things are going well, worry that they might disappoint their children. Despite the overwhelming fear and uncertainty, Malorie's fierce love for her children shines brightly. She teaches them survival skills, fosters hope, and creates a nurturing space even in chaos.

Malorie makes a decision, showing the complete devotion that motivates her. Her love is her strength, giving her the power to face unimaginable dangers to protect her children. Malorie's relationship with her children is not without tension. She constantly juggles her protective instincts against the necessity of preparing them for a brutal world. Malorie speaks to the painful balancing act many parents endure wanting to shelter children while knowing they must also empower them. Malerman uses Malorie's journey to explore this fundamental tension in parenting.

### Impacts of Maternal Instinct

#### Strength

*Bird Box* tells how heartbreaking storyline about Malorie and her children, the Boy and the Girl. The story shows how strong Malorie and her children are. Set in a world where an unseen entity drives people to madness and suicide, those things highlights the multifaceted nature of strength physical, emotional, and psychological. Malorie's journey as a mother along with her children's growth in a dangerous place, shows how strength can take many forms, including being vulnerable and making sacrifices. From the beginning of the novel, Malorie's resilience is evident. When the world is thrown into chaos, she quickly adapts, demonstrating her innate strength as a mother. The transformation of her home into a fortress reflects her resilience in the face of overwhelming fear. While the states before, she does not give in to despair instead, she takes action the demonstrating her strength through her ability to adapt to this terrifying new reality.

Malorie's strength is further demonstrated by her determination to create a safe environment for her children. She goes to great lengths to protect them, even if it means living in a constant state of vigilance and fear. Malorie knows that four years can easily become eight. Eight will quickly become twelve. And then the children will be adults. Adults who have never seen the sky. Never looked out a window. She kept her children

safe from the terrible things outside, and she also tried to protect them from the world she used to know. Her strength is in her willingness to endure this isolation for the safety of her children. Malorie is very lonely, and it is very hard for her to deal with that. But she loves her children, and that makes her keep going.

### Discipline

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In Josh Malerman's *Bird Box*, discipline is a key theme. This is especially true for the characters Malorie and her children, the Boy and the Girl. The story is set in a world after a huge disaster, where a hidden force makes people go crazy and kill themselves. It shows how important it is to have rules to survive. Malorie's way of disciplining her children shows how she is determined to protect them and prepare them for a dangerous world. This analysis will explore various aspects of discipline as they relate to Malorie and her children. It will highlight the methods she uses, the challenges they face, and the broader implications of discipline in their lives.

The world of *Bird Box* is chaotic and full of fear. Seeing anything can make people go crazy or even kill them. In these situations, discipline is not just a way to raise children, it's a way of staying alive. Malorie understands that her children must be prepared to live in a world that is sometimes cruel and always changing. Malorie's discipline keeps her children safe from the terrible things in the world. She is isolated to protect her from the dangers of the world. Malorie understands how important discipline is because she wants to make sure her children survive.

As the story continues, the children start to show that they have their own will within the limits of the strict training they've received. They learn to make decisions and take risks, showing the resilience that Malorie has instilled in them. Her children are becoming more confident and self-assured. Malorie's discipline works well because they are confident and assertive. She has strict rules, but she also lets them take control of their own lives. Despite the challenges of strict discipline, Malorie's methods ultimately foster independence and resilience in her children.

### Survival Skills

Malorie's journey in *Bird Box* is a scary example of what people will do to survive and protect their loved ones in a world that has been completely changed by a threat that can't be seen. Her survival skills are not just practical abilities. They are also a complex mix of mental strength, effective parenting, and a strong belief in one scary truth; if you see it, you might die. This explanation will look at the many sides of Malorie's survival. It will use direct quotes and descriptions from the text to show her methods and the big effect they have on her and her children.

As a mother, Malorie's main instinct is to protect her children. Her survival skills are closely related to her relationship with them. This exploration will look at the different survival skills that Malorie uses, how she teaches them to her children, and the emotional and mental effects of their shared experiences. The most important survival skill that Malorie teaches her children is the importance of staying blindfolded. In a world where seeing can make you go crazy, Malorie knows that being blind is their only protection against the evil forces outside. Highlight by Malorie shows that, Then she takes each child by the hand. They cross the house quickly.

Because of their poor eyesight, Malorie and her children learned to depend on their other senses, especially hearing. This heightened hearing became their main way of

understanding and navigating their environment. Malorie carefully teaches her children to identify different sounds. They learn to tell the difference between safe sounds and dangerous sounds. She describes the sounds of the forest to them, says, "Leaves crinkling, she would say."

Malorie's survival skills in *Bird Box* come from her extreme adaptation, unwavering discipline, strong mental resilience, and her fierce, protective love for her children. Her story shows how people can survive and create new things in very difficult situations. It shows that survival is not just about staying alive, but also about keeping hope alive and believing that there will be a future, even if that future is not clear yet. Malorie's character represents the strength and determination to survive in a world that is very different from what we are used to. Her experiences show that it's as important to protect and nurture as it is to have the skills to deal with dangerous and unpredictable situations. In the end, her story is about being strong, not giving up, and the unbreakable connection between a mother and her children. It shows that even when things seem the worst, there's always hope.

### CONCLUSION

Josh Malerman's *Bird Box* is a fascinating exploration of maternal instinct through the character of Malorie. The goal of this research is to identify the types of maternal instinct she exhibits and examine how these instincts impact her children. The analysis shows that Malorie's maternal instinct are evident in how she nurtures, protects, loves sacrificially, and is resilient and emotionally complex. These traits are not shown in the usual ways, but rather through tough decisions that are driven by the need to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. Malorie trains her children very strictly and can handle pain and being alone, and has a hard time making moral decisions. All of this shows the hard parts of being a mom in very difficult situations.

The impact of her maternal instincts on her children is equally significant. It shapes their strength, discipline, and survival skills. However, it also creates emotional distance and psychological distress. Despite these problems, Malorie's journey shows that a mother's instinct while imperfect, scary, and sometimes mean is a strong and unbreakable force of love and strength. In the end, *Bird Box* shows that being a mother is not just easy. It shows that being a mother can be hard, but also that mothers' love can help them and their children get through hard times.

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