

# THE STORY OF CORALINE(S): A GOTHIC COMING OF AGE

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## ABSTRACT

This study deals with *Coraline* (2002), the novel by Neil Gaiman, and *Coraline* (2009), the animated adaptation directed by Henry Selick based on Gaiman's book. While Gothic stories often emphasize and question human morality, children's literature usually holds a moralizing value. Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* presents a story within the genre of children's literature that seems to be deeply rooted in the Gothic tradition. Some of the fundamental gothic elements in Coraline's story are the presence of ghosts, grotesque beings, and the existence of a parallel and dark universe that serves as the setting for the story. Coraline deals with anxieties related with personal development, growing up, and the environments that surround her. Gothic content within both the book and the film contribute to the undermining of the idealization of Coraline's family, her own process of growing up, and her coping with moving to a completely different place. The creation of the gothic world is exploited in both works to represent Coraline's coming-of-age experience and her conflict with her family. However, despite Selick's film being a faithful and well-delivered adaptation of Gaiman's novel, there are considerable differences that affect how the audience interprets Coraline as a character and her story, which this analysis will highlight.

*Keywords:* Gothic, children's literature, coming-of-age, Coraline, literature

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## I. THE GOTHIC AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

This paper deals with *Coraline's* story, both in the novel by Neil Gaiman, published in 2002, and the stop motion animated film released in 2009, directed and written by Henry Selick. Before delving any further into the paper, it is important to highlight the role of Selick as the screenwriter, for it gives him the capacity to change the story. Now, while Gothic stories often emphasize and question human morality, children's literature usually holds a moralizing value (Saravia and Saravia 77). In other words, when a gothic narrative is shaped and directed within a definite moral purpose, it is aimed at confronting good and evil through different

characters as representatives of such forces in antagonistic positions (Georgieva 39). In fact, “the importance for authors does not reside in an abstract struggle between good and evil but in a concrete moral example involving plausible personae, a model that can be applied to real life” (ibid). Margarita Georgieva, in *The Gothic Child* (2013) further states that “the struggle between good and evil in a child’s soul is among the recurrent preoccupations of the [gothic novel]” (Georgieva 40) and Michael Howarth in *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children’s Literature* (2014) argues that the presence and the importance of Gothicism in children’s literature has a long tradition, “Gothicism has always been an integral part of children’s literature” (Howarth 4); indeed, children’s literature is expected to play a didactic role in the growth and development of its young readers, which parents often see as subverted by Gothicism (Howarth 6). On the same note, Howarth argues that “one of the strengths of gothic literature is that it teaches us things are not always what they seem” (ibid.), which could reasonably be one of the main didactic messages underlying Coraline’s story. Young readers will encounter monsters and ghosts while reading and watching Coraline’s adventure in a Gothic world. This becomes essential, as Howarth states, “to our mental and physical growth because as we grow older we discover that these strange shapes and intense situations often embody our individual fears and anxieties” (ibid.). To further support this argument, Howarth explains the following:

By going on an imaginary journey with these characters, and through witnessing their rewards and mistakes, we learn how to deal with similar conflicts in reality. While a child is certain not to encounter a troll or a werewolf, he or she might feel threatened or oppressed by other people or events in his or her life. In these cases, gothic literature aids the child in abandoning childish impulses so as to engage in mature reflections. (Howarth 6)

Thus, Coraline helps her readers and audience realize that they will not be overcome by their own emotions or problems, but that they will, as she did, survive and prevail. This way, Gothicism can arguably be considered as a teaching tool for children. Gaiman’s *Coraline* presents a story that falls into this category of gothic children’s literature. Some of the fundamental Gothic tropes are the presence of ghosts, grotesque beings, and the existence of a parallel and dark universe that serves as the setting for the story. Both in the novel and the film, the eponymous character deals with anxieties related to personal growth, development, and the new environment that surrounds her after moving to a completely new town. Many critics have valued *Coraline*, arguing that its narrative articulation can help children grow out from dependence into a healthier acceptance of their desires and give them agency as subjects. Padma Jagannathan classifies *Coraline* as written in the finest tradition of fairy tales and Gothic fiction, not only addressing very specific fears of childhood such as the already mentioned above, but also children’s creativity and their freedom to explore (Jagannathan 1). This paper aims at presenting the main narrative and aspects that could be understood as gothic aesthetically in Gaiman’s *Coraline* and Selick’s *Coraline*, individually analyzing each work and providing a

comparison so as to discern which one delivers a better understanding of Coraline's gothic coming-of-age.

For Chloé Buckley, "the uncanny [is] one of the most useful theoretical tools for understanding children's fiction" (Buckley 58) and, furthermore, some critics have asserted "that childhood itself is uncanny" (Rollin and West in Buckley 58). David Rudd defines *Coraline* as a "rich and powerful work" that participates in a long tradition of "exploring the darker side of life", and which aims at the negotiation of "one's place in the world" (Rudd 159-60). Karen Coats's analysis of *Coraline* argues that Gaiman's work is "well made [...] giving concrete expression to abstract psychic processes... mingling the horror with healthy doses of humor and hope" (Coats 91). Now, Buckley further argues that the importance of *Coraline* in the literary canon of children's fiction relies on the underlying psychoanalytic themes and the uncanny, making it a "monumental" work (Buckley 61). When considering morality and children's literature, Henry Hughes states that the evil forces are eventually destroyed through justice, even though the Gothic tends to subvert more conventional aspects of morality (Hughes 83-4), and I agree with Saravia and Saravia when they argue that the Gothic elements in *Coraline* support the creation of an environment that is needed for the didactic purpose of the narrative to be perceivable in young readers (89). As Buckley puts it, *Coraline* has been valued for its Gothic nature since it helps young readers in their growth towards being more independent and accepting their own desires and emotions (Buckley 60).

Gaiman's book has not only been catalogued as children's literature: it has also been defined as frightening and definitely Gothic in essence, and it "has rapidly achieved canonical status" (ibid.). Selick's film adaptation successfully captures, explores, and projects the book's gothic essence onto the screen. A fair example of this can be the great and astonishing difference in the use of colors between the Real World—understood as the world in which Coraline lives with her family and her new neighbors—and the Other World—understood as the parallel evil universe that Coraline discovers exploring her new home—. In the Other World, Coraline initially seems to find all she could wish for, and everything seems to be extremely alive and colorful. In fact, everyone pays her the attention she seems to lack back in the Real World.

Coraline's negotiation of her place in the world and the exploration of the darker side of growing up is achieved through the use of devices such as spooky settings, the outsider hero, scary villains such as the Beldam, who is also known as the Other Mother, the main antagonist of both works. She is an evil figure that has the ability of shape-shifting in order to lure children into this Other World that mirrors the Real World to take their soul by sewing button eyes in the children she lures successfully. When Coraline first encounters the ghosts of other children, victims of the Beldam, one of them states that "she stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark" (Gaiman 84). Additionally, the Beldam's true and sinister form is revealed later in both works. While in Gaiman's narrative there are numerous references to arachnid beings

throughout the story and the descriptions of the Other Mother's physique, Selick's film delivers a decaying evolution of the Other Mother's physical characterization into that of an arachnid form while also making use of the color scheme, which becomes duller and darker as the story progresses.

Gothic content within both the book and the film contributes to undermining the idealization of Coraline's family, her own process of growing up, and her coping with moving to a completely different place. Therefore, this holds a significant didactic purpose in young readers that might feel connected to some features of Coraline's story. As George Bluestone states, "changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium [and] the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture" (Bluestone 5). On the same note, Linda Hutcheon argues that "the different media and genres that stories are transcoded to and from in the adapting process are not just formal entities [...] they also represent various ways of engaging audiences" (Hutcheon xiv). Now, despite Selick's film constituting a reproduction and recreation of Gaiman's narrative, there are considerable differences that affect how the audience might interpret Coraline as a character, her story, and her gothic coming-of-age, which is the aim of the comparative analysis presented in this paper. However, as Hutcheon argues, the double nature of an adaptation does not imply that the proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis (Hutcheon 6). Thus, the focus will be on the characterization of Coraline as the main character and how both authors interpret and introduce the Gothic elements in their work as, for example, what the addition of Wyborn—also known as Wybie, a character added in Selick's film who accompanies Coraline throughout her journey and serves purposes such as saving her from the Beldam and also as confidant, since Coraline eventually finds herself talking to him as a friend—means for how the audience interprets Coraline's development and her gothic coming-of-age.

## II. CORALINE'S STORY

The story begins when Coraline and her parents move into a new house; given the stressful situation, and that her parents are always busy with work, Coraline decides to go out exploring around since she feels isolated and ignored. Soon, she meets the neighbors: Miss Mariam Forcible and Miss April Spink, two elderly women retired from the stage who own several Scottie dogs, and Mr. Bobo, an older man who trains mice to play music. In the film, Selick also introduces the character of Wybie, who has just been described above as Coraline's friend. After exploring the surroundings of her new home, she finds a big locked wooden door in the drawing-room, but it is bricked up. In the cinematic adaptation, this door is small and is located in the living room. Behind this door is a parallel, or alternate, world where her Other Mother and her Other Father live, almost exact replicas of her real parents, though they have black buttons instead of eyes. What remains fundamental about not only the Other World but also her Other Parents is that she seems to be more welcomed there than in the Real World.

Everything seems more interesting, fun, and caring at first. At the end of her first visit to the Other World, the Beldam—Coraline’s Other Mother—offers Coraline to stay there with them forever, if she lets her sew buttons over Coraline’s eyes. After rejecting the Beldam’s offer, Coraline goes back home.

When she returns to the Real World, her parents have gone missing, and they do not seem to be returning anytime soon. Coraline soon realizes they have been kidnapped by the Beldam, and decides that she must rescue them. This means that Coraline has to go back to the Other World again, where she will be trapped behind a mirror as punishment for not accepting the Beldam’s gifts. Behind the mirror, she meets the ghostly souls of three children from different eras that had been lured and entrapped by the Beldam. In the novel, Coraline is taken out of this mirror prison by her Other Mother, while in the film, it is Other Wybie who saves Coraline from it. In both works, Coraline decides to challenge the Beldam in a game to find the children’s souls and her missing parents within the Other World. She does so using her wit and the seeing stone that Miss Forcible and Miss Spink gave her, when they first foretold that Coraline was facing an evil force and a dangerous situation. Eventually, Coraline escapes after she manages to find the souls of the three children and her real parents.

Even though Coraline forced the corridor’s door shut, the next day she discovers that the Beldam’s severed hand is in the Real World attempting to steal the corridor’s key, so that the Other Mother can take revenge on her. In the novel, Coraline lures the hand to a well and tricks it into falling in with the key. In the film, even though Coraline is completely unaware of the presence of the Beldam’s hand in the Real World, she decides that she must get rid of the corridor’s key by throwing it into the well. When she is attacked by the Beldam’s hand, it is Wybie who saves her and helps her in the struggle against it, until they finally get rid of it by smashing it with a rock and throwing it into the well alongside the key.

The creation of the Other World is exploited in both works to present Coraline’s coming-of-age experience and her conflict with her family. This gothic world is seen as an alternative reality, since there is nothing that hints at this parallel dimension being created through Coraline’s imagination. As Jagannathan states, “the darkness is an essential ingredient even though it leads to traumatic confrontations for the protagonists because, in that catharsis, both the reader and the protagonist expand their imagination and creativity” (Jagannathan 2). In fact, Nick Midgely’s analysis of *Coraline* supports this claim when he states that “Freud’s work makes clear the way in which confronting the terrifying and the horrific is an important aspect of emotional development” (Midgely 131). Besides, “*Coraline* is here proposed as a gothic text of surfaces, upon which discourses of the child, the uncanny, and psychoanalysis intersect, converge, and come into conflict” (Buckley 62). It will be through Coraline’s experience within this gothic world that readers and audiences will be introduced to her fears of loneliness and inability to fit in, and also to the way she will eventually overcome such fears.

Some viewers might consider *Coraline* inappropriate for children precisely for these Gothic images and content. Nevertheless, Saravia and Saravia argue that Coraline becomes a

more “mature girl who is able to empathize with imperfect adults and appreciate them without having to like or understand everything about them” (Saravia and Saravia 92). By instrumentally contributing to the awakening of young readers (for example, undermining the idealization of family love), the gothic elements in the story serve a significant didactic purpose.

## 2.1. GAIMAN’S CORALINE: THE NOVEL

This section is centered on several aspects that will be analyzed in the novel, such as, for instance, descriptions, dialogues, characterization, and specific roles and symbolism within the story. Coraline is introduced as a naturally curious explorer in a new environment that both frightens her and attracts her attention, so that Coraline’s narrative is that of an adventure story and, first and foremost, a gothic narrative, once the action begins with Coraline’s first contact with the Other World. The story begins with “Coraline discovered the door a little while after they moved into the house” (Gaiman 1), followed by the description of the surrounding area and her neighbors and, then, she goes exploring. However, when it rains, she is not allowed to go out; thus, out of pure boredom and her parents’ indifference, she started wondering about “the old door that opened onto the brick wall” (Gaiman 11) that she and her mother had opened and closed before. That night, Coraline dreamed “of black shapes that slid from place to place [...] little black shapes with little red eyes and sharp yellow teeth [that] started to sing” (Gaiman 11-12). This uncomfortable dream sets the eerie atmosphere for the beginning of Coraline’s gothic adventure. Even though dreams tend to reveal to the reader something that the character is usually afraid to recognize about her/himself, this dream functions as a foretelling element that presents the uncanny nature of the Other World she has awakened when opening the old door, which later reveals a corridor behind it.

To begin with the characterization of Coraline, Gaiman demonstrates Coraline’s adventurous nature when, after crossing the mysterious corridor behind the old door, she steps into what she at first thought of as an empty flat, but she is hit with an overwhelming feeling of uncanniness. “There’s something very familiar about this. It’s the same carpet that we have in our flat” (Gaiman 30), Coraline states as she explores the Other World, realizing that everything seems to look “exactly the same from the outside, or almost exactly the same” (Gaiman 39). Her first visit to the Other World is received with a wonderful, tasty, and homemade meal cooked by the Beldam—her Other Mother—, which constitutes an evident contrast with the food she is used to eating back in the Real World. In Gaiman’s book, we can read the following: “it was the best chicken that Coraline had ever eaten. Her mother sometimes made chicken, but it was always out of packets or frozen, and was very dry, and it never tasted of anything” (Gaiman 29). One of the most relevant differences between novel and film for the purpose of this analysis is Coraline’s attitude towards the Other World and the Beldam. While Coraline in the film seems to be completely happy to be in this alternate world, the Coraline from the book grows suspicious from the very beginning:

It sounded like her mother. Coraline went into the kitchen, where the voice had come from. A woman stood in the kitchen with her back to Coraline. She looked a little like Coraline's mother. Only... Only her skin was white as paper. Only she was taller and thinner. Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp (Gaiman 27-28).

This not only supports the claim of Coraline's wariness towards the Other World and her Other Mother, but also describes the Other Mother and its physical appearance with details that betray an unsettling nature. Literary Coraline is almost convinced, from the very beginning, that the Other World is not a place she feels comfortable spending a lot of time in. However, she decides to go exploring this new mysterious world in which she seems to be able to do whatever she desires, and the adults around her are fine with it.

The presence of adult figures is another issue that has to be dealt with when considering the character of Coraline and her gothic coming-of-age. Eventually, for Coraline, the familiar becomes dangerous in the Other World. That is, although everything in the Other World may seem familiar, since the Beldam has created it as a replica of Coraline's Real World, it will evolve into a dangerous world where Coraline will have to face and overcome her fears regarding isolation and losing her parents to the Beldam's monstrous plans. Karen Coats in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (2008) delves into Coraline's boredom as a transitional point that marks that she is developing her capacity of being alone in the process of identifying her own desires as separate from her parents' (Coats 84). It seems like Coraline's real parents are disengaged and unimaginative, they do not consider bothering to explore their new home nor the neighborhood and, therefore, Coraline has to navigate her adventure alone. It is also true that the rest of the adults that surround Coraline are eccentric people, such as the old actresses who read tea leaves, and the old man who trains mice. As an example of the disconnection between the desires of Coraline's parents and her own, Coats refers to when Coraline goes shopping with her mom: while her mother is "aligned with the shop assistant and the school's dress code", Coraline "wants to assert an individual sense of style by buying some Dayglo green gloves" (Coats 84). The importance of this event in the narrative is translated and adapted into Selick's film, for it shows Coraline's separation from her mother. Coats also quotes Coraline's mother when she asks Coraline where she has been, to which she replies, "I was kidnapped by aliens [...] They came down from outer space with ray guns, but I fooled them by wearing a wig and laughing in a foreign accent, and I escaped", to which her mother plainly replies, "Yes, dear. Now I think you could do with some more hair clips, don't you?" (Gaiman 24). I agree with Coats when she argues that these small interactions clearly represent Coraline's searching for her own desires while feeling alone in the presence of her mother. Significantly, it is after this disconnection is presented in the novel that Coraline embarks on her first visit to the Other World.

Drawing back to the significance of the adult figures in the story, analyzing their characterization is key since the apparent absence of competent, caring adult figures is what drives

Coraline to fend for herself when her parents have gone missing and, ultimately, leads to her adventure. One of her first reactions when she realizes that her parents have been kidnapped is to call the police. However, the officer replies the following:

You ask your mother to make you a big old mug of hot chocolate, and then give you a great big old hug. There's nothing like hot chocolate and a hug for making the nightmares go away. And if she starts to tell you off for waking her up at this time of night, why you tell her that that's what the policeman said. (Gaiman 55)

In the novel, Coraline's reality is that she is truly alone in this tangible nightmare. Other adult figures, such as Miss Forcible and Miss Spink, are significant not only as characters that warn Coraline about evil things lurking in the darkness, but also as one of the main elements of gothic literature, foretelling the future to the reader through visions and dreams. It has been already mentioned how Coraline dreamed about the rats and their song, however, it is because of Miss Forcible and Miss Spink that Coraline's future is foreshadowed as one with an evil presence that Coraline will have to face when they read her fortune in the tea leaves:

"You know, Caroline," she said, after a while, "you are in terrible danger."  
Miss Forcible snorted, and put down her knitting. "Don't be silly, April. Stop scaring the girl. Your eyes are going. Pass me that up, child." [...]  
"Oh dear," she said. "You were right, April. She *is* in danger." (Gaiman 20)

The use of italics in the novel emphasizes that the danger is already upon Coraline. Miss Forcible and Miss Spink are two adult figures that, despite their eccentric characterization, help Coraline through their warning and the seeing stone. This is also significant when considering other characters such as the black cat, which holds a greater purpose in the novel than in the film, as will be argued later. Unlike cinematic Coraline, who navigates the Other World with the Other Wybie, literary Coraline can only really express her honest fears and feelings to the black cat. In other words, in the novel, Coraline interacts and dialogues with the cat, while in the film these kinds of interactions are reconstructed through Wybie; these interactions with the cat are added to Coraline's inner monologue, fundamental in the narrative.

Following Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and his narrative pattern of the monomyth, or hero's journey, Coraline—the hero—is helped by a mentor-ally figure—that could arguably be represented by the cat in the novel—who ventures into the unknown facing conflict but, ultimately, overcoming these difficulties and returning home, transformed. To support this argument of the cat as a mentor-ally figure, observing the dialogues between them is necessary:

"Small world," said Coraline.  
"It's big enough for her", said the cat. "Spider's webs only have to be large enough to catch flies."  
Coraline shivered. (Gaiman 75)



Here, Coraline has discovered that the Other World only goes as far as her house and the surrounding area; once she tries to go further, she is brought back to where she started exploring. Even though at first she might think she was free to do as she pleased without getting bored, she has noticed she is trapped in the Beldam's world. A world that, as the cat points out to Coraline, is in fact a spider's web in which Coraline has fallen into. This quote, and the following one, hold great philosophical and metaphorical significance for Coraline's adventure. The cat's dialogues are full of philosophical undertones and even, as hinted by scholars quoted at the beginning of the paper, psychoanalytic:

"Stop it!" said Coraline.

The cat dropped the rat between its two front paws. "There are those," it said with a sigh, in tones as smooth as oiled silk, "who have suggested that the tendency of a cat to play with its prey is a merciful one—after all, it permits the occasional funny little running snack to escape, from time to time. How often does your dinner get to escape?" (Gaiman 76)

In this conversation, the cat is presenting a moral dilemma about food, preys, life and death, so it actually poses a question to the reader and to Coraline herself: who is the prey? In the context of the spider's web metaphor, if Coraline is the fly that the spider is catching and, therefore, the prey, is the Beldam playing with her and giving her the chance to escape? This quote also goes hand in hand with the foreshadowing trope that has been mentioned before and supports the idea of the cat playing the role of mentor-ally.

In fact, when Coraline is trying to find out what the Other Mother truly desires, the cat replies, "'She wants something to love, I think,' said the cat. 'Something that isn't her. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that'" (Gaiman 65). This dialogue on the nature of the Other Mother reinforces how Coraline is at first intrigued by the Other World as a place where all of her desires would be met without any problem or argument, but soon she realizes that she will, in fact, not be allowed to desire anything that the Other Mother would not want her to. Coraline would never be able to go beyond her Other Mother's desire: she would be confined to her, which is the horrific nature lying beneath the Beldam, her love being an insatiable desire to consume Coraline. Following the analysis offered by Coats, the ghost children that Coraline meets when imprisoned behind the mirror were unable to learn the "paradoxical lesson that Coraline does, that desire doesn't work by getting everything you want" (Coats 84). Coraline is able to grow not only as a child but also as a character: "'You really don't understand, do you?' [Coraline] said. 'I don't *want* whatever I want. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted? Just like that, and it didn't mean anything. What then?'" (Gaiman 120). While the Other Mother does not understand Coraline, Coraline is "unlike other children, discriminating enough to know what she likes, and she also knows, somehow, that being bored is a necessary move in the game" (Coats 85). This is part of the lesson that readers will receive when accompanying Coraline in her adventure. Besides, the fact that this is a gothic narrative brings

a nasty villain that must be defeated, while also functioning as context and escape through which fears, anxieties, and inner dramas are not abstract but represented in a dark and haunting way so that children can actually see them and face them.

## 2.1. SELICK'S CORALINE: THE FILM

This section will replicate the previous one, but referencing Selick's film adaptation instead. Given that it is an audiovisual medium, light, color, and dialogue will be more significant in the analysis. In the novel, the point of view is that of the protagonist, so that the readers share Coraline's point of view. In the film, the point of view shifts necessarily as it is not made in the first-person point of view, thus placing the audience as spectators watching Coraline. Descriptive passages in Gaiman's novel are adapted to long shots and close-ups that show the extreme detail put into the animation design and development, giving birth to Coraline's adventure from our imagination onto the screen.

The first significant change that Selick introduces in the film adaptation is the addition of an opening sequence, set in what seems to be the Beldam's workshop. This sequence, as the beginning of the story, introduces the audience to a pair of metallic hands made of needles, making a stuffed doll with black button eyes that bears an incredible and uncanny resemblance to the hero of the story, Coraline. Just as with the analysis of the first sentence of a novel, this credit scene, without any dialogue but with eerie background chanting, sets the mood for the film.



Figure 1 Credit scene, the making of doll Coraline (Selick).

The detailed close-ups and the color scheme used during this credit scene create an eerie atmosphere that sets the gothic tone for the Other World's nature and the dangers that Coraline will have to face. As mentioned above, there are no dialogues during this scene, but we can hear children chanting in the background and, just before the doll is finished, the Beldam itself joins the chanting for a few seconds. Another important detail to consider is that we are able to see the Beldam's hands in its true form, rather than a couple of human hands, which would lessen the feeling of uncanniness that this scene builds up in the spectators from the very beginning of the film.

Now, the characterization of the hero of the story is also significant: cinematic Coraline is presented as more naïve, which makes her character development more noticeable in the end. Her growth and her coming-of-age story as she becomes the hero of her own story make the ending more rewarding, since her increased maturity is observed. As mentioned before, while literary Coraline does not feel comfortable in the Other World from the very first visit, the characterization of Coraline as unsuspecting is peculiar to the film, in which she perceives the Other World as a paradise compared to her own reality.

However, this is not the only element that changes how the character of Coraline is adapted and, thus, perceived by the spectators; the role of adult figures is also significant. While, in the film, Coraline's parents are also disengaged and unimaginative, Coraline is constantly trying to catch her parents' attention. Besides, they do not go missing until after a few days of Coraline's first visit to the Other World, and still, there are neighbors around offering their help and aid to her, contrary to the literary version. In the film adaptation, Coraline is constructed and perceived as more sociable, aiming at winning her workaholic parents' attention.

Films have music, sound effects, tones of voices, even breathing and gasps, which are all elements used to play with empathy and affect, to signal hidden emotions that cannot, in film, be communicated through an interior monologue without a voiceover. Thus, another significant addition that has a great impact on how we perceive Coraline and her coming-of-age is the fact that Selick introduces Wybie to the story. What he brings into the picture is a mixture of comic scenes and dialogues that water down and ease the tension of the gothic atmosphere. Furthermore, through Coraline's interactions with Wybie, we are able to find the traces of her inner monologue—very much present throughout the entire novel—. It could be argued that in the novel, Coraline interacts with the black cat, while in the film this kind of interaction is reconstructed through Wybie. Drawing back to Campbell's hero's journey, Wybie can be analyzed as the mentor-ally of the film. This decision to have a certain character be split or combined brings narrative consistency to the film. The purpose of adding Wybie as the only other child who shares, to some extent, Coraline's adventure is to provide Coraline with an external interlocutor to share her thoughts; even though the film could have employed a first-person point of view, Selick chose to insert an actual character instead. In fact, when

considering that Other Wybie is mute, it might be even argued that it takes on a bit of an imaginary friend role.

While Other Wybie is necessary to show what a sweet and idealized world the Other Mother has created for Coraline, the novel remains much creepier in essence, since Coraline has to navigate it all by herself. Additionally, even though at first Other Wybie is used by the Other Mother as a way of providing Coraline with a friend, since sharing all those new experiences is fun and appealing when she has someone with her, he tries to snap Coraline out of that fantasy when the Other Mother is not around. Wybie remains absolutely necessary in the movie and to cinematic Coraline to show her that not all is as it seems, as well as to save her from the prison behind the mirror and also help her escape through the corridor. He remains an active force on her side while in the Other World, so that Coraline has someone to rely on. However, when the Other Mother realizes that Other Wybie has become a problem in her schemes, Coraline will find Other Wybie's clothes hanging empty from Other Mr. Bobinski's—Mr. Bobo from the books—flagpole.



*Figure 2 Other Wybie's clothes hanging (Selick).*

Wybie shows Coraline and the spectators how terrible the Other World is, as this scene depicts the terrifying fate that Other Wybie has met for not abiding by the Other Mother's commands. Coraline is shocked when she sees her friend's clothes like this, which further delivers the serious and dangerous nature of the Other World to the spectators, viscerally and emotionally.

Additionally, Wybie as a character is also important in the Real World because he helps movie Coraline getting rid of the Beldam's hand that escaped from the Other World in search of the corridor's key and Coraline herself, to drag her down to the Other Mother. This becomes

essential when tackling Coraline's gothic coming-of-age and comparing the two works: inevitably, the film, by bringing Wybie into the story, eases the struggle that literary Coraline has to go through in her journey. The fact that literary Coraline is isolated and alone makes her gothic experience more frightening, whereas she has Wybie in the film to help counter the horrific elements that are at the core of the Other World. Therefore, Wybie can be defined as an ally archetype following Joseph Campbell's monomyth. Selick presents a more friendly environment by adding allies into the mix while maintaining the mentoring role of Miss Forcible and Miss Spink, who also guide Coraline providing her with the valuable and useful tool—the seeing stone—that she will need to escape the Other World just as it happens in the novel.

Paying attention to color and scenery in Selick's film, it seems as if the Real World is more gothic in terms of the frightening atmosphere and the apparent lack of life and color, as we can see in the following comparison between figure 3 and 4 of the same event happening in the two worlds at different times. As it can be observed in figure 3, Coraline's home in the Real World is dull, boring, with a color palette of cold tones that conveys an unwelcoming feeling.



Figure 3 Coraline having dinner in the Real World (Selick).

Contrary to this, figure 4 presents Coraline's home in the Other World with warm color tones, which presents a more welcoming and familiar atmosphere. The reason for this is because the Beldam feeds on Coraline's fears, anxieties, and unhappiness; besides, as has already been mentioned, this world is in fact a trap that has been designed specifically for Coraline. Here, the film adaptation pays special attention to every single detail, creating different feelings in the spectators through the choice of color tones, type of shot, and even the characterization of the different people involved in the scene, such as Coraline's Other Father wearing a red

robe—arguably a sign of his non-workaholic nature to completely contrast with Coraline’s Real Father.



Figure 4 Coraline having dinner in the Other World (Selick).

The attention and care to detail in the film adaptation are such that even what, at first, might seem insignificant, can carry a strong meaning. An example of this can be found in the “Welcome home!” cake that Coraline’s Other Mother has prepared for her.



Figure 5 "Welcome home!" cake in the Other World (Selick).

Again, with warm tones and a detailed shot, Selick presents a cake that superficially represents a gift for Coraline. The Beldam wants to take care of her and provide her with things she wished she had in the Real World. However, nothing is random: this cake features a double loop on the lower-case O in the term 'home'. Considering the popular graphology's interpretation of this, a double loop on a lower-case O means that the person who wrote it is actually lying (Raghavendra 103). However, there is no double loop on the lower-case O in the term 'Welcome'. Thus, the cake means that Coraline is truly welcomed in the Other World, but she is not home. This element can arguably be interpreted as a feature foreshadowing the dangers that Coraline will be facing along her adventure in the Other World.

One last significant element to be considered in this analysis is the door and the corridor through which Coraline has access to the Other World. While literary Coraline finds her way through a "big, carved, brown, wooden door at the far corner of the drawing room" (Gaiman 8), cinematic Coraline finds a tiny door in one of the walls of the living room, after the little stuffed doll that we saw in the credit scene mysteriously disappears from the table where Coraline left her and reappears exactly in front of the small door next to the chimney, as we can observe in figure 6.



Figure 6 Coraline follows a mouse that gets into the small door at night discovering the corridor (Selick).

Even though when Coraline's mother opened the door for her—as a deal for Coraline to “zip it” and leave her alone to her work—it revealed a wall of bricks, at night a little mouse guides Coraline again to the door, just as the stuffed doll previously did, only to actually find the corridor behind. The symbolism that the corridor holds in both works is incredibly significant as one of the essential gothic elements that differ from one work to the other.

In the novel, the corridor is first described attending to its smell, “a cold, musty smell [...] like something very old and very slow” (Gaiman 26), with red carpet beneath her feet, just the same carpet she had at her new home. It seems like a pretty small corridor. However, later in the narrative, Coraline describes a dark hallway behind the old wooden door as

an uphill run [that] went on for a longer distance than anything could possibly go. The wall she was touching felt warm and yielding now, and, she realized, it felt as if it were covered in a fine downy fur. It moved, as if it were taking a breath. She snatched her hand away from it. (Gaiman 135)

Thus, this element seems to be alive or, at least, to change as the story develops. The fact that Coraline’s fear is derived from the corridor being warm is interesting, as one would expect a dark corridor to be cold, just as it was described the first time. This warmth makes it quite uncanny by virtue of being an unexpected trait. Furthermore, combined with the “fur”, and the movement that the narrative compares to “taking a breath” the corridor is portrayed as being alive. These details provided by Gaiman in the novel can be used to argue that the corridor emulates having Coraline eaten, maybe walking down the corridor’s ‘throat’. Additionally, following the novel, Coraline “knew that if she fell in that corridor she might never get up again. Whatever that corridor was was older by far than the other mother. It was deep, and slow, and it knew that she was there” (Gaiman 136). These passages present another level of horror, where the corridor is defined as another grotesque, evil being that makes Coraline struggle on her way out and seems to grow creepier the more scared Coraline gets. In fact, there are two possible readings of these passages: either the corridor is used as a literary device to let the readers know how scared Coraline is on her journeys, or the corridor is actually evil and alive just like the Beldam. In other words, the second quote, through Coraline’s eyes, provides the corridor with a conscience. It is particularly significant and interesting that Coraline believes that the corridor is older than the Beldam, because it makes the readers question whether the Beldam is really that powerful or if this monstrous corridor was in control all along. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this article, the symbolism that the corridor holds is analyzed as a metaphor for how scary growing up is. Coraline’s fears and anxieties have grown throughout the story, since she has had to take responsibility and be brave enough to save her parents from the Beldam. Inevitably, though expressed through a gothic narrative, she is growing up. The more she steps into the unknown, the feeling of fear and uncanny are intensified, so the corridor might just be reproducing Coraline’s subconscious.

To finish with this section, the passageway to the Other World is adapted in the cinematic version as a corridor through which Coraline has to crawl every time. However, it also changes along with the story. The corridor during the first part of the movie is presented as pretty and appealing, but slowly fades into a cluttered crawl space as the story progresses and Coraline travels back and forth. Figures 7 and 8 show the corridor at two different points in the film.





*Figure 7 Coraline crawling through the corridor for the first time (Selick).*



*Figure 8 Coraline running back home after escaping the Beldam (Selick).*

Here, it is also significant to remark how the moods of the two different scenes are changed, not only due to the appearance of the corridor itself but also because of elements inherent to the audiovisual medium. In figure 7, Coraline has just discovered the corridor, and the color palette is combined with sound effects similar to fairies flying around. In figure 8, the corridor has completely lost its life and color, it is full of messy stuff around it and covered in spider webs. Moreover, this scene in particular holds greater horrific elements such as the Beldam repeatedly shouting “Don’t leave me!” while not only pounding the door but also reducing

the corridor's length as if it were to eat Coraline, just like the feeling readers get in Gaiman's novel, but adapted to the screen. To conclude, a small door can very well provide the spectators with a sense of uncanny and dread, for it is not something common, it actually stands out as something suspicious and out of place. It could also be argued, relating it to children's literature and the lack of adults, that it is an element necessarily aimed at children. In other words, it is possible to argue that the film focuses more on the child as the target of the gothic.

### III. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE GOTHIC ELEMENTS

Having delved into the important elements and differences in each of the texts, this section is devoted to discussing how cinematic Coraline appears as more naïve, how foreshadowing is used differently, and also the impact of Wybie's character in Coraline's coming-of-age and the reception of the gothic elements in the spectators. The lack of adults, or the lack of competent care, is arguably a strong point of comparison between the novel and the film since Campbell's hero's journey monomyth is presented differently in each of the texts. Two characters that maintain their archetype roles are Miss Forcible and Miss Spink as mentors, who aid Coraline indirectly, before she is even aware of the danger she will find herself in, by providing her with an essential tool to escape and see the true nature of the Other World. Despite this, they are not able to take up the role of allies for Coraline when she tries to find them after her parents have been kidnapped. On the one hand, in Gaiman's work, the black cat is both a mentor and an ally of Coraline throughout the story by not only physically helping Coraline struggle with the rats and the Beldam itself, but also psychologically, by making Coraline ask herself questions that will aid her facing and overcoming her fears preparing her for the catharsis of the story. On the other hand, Selick's work constructs a doubling of the black cat by adding Wybie into the film.

A clear example of how the addition of Wybie, with the role of ally for Coraline in both worlds, is significant in the perception of Coraline's gothic narrative can be observed in the ending of the film. This is also central in the comparison, for it is what shows to what extent Coraline has, as a character, developed, matured, or changed after her adventure. While the novel shows Coraline as being brave, resourceful, and wise from the very beginning—she notices that the Beldam's hand has followed her into the Real World and she is able to patiently wait and plan how to trap it on her own—, the movie delivers a rather more improvised situation in which Wybie helps Coraline getting rid of the Beldam's hand, to which Coraline was completely oblivious. This change in the story falls in the 'boy saves girl' narrative paradigm.

In both works, the archetype of the shapeshifter is used in the Other World through the different creations of the Beldam, which represent unstable or shifting characters that mislead Coraline and act as a catalyst of change by bringing in doubt and suspense. As an example of this, we find Coraline's Other Father, Other Miss Forcible, and Other Miss Spink. Gaiman's work pays more attention to detail in description, while Selick's work delivers the same

uncanny feeling by adding sound effects, lighting, and the physical characterization of the decaying nature of the Beldam's creations. Despite these elements, Wybie remains the main difference between the two texts in terms of character roles.

Coraline's gothic coming-of-age in the film adaptation is thus inevitably different from the original. Even if Selick's work delivers a great adaptation of Gaiman's story into the big screen, the book still allows for greater room for gothic elements, or a major influence of the gothic in Coraline's coming of age since the novel leaves more to the imagination eliciting uncanny images in the reader. Arguably, both works make use of the uncanny and the gothic genre as the setting for Coraline's adventure and her development as a child. Furthermore, in both versions of Coraline's story, the notion that children's literature holds a moralizing value can be traced. The decision of making the story a bit more cheerful and have goofy characters, such as Wybie, allows the film to be more appealing to a wider audience. Moreover, the notion that Coraline is constantly navigating and exploring in a subconscious way to escape her boring reality is crucial to both versions of the story. As a premise, she felt like her parents did not pay attention to her and that she can find the exact opposite on the other side of the corridor. In the Other World, her negative feelings and emotions are released when in touch with the gothic, fantastic dimension she deals with, and her intelligence is engaged. Thus, Coraline's adventurous nature is enhanced in her journey back and forth to the Other World and in her quest to save her parents from the Beldam. Her exploration of the Other World is cathartic and, as a result of her contact with this gothic reality, Coraline returns home a more mature child, having understood, for example, the value of her family.

Another significant difference between the two texts is how readers and spectators receive said value of family and love. Arguably, the film makes it more evident that Coraline was not mature enough to understand her parent's needs in terms of, for example, working or what moving houses meant for them concerning stress. Coraline comes back home with a lesson learned, which is that loving parents would not allow her to do whatever she wishes every day at all times, nor pay her full attention constantly. In the novel, while Coraline was at first not comfortable with her neighbors—who were not able to even get her name right, as they repeatedly called her "Caroline"—she comes back to give a tight hug to Miss Spink, who says, "What an extraordinary child' [...] No one had hugged her like that since she had retired from the theater" (Gaiman 161). Coraline's growth in the novel is observed through her subtle gestures with her family and those who surround her, whereas Coraline's growth in the film is more evidently hinted in, for example, her complete change of attitude towards Wybie—who at first she could not even stand.

The devices distinctive of dark fantasy and gothic narratives are fundamental in the construction of such an evolution, allowing the readers to grasp and recognize themselves in Coraline's situation. Eventually, young readers will follow her development as a character and observe the progressive construction of a "new" Coraline that is presented as not only more mature but also more appreciative of the world that surrounds her. Thus, the moral is

that imperfection is inherent in life, and that the idealization of love does not have any good consequences. Additionally, Coraline's perception of her parents' treatment and her overall situation was distorted by the "trauma" of moving to a new house, which might imply a loss of security for children, as they lose sight of the world as they know it—their city, their friends, school, etc.; this is also part of the lesson she learns in the end, how to adapt to a new reality and face uncomfortable changes. In short, while Gaiman's text focuses on Coraline and her growth, Selick's film draws on conventional narrative paradigms such as the already mentioned "boy saves girl," and the family coming back together.

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