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Introduction

Neil Gaiman is an author of fantasy and horror fiction, who has written many books for adults, young-adults, and children. A few titles of his children's books are *The Day I Swapped My Dad For Two Goldfish* (1997), *The Wolves In The Walls* (2003), *Coraline* (2002), *The Graveyard Book* (2008), and *Chu's Day* (2013). His works for young-adults and children are immensely popular because they offer that specific group of readers a unique, paradoxical reading experience; they are simultaneously scary and pleasurable. In offering young readers pleasurable, even attractive scares, Gaiman, on the one hand, is following in the footsteps of authors such as Roald Dahl, whose books, such as *The Witches* (1983) and *Matilda* (1988), are foundation stones of pleasurable children's horror stories. On the other hand, as this thesis will show, Gaiman has developed a unique and recognizable style that has revolutionized the production of children's literature in the past few decades. In fact, Gaiman's style has helped the development of a new genre that can be tentatively named cozy gothic.

According to Wagner, Golden, and Bissette:

> In ages past children were supposed to be afraid. Original bedtime stories and fairy tales—back to the Brothers Grimm and earlier—were cautionary tales … suffice to say that the fear and wonder that great children's literature can produce are useful and necessary. There is catharsis for children in such works. The fears they read about—the harrowing or disturbing adventures they take within the pages of books—can distract them from genuine fears, but they can also help process their fears and emerge less fearful. (345)

Children's books no longer have to be cautionary tales; they can be scary for the sake of scaring the reader, or works of grotesque fun, as Mark West has argued is the case with Dahl's "horrific" children's stories. Most striking about the style that Neil Gaiman has

developed in writing his children's books is the idea that being scared is not only thrilling, but can actually be a joyful, positive reading experience.

This thesis will critically explore the relationship between the style and the content of three major works of children's fiction by Neil Gaiman in order to explain how horror can in fact be a source of pleasure. *Coraline* is a story about a young girl who feels ignored by her workaholic parents, and decides to explore her new flat. She stumbles upon an other apartment in which her other mother lives who has buttons for eyes. She keeps ghosts in the closet in which she also locks up Coraline, and has stolen the souls of Coraline's true parents. The other mother wants to keep Coraline, and so Coraline has to play a game with the other mother. She has to find her parents' souls so that she can return to her own apartment and her parents. Chapter one will show that in *Coraline* Gaiman reversed several fundamental children's literature themes, and in doing so created a paradoxical reading experience, during which horror is simultaneously pleasurable and thrilling.

The Graveyard Book is a story about a little boy named Bod who survives an attack on his family by an assassin when he is still a toddler. His parents and sibling are killed, but he manages to escape the house and ends up in the city's old graveyard. The ghosts living in the graveyard decide to keep the boy and raise him. When Bod is all grown up, he has to leave the graveyard and live in the "real" world. The characters in the real world, such as the Man Jack and the shopkeeper, are in fact horrifying. In this novel, Gaiman again reverses various conventions of horror. Chapter two will show that the graveyard is a safe haven, and the real world is full of horrors. Generally speaking, in horror, a graveyard is not a happy place, and the living-dead are not considered to be warm, loving people. But Gaiman manages to reshape this horror setting with its

undead characters in such a way that it is a homely and attractive place, while turning the real world into a place of horror peopled with evil characters.

MirrorMask (2005) was originally a movie, scripted by Gaiman. Later, Gaiman's publisher decided to publish the script, illustrated by Dave McKean, who also did the visual design for the movie and directed it. The story is about a 15-year old girl named Helena who struggles with the process of developing her identity and clearly struggles with her current self. She lives in the circus with her parents, but when her mother collapses and is hospitalized, Helena has to develop her own identity. Helena enters a parallel, dreamlike universe made up of the light world and the dark world, in which she goes in search of a talisman called the MirrorMask. With that talisman, she can save the light world and the dark world and travel back to her own world. Chapter three will show that the chaotic and hybrid style of the book reflects what typically goes on in the mind of a teenage reader: anxiety about identity, future, and the sense of self.

The Public Reception of Gaiman's Work

Coraline has received much praise from reviewers. Philip Pullman reviewed the book for *The Guardian*. About the tone of the book Pullman says, "the matter-of-fact tone is important, because this is a marvelously strange and scary book." Pullman touches upon this intriguing paradox that exists in this book, that of being marvelous, strange, and scary at the same time. Overall, Pullman is highly enthusiastic about *Coraline*. He concludes: "there is the creepy atmosphere of the other flat—the scariest apartment since the one in David Lynch's film *Lost Highway* (1997); there is the tender and beautifully judged ending; and above all, there is Coraline herself, brave and frightened, self-reliant and doubtful, and finally triumphant. Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, rise to your feet and applaud: Coraline is the real thing" (Pullman). Pullman

highlights the tension between the matter-of-fact tone of this book, and the creepy setting and storyline. These literary traits are exactly what brings about the paradoxical reading experience.

The Graveyard Book won the 2009 Newberry Medal, awarded each year to the most inspiring children's book by the American Library Association. According to Monica Edinger, who wrote a review of *The Graveyard Book* for the *New York Times*, Gaiman's book raised much debate among librarians and critics around the US. They asked themselves and each other if awarding a popular author known for writing dark horror and fantasy novels the Newberry Medal was a good, and also welcome change (Edinger). According to her, "the tone shifts elegantly from horror to suspense to domesticity, and by the end of the first chapter Gaiman has established the graveyard as the story's center" (Edinger). Gaiman's peculiar tone is one of the aspects of his style that attracts young readers to the story. Despite the story being scary, the tone soothes the reader by shifting elegantly from "horror to suspense to domesticity" (Edinger). Edinger concludes: "while *The Graveyard Book* will entertain people of all ages, it's especially a tale for children. Children will appreciate Bod's occasional mistakes and bad manners, and relish his good acts and eventual great ones. The story's language and humor are sophisticated, but Gaiman respects his readers and trusts them to understand." Because Gaiman "respects his readers and trusts them to understand" the sophisticated humor (Edinger), he is able to write in a language entertaining for both adults and children, which makes the book appealing to a much larger audience. Children will be able to identify with Bod and sympathize with him, while adults will enjoy the storytelling skills Gaiman has used to craft this book.

William Morrow wrote an extensive review of *MirrorMask* for *The Green Man Review.* He starts his review by saying:

> If you're a fan of either the writing of Neil Gaiman (which I most certainly am, as he rarely disappoints me) or the ever so cool artwork of Dave McKean (his artwork for Gaiman's *Coraline* added just the perfect touch of creepiness to that short novel), you'll definitely want this work.

Morrow is very enthusiastic about this collaboration between Gaiman and McKean, but not many reviewers agree with him. Lisa Goldstein, a New York Public Library librarian is disappointed: "McKean's stark but lively pen-and-ink drawings perfectly reflect the narrative's sinister humor…While entertaining, this scant story is less developed than Gaiman's other work." While the story is less developed than Gaiman's other works, it still contains many aspects typical of Gaiman's style.

Even though Gaiman's work is often classified as horror, it is popular with young readers because Gaiman has adapted classic adult horror conventions, such as villainous and/or monstrous characters, resourceful heroes and heroines, the haunted house and other stereotypical settings such as a graveyard, for a younger readership, which makes horror accessible and thrilling without scaring young readers away. In other words, horror becomes a form of fun.

In order to explain Gaiman's success in adapting horror for a young audience, I will analyze the novels in the context of Jerry Griswold's five literary "themes" for children's literature, as developed in his book *Feeling Like A Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature* (2006). Griswold's theory makes it possible to situate the books in the context of children's literature studies. Griswold reveals that children's stories, like other genres of popular story-telling, follow certain conventions. Studying the style of children's books has to be done in the context of those conventions. Because Gaiman's children's books are also horror fictions, I will also place the texts in the context of Noël Carroll's theories concerning the attraction of art-horror, as developed in *The*

Philosophy of Horror (1990). Furthermore, I will analyze the uncanny, as an aesthetic effect, in Gaiman's works. The uncanny was originally a psychological term, but has been developed into a term describing a literary convention employed to construct thrilling pleasures. As a literary convention, the uncanny was developed as early as the classic gothic fiction of the end of the eighteenth century. Together, these theoretical frameworks—outlined in more detail below—allow for a critical exploration of the pleasurable nature of the horrific content of Gaiman's bestselling children's fictions.

Griswold's Five Themes of Children's Literature

Griswold's five recurring "themes" in popular children's literature are: snugness, scariness, smallness, lightness, and aliveness. Griswold explains that "these five themes or qualities in literature, looked at in a different way, can be seen as feelings or sensations prevalent in childhood" (3). These themes, or qualities, embedded in the children's stories are points of recognition for the child reader. They draw the child to the book.

Snugness is the first of five literary themes. It seems "a pleasurable feeling especially sought in childhood" (5). In short, it is a feeling that surfaces when playing behind old furniture, building and playing in pillow forts, or sleeping in snug places, such as attics. According to Griswold, "children seek this feeling" as it echoes the sense of the uterus—the ultimate snug place for humans because that is the place where people develop and grow into humans (5). The theme of snugness will be critically explored in more detail in chapter one.

The second theme is scariness. According to Griswold, "scariness seems to play a larger role in stories for children than for adults … fear seems so common as almost to be an omnipresent feature in their literature" (35). In other words, most children's

books contain a fear factor. Traditionally, fairytales are cautionary tales that scare children into good behavior, providing them with "moral education," as Bruno Bettelheim has argued (5). These days, fantastic stories do not have to scare children into being good, but they do represent an element of fear that is, as Griswold states, "more acute in kids' lives than in the lives of grown-ups…childhood has more than its measure of anxieties and fears—some big, some small—but children do not know which are 'big' and which are 'small'" (35-37). Authors of children's books try to make the anxieties and fears that children may have tangible.

Griswold differentiates between two types of scares authors can induce in their readers. The first one is the good scare. One form of a good scare is the traditional cautionary tale. The German children's story *Der Struwwelpeter* (1845) is an example of a classic cautionary tale. This book was written to scare children away from bad behavior, such as sucking your thumb, and playing with matches. This book is about children who misbehave and their bizarre fates they suffer due to their bad behavior. Though *Der Struwwelpeter* is a cautionary tale, it is a rather extreme example because the children in the book either die or suffer horrible injuries due to their bad behavior. A less extreme form of the cautionary tale—and more well-known story—is the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697). Little Red Riding Hood was warned by her mother to not leave the path in the woods when she is going to visit her grandmother. When Little Red Riding Hood disobeys her mother and strays from the path, she encounters the wolf who then decides to go to Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother's house and pretend to be Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother so he can attack Little Red Riding Hood and eat her. The moral of this story is to listen to your mother and not to disobey; if you disobey your parents, bad things will happen.

The second form of the good scare is a scare that teaches children to master their fears. *Coraline* is an example of a story that teaches children to master their fears, because the character of Coraline has to overcome her own fears—being locked up inside a closet with the ghosts of children, and trying to break out—in order to beat the other mother. Once Coraline does overcome her fears of the haunted house and the scary other mother, she becomes victorious in beating the other mother. The moral in this story is fear is only a limitation; once you overcome your fears you can be successful at anything you undertake.

Another function of scariness is to induce the oxymoronic emotional experience of discomforting fun. Griswold writes, "There is something paradoxical in these delights because the fundamental feeling of being frightened is acute discomfort … It is a visceral experience: our flesh creeps, we get goose bumps, we break out in a cold sweat" (45). Despite this discomforting, physical experience, the worldwide success of series such as R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* prove that many children devour scary books.

Griswold has an explanation for this search for scariness: "Whether threatening or pleasurable, scariness confirms the experience of living. Being frightened is stimulating and thrilling because it wakes up a more vivid self in response…the proximate encounter with pain in the fiction of a scary story evokes a more intense feeling of being alive and heightened recognition of being an individual" (49). Reading scary stories helps children feel like an individual who is alive. They have a fear that they can experience on their own, not depending on their parents.

Smallness is the third theme that Griswold discusses in his book. The name speaks for itself. Smallness is "a reflection of their [children] diminished power" (53). Children can, unconsciously, identify with objects and animals that are small because children are small human beings living in a world of adults who are taller and larger

than them: “In terms of altitude, children constitute an overlooked underclass” (54). When coming across characters or objects of smallness in books and stories, the child reader can easily identify because they are small themselves. They feel a sense of recognition despite being that smaller and overlooked class.

The fourth theme Griswold discusses in his book is lightness. According to Griswold, “characters are more likely to go airborne than in adult fare” (76). This is the most literal definition of lightness. A prime example of this definition of lightness is Peter Pan and the children in J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911). Those characters are so light—because of pixie dust—that they can fly. But lightness can also be defined via emotions. Griswold writes:

> Emotional experiences are translated into muscular events: how, over time, individuals become rigid and stiff, sclerotic and blocked, in response to feeling thwarted or obstructed; how maturation involves the construction of “body armor” as a defense mechanism to perceived threats; and how this muscular rigidity is accompanied by feelings of being unloved, helpless, and unable to communicate. (77)

Childlike characters in children’s literature have not yet matured on an emotional level. They are not yet “rigid and stiff, sclerotic and blocked,” as a response to emotional stimulation, simply because their life, so far, has been very short (77). Therefore, childlike characters are “fluid, mobile and light” (77). As the longer quote indicates, maturing as a person involves constructing body armor to defend oneself from such emotional stimulation. Because of this body armor, a person—or character in a book—becomes less mobile and fluid, and thus less light.

Lightness can also be defined by other characteristics and incidents occurring to the characters in a novel. Mischief is seen as a form of lightness because a character

breaks from a rigid surrounding, restricted by rules. A good example of this form of lightness is the character of Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). An example of the mischief of Tom Sawyer can be found in the scene in which Aunt Polly catches him while he is fleeing away from the pantry where he had just been eating a lot of jam without permission from his aunt. While Aunt Polly is trying to discipline Tom, he tricks her by saying that something is behind her and that she should turn around and look. As soon as she turns around, Tom flees the scene. The mischief of characters like Sawyer delights readers and lifts their spirits (Griswold 87). The lifting of spirits is a form of lightness and can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. A literal way of a lifted spirit is when a character actually goes airborne. The figurative way of lifting the spirit is related to the saying "lifting one's spirit"—trying to cheer up someone. Humor is another form of lightness because it lifts the spirits of the readers. It can be placed in the same category as mischief. Reading about mischievous characters can be exciting, but also funny once the characters get in trouble for their mischief. At times, mischievous behavior of characters can be scary when the characters get into serious trouble, such as Oliver Twist in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838).

The fifth and final theme, or quality, of children's literature developed by Griswold is aliveness. This theme relates to animals and objects, such as toys and furniture. Griswold writes, "we aren't taken aback when animals talk in children's books because garrulous animals are commonplace … We don't boggle when animals engage in conversation, as long as that happens in children's stories … In the world of children's stories, all God's creatures seem chatty" (103-104). Talking animals in children's literature is possible because of children's willing suspension of disbelief. There is a long list of stories that involve talking animals, for example, the animals in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894), the elephants in Jean de Brunhoff's *The Story of Babar, the*

Little Elephant (1933), and the white rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

The aliveness of objects and things is related to the child's imagination where "consciousness is attributed to insentient things" (109). When children play with their toys, the toys come to life in a way that the child moves the toy and speaks for the toy as if the toy itself is speaking. According to Griswold, "the aliveness of toys is important when the young play… from the point of view of children, living toys actively participate in their lives, and, as it were, from their side and at their own initiative" (113). Living objects are easy for the child reader to identify with. They are familiar to them and highly believable because they attribute qualities of life to their own toys. A good example of aliveness related to objects and things in children's literature is the character of Pinocchio in *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* (1883). This story is about a wooden puppet that comes to life and wants to be a real boy. The narrative of toys coming to life and wanting to be real is very popular in film nowadays. A few examples are *Ted* (2012) and Disney's *Toy Story* (1995). In both these movies, the toys of children come to life. In the movie *Ted*, the teddy bear named Ted is always alive. He remains alive, even when the child grows up. The toys in *Toy Story* only come to life when the child is not around the toys. These two movies show the difference between aliveness of objects and things: there is a secret aliveness, and an obvious aliveness.

Authors who are still closely connected to their own childhood can conjure up these emotions for their readers with their writing. Because these sentiments are points of recognition for young readers, the works that contain one or more of these five themes speak to the young readers—these themes are what make those works popular. After explaining these five literary themes, I would like to point out that I interpret what Griswold calls "themes" or "qualities" as aspects of an author's style, rather than literary

themes in the traditional sense of the term. Novels can have various themes, and most themes are applicable to a large range of stories. Focusing on Griswold's themes as aspects of style narrows the focus on children's books, which differentiate themselves from adult books as much by the mode of representation than the content of the story. After all, some of the most enduring and most often retold children's stories in English started life as adult-oriented fictions: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1724), to name a couple. Many literary classics—from the *Odyssey* to *Moby Dick* (1851) have been adapted into children's literature. Adding qualities of, for example, aliveness and lightness to characters is therefore more a stylistic convention than a theme.

Applying Griswold's stylistic terms as critical tools with which to investigate the peculiar style and reading experience offered by Gaiman in *Coraline*, *The Graveyard Book* and *MirrorMask*, will allow me to explain why Gaiman's brand of children's horror fiction is so pleasurable.

Theory of Horror

Because much scholarship has been done on the genre of horror, it is important to briefly discuss some of this scholarship that specifically addresses horror's pleasures, in order to explain why I have chosen to follow Carroll's theory of horror as a critical framework for the analysis of Gaiman's novels. Genre critic and horror specialist Andrew Tudor has investigated why horror is such a popular genre in contemporary Western Culture. He begins by outlining the psychological scholarship that has been conducted in relation to horror culture. He discusses, for instance, that the appeal of horror lies in the way in which the genre can be a vehicle for representing repressed and unconscious human desires. According to Tudor, "the attraction of horror derives from its appeal to the 'beast' concealed within the superficially civilized humans" (445).

Unconsciously, Tudor suggests, humans are bad at the core. Horror is an outlet for those bad inner emotions. For example, in Western culture it is generally understood that murder is a heinous crime; yet individuals and groups of people do harbor hatred towards each other that in extreme circumstances can lead to a desire or wish for a person's death. From such a psychological perspective, the creation and consumption of horror films can function as a form of sublimation. In a way, in the light of this theory, the horror audience lives vicariously through the characters in the books and films of horror. Tudor concludes that such general psychological explanations of horror's pleasure are problematic. The question of why horror is so popular should be further specified. Scholars should ask "why do *these* people like *this* horror in *this* place at *this* particular time?" (461).

Tudor also discusses Carroll's theory, and concludes by saying that "monsters fascinate and repel us simultaneously" (454). The factor of attraction to horror in Carroll's theory is the otherness of the monster.

Tudor also puts forward a sociological explanation for the popular attraction of horror. Tudor says, "the appeal of particular features of the genre is understood in relation to specified aspects of their socio-historical context" (459). The fear in horror resonates with social and cultural fears of the viewers/readers. The content of horror stories has changed over time, in order to match the underlying fears of the audience. For instance, during the cold war, books and films exploring paranoid states became popular. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) is the most famous example.

Terry Heller's scholarship on the pleasure of horror focuses on the distinction between terror and horror. Heller writes, "terror is the fear that harm will come to oneself. Horror is the emotion one feels in anticipating and witnessing harm coming to others for whom one cares … Terror is exclusively the experience of characters in the

work and horror is part of a larger response of pity for these characters and/or their victims" (19-20). According to Heller, horror is an emotional response. It is a form of sympathy towards characters in the book/movie. Often, a reader is instructed to feel horror. Rarely, the reader is instructed to feel a sense of terror. Reading the genre of horror is a form of active reading. The reader creates an implied reader and "becomes the proper interpreter" (18). Heller says,

> the main pleasure of the sensational tale of terror seems to safely be experiencing feelings unavailable in the normal course of events. We seek out such stories primarily to exercise our uniquely human psychological equipment, to explore, insofar as we safely can, the psychological extremes that arise from physical danger. (29)

Heller echoes Tudor in turning to an explanatory model that combines psychological and sociological insights into human fears and monstrosities.

In his *Philosophy of Horror* (1990), Noël Carroll took a different approach by focusing more on the mode of representation of the monster and the nature of the reader/audience's response to monsters in horror stories. Carroll's more formalist approach will help to explore the ways in which Gaiman reverses horror conventions to create appealing tales of terror that can be enjoyed by younger readers. To foreground his formal approach Carroll uses the term art-horror when he explains the nature of horror in works of fiction:

> The genres of suspense, mystery, and horror derive their very names from the affects they are intended to promote—a sense of suspense, a sense of mystery, and a sense of horror. The cross-art cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror. (14)

Even though Gaiman may never have read Carroll's thesis, my research has revealed that he has taken this blueprint of horror and laid it over his own stories for young readers. He follows the conventions of horror writers, but he reverses many of their stylistic means. Instead of creating a horrific reading experience, Gaiman has created a pleasurable and thus paradoxical horror experience. The reader expects to be horrified, but instead, the story is very entertaining and not horrific at all.

An important convention of horror is the reaction of the fictional characters to the events and monsters in the works of horror. According to Carroll, "the characters in works of horror exemplify for us the way in which to react to the monsters of fiction" (17). This convention is the most important one when analyzing Gaiman's works for children. Gaiman's characters determine how his child readers respond to the horrific story. All of Gaiman's protagonists are strong children who master their fears. Therefore, the child reader feels strong as well when reading the stories, and not scared. Carroll continues, "the emotional reactions of characters, then, provide a set of instructions or, rather, examples about the way in which the audience is to respond to the monsters in the fiction—that is, about the way we are meant to react to its monstrous properties" (17). Gaiman changes the set of instructions noted by Carroll. He does not want to scare his children's audience away. Instead, he wants to draw them in. What the following chapters will show is that Gaiman is able to draw his young readers into his stories because he has managed to seamlessly lay the core aspects of children's literature—as defined by Griswold—over the horror narrative blueprint as developed by Carroll.

The Uncanny

As mentioned earlier, I will also place the three texts in the context of the uncanny, understood as a literary convention employed already in classic gothic fiction to create unsettling and scary effects. I will not use the term the uncanny as developed initially by Sigmund Freud to explore aspects of the human unconsciousness. I use the uncanny as defined by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle: "'making things uncertain: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic'" (qtd. in Byron and Punter 283). In the three works of Gaiman I have studied, the familiar has become unfamiliar. Maternal figures turn out to be evil instead of caring, as they usually are in children's stories; dead characters raise the living, instead of the living raising the dead, which is a common feature of horror stories.

According to Tzvetan Todorov a reader decides whether the fantastic elements in the story are uncanny or marvelous in the course of reading the story: "If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny" (41). The uncanny derives from "the supernatural explained" (Todorov 41). When the fantastic events cannot be explained, the book will be labeled as marvelous. According to Todorov, "these sub-genres include works that sustain the hesitation characteristic of the true fantastic for a long period, but that ultimately end in the marvelous or in the uncanny" (44). The fantastic, according to Todorov, is "a frontier between two adjacent realms" of the uncanny and marvelous (44). Readers will move towards one of the two realms. Todorov states, "the uncanny realizes, as we see, only one of the conditions of the fantastic: the description of certain reactions, especially of fear. It is uniquely linked to the sentiments of the characters and not to a material event defying reason" (47). The

sentiments of the characters are then projected onto the sentiments of the reader, creating a sense of the uncanny. This is similar to Carroll's theory of horror, of how the reaction of characters to monsters instructs the reaction of the readers to the monster.

Chapter 1: The Pleasurable Scariness of *Coraline* – *Transforming the Haunted House into a Snug Place*

Coraline is very popular among children, as well as adults. It is a story about a little girl named Coraline who just moved into a new flat with her parents. She decides to go exploring around the new flat and finds a locked door. Once she is able to open the door, she enters a different world that resembles her own.

According to Wagner, Golden, Bissette,

> *Coraline* is so wonderfully and elegantly written, and so full of the kind of fear only children feel and adults too soon forget, that with its publication Neil Gaiman reminded the rest of the publishing industry what children's literature could be, that not every story had to be a series … also undermining that sense of security, *Coraline* is deeply unsettling and yet ultimately reassuring as well. (345)

The paradoxical reading experience that the book brings about to its reader is noticed and praised by many critics. Many critics have tried to label the book and/or compare it to other similar stories:

> Although it sounds a little like *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, or *The Wizard of Oz*, Gaiman's novella is far darker, far stranger, and far more threatening than those books; it is, in fact, a work that many adults find too scary to read. As Gaiman states on the Harper Collins web site, 'It was a story, I Learned when people began to read it, that children experienced as an adventure, but which gave adults nightmares. It's the strangest book I've written, it took the longest time to write, and it's the book I'm proudest of.' (350)

Gaiman reversed the fundamental children's literature theme of "snugness," and in doing so created an oxymoronic reading experience that is simultaneously thrilling and pleasurable, comfortable and unsettling. Gaiman is both making the familiar unfamiliar (defamiliarisation), and the unfamiliar familiar (uncanny).

Fans of Gaiman's work have struggled to determine *Coraline's* target audience and often publish their experience online. One such Gaiman fan and blogger is Sara Zaske. She posted on her blog that "as an adult, I love *Coraline*. I picked it up on a whim, and the story has haunted me for weeks with the clicking, scratching noise of the other mother's hand, and I'm well past the 8+ recommended reading age. But for kids? It might be too terrible, in the old scary sense of the word." Zaske is not the only reader who has questioned the audience for *Coraline*. Reviewers state that the book explores cumbersome themes, such as soulless children, that are not suitable or even understandable for children at all. According to Parsons, Sawers and McInally, *Coraline* belongs to "the genre of fantasy, fraught with anxiety, riddled with disturbing psychological dilemmas, and infused with fears and dangers that threaten the security of the knowable self" (371). Most children will not even detect these themes while reading. The scary events occurring in the narrative will most likely dominate their reading, as they are not able yet to reflect upon the text in a psychological or literary way.

Adults can reflect on the relationship between style and content and they will recognize when words and images are used figuratively or symbolically. Children tend to read literally rather than figuratively. On the pages the young readers of *Coraline* will find other mothers with buttons for eyes that want to lure in little children and keep them in their closets forever.

According to Gaiman, *Coraline* was published because a little girl who read the unfinished manuscript really wanted to know the ending despite being terrified. Gaiman's literary agents were not sure whether to publish *Coraline* as a children's or as an adult's book. Gaiman asked the daughter of one of his agents to read it and give her opinion, but the young girl lied. The girl was terrified by the book, but she wanted to find out how the book ends, and therefore needed it to be published (Gaiman, "What the [*]" 18). It is still not crystal clear what makes a book a children's or an adult novel, especially in the case of *Coraline*, but all readers have one thing in common; if they are intrigued by the story, they want to know what happens in the end. The will to find out is stronger than the scariness many people experience. Curiosity takes over. And that is something everybody possesses, child or adult.

Before discussing Griswold's aspects in *Coraline*, I would like to briefly discuss the haunted house horror convention, as this is the horror convention Gaiman has adapted to the narrative of *Coraline*. One of the most influential modern haunted house stories is Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). In this novel, the haunted house turns out to be a symbolic vehicle; the novel ultimately explores the "haunted" mind of Eleanor Vance. The house turns out to be evil; the unconscious forces at work within Eleanor seem to destroy her mind. The haunted-house trope in horror stories is not necessarily destructive; it can also be a vehicle for character building. In Jackson's story, it is suggested, at the beginning, that the house may have a telekinetic connection with Eleanor's mind. The paranormal activity in the house may not come from the house itself, but from Eleanor. Jackson chose to link the haunted-house convention to the psyche of the main character of the story. Throughout the narrative the rise and the fall of the house is paralleled by the construction and disintegration of Eleanor's character.

While many haunted house stories contain the house-equals-the-head allegory, many contain a house that is actually haunted, such as Edgar Allan Poe's foundational story "The Fall of the House Usher" (1839). In Poe's tale, the ghost of Roderick Usher's sister, Madeline, haunts the family mansion after she has been prematurely buried by her paranoid brother. The narrator experiences how the house disintegrates along with the mind of the guilt-stricken Roderick, who remains unconscious of his crime. At the climax, when the house collapses and the narrator flees, Roderick and Madeline embrace each other; the ghost avenges the wrong done to her in life and the wrong-doer finally confronts his guilt.

Despite the debate about whether or not *Coraline* is a haunted-house story for adults, or a children's book, Griswold's five major literary themes—or rather stylistic aspects or motifs—for children's literature are very much present in this book. One of those five aspects is snugness. Snugness is a feeling of comfort that can be found in small, tight, cozy places, such as a pillow fort or playing under the dining room table. According to Griswold, "snugness seems a pleasurable feeling especially sought in childhood. We don't see adults playing under the table" (5). The places of snugness offer comfort, safety, and a place where children can be individuals. Griswold notes, "the snug place is a refuge and haven associated with sensations of comfort and security, with ease and well-being" (6). Snugness is not so much a theme as it is a mood because it is a "pleasurable feeling" (5). As a critical term, mood is "the emotional-intellectual attitude of the author toward the subject" (Harmon & Holman 354). In the case of *Coraline*, the mood is not established because of Gaiman's attitude toward the story, but by the imagery in the story. Features of snugness are present throughout *Coraline* and entirely alter the haunted-house experience.

According to Griswold, snug places in children's literature have certain "identifiable features" (9). These features are: enclosed, tight, small, simple, well designed, remote, safe, guarded, self-sufficient, owned, and hidden. Not all snug places possess all identifiable features. And even the features themselves are not set in stone. Gaiman decided to play with these features. He reversed them, and by doing so created the theme of scariness for his book. Scariness, according to Griswold, "seems to play a larger role in stories for children than in those for adults … fear seems so common as almost to be an omnipresent feature in their [children] literature" (35). Children seek scariness: "The young learn the surprising fact that scariness can be discomforting fun … it is a frightening realm" (Griswold 1-2). By writing a scary children's book, Gaiman automatically attracts a large audience because children like to be scared.

Reading a scary book might be uncomfortable, but as soon as the reader closes the book, the scariness is gone. It is a scare the reader, young or old, can control. In *Coraline*, Gaiman created this scariness by turning a comfortable snug place into a scary and unsafe place so that children will recognize the place, but will not experience the comfortable snug feeling when reading about it. Instead they are introduced to a reversed snug place—one that is not so comfortable at all. In other words, Gaiman has created an uncanny snug place in *Coraline*. This comfortable, snug place—the other flat—is scary because it is supposed to be such a familiar and innocent place, but it is nothing like that at all. That is exactly what the snug place in *Coraline* is. "It is not concerned with such things as bug-eyed monsters or little green men but things far closer to home, which, as a consequence, are the more disturbing (it is much harder to escape that which is on your doorstep; that which can gain entry to your bedroom)" (Rudd 161). Griswold's snugness is linked to the uncanny. By reversing the usual feeling of snugness into something potentially scary, Gaiman has created an uncanny effect.

The main snug place in this story is the flat created by the other mother. Before the reader reads about the flat, he/she is already warned about the place. Coraline is not allowed to go inside the drawing room, and once she is allowed and finds the door, it is locked. All these obstacles make the closed door, and thus the other flat, all the more attractive. According to Richard Gooding, "uncanny effects in Coraline are aided by … a border between real and fantasy worlds" (393). The border in Gaiman's story is the locked door in the drawing room. The locked door adds a fear factor to the drawing room itself and the room that may or may not be found behind the locked door. Before there are any identifiable features ascribed to the other flat, the flat is already scary and thrilling because of the uncanny, invisible border. As Gooding says, the set up for the uncanny is present in Gaiman's book (Gooding 393).

The flat is the snug place of this story because it contains several of the identifiable features. The other flat is simpler than Coraline's own flat, but it is also the place in which Coraline is bored to death and wishes to go exploring. According to Griswold, "part of the pleasure of the snug place is that it is simple" (10). When Coraline enters the other flat, she notices traces of furnishings such as paintings and furniture that used to be there in the flat. The furniture and paintings are now gone; there are less furnishings in the other mother's house. Also, the snug place is a well-designed place; snug places are cleverly "made shipshape by the thoughtful arrangement of objects" (Griswold 11). This snug place had to be created by someone and that someone made the other flat resemble Coraline's real home. The designer of this snug place is the other mother. She designed it just so that Coraline would recognize it as her own and hopefully would feel safe and at home.

The place designed as a new home for Coraline is the inside of the flat; not the outside. This leads to another identifiable feature of snugness: enclosed. "Snugness, in

other words, is a feature in a world where the dialectic of inside and outside is operative" (Griswold 9). The entered snug place becomes a circumscribed place. The new flat is the snug place; the outside is not. Coraline decides to go out and explore. She runs into the cat that tells her: "Nothing to find here. This is just the outside, the part of the place she hasn't bothered to create" (Gaiman 88). The cat tells Coraline that the outside does not belong to the snug place created by the other mother, because the mother did not create or design the outside. Therefore, it becomes an escape for Coraline. She cannot go there and completely leave the other flat (the snug place), but she can go outside and be away from the place for a little while. Coraline tries to escape the enclosed feature which is opposite from the expected behavior in and/or around a snug place. A snug place functions as a place of refuge for a child, but Coraline rather runs away from it because her snug place in the new flat is scary. This signifies to the reader that there is something wrong with the snug place. The mist also plays an important role. Coraline cannot escape the mist that surrounds the house, which creates a sense of imprisonment. Snug places are supposed to be comfortable, boundaried places that children seek out voluntarily. But the boundary of mist keeps Coraline within the confines of the other world against her will.

This leads to one of the first opposites that is at work in Gaiman's book. As mentioned before, the snug place is a safe haven and a place of refuge for children. Safety is one of the identifiable features. There are two types of safety for the snug place: "The snug place is a refuge. It is, for example, a shelter from threatening weather. But it may also be a refuge from others … [and] offer immunity from the cares of the world" (Griswold 12). In *Coraline*, it is the other way around. Even though Coraline cannot endlessly go and explore the outside (there are boundaries), the outside is still an escape from the snug place rather than the snug place being an escape from the

outside. Because Gaiman reversed this feature, the story is scary. A place that should be safe for children is not safe at all. The other flat is a scary place with a woman who has buttons for eyes. Parsons, Sawers & McInally write: "This [the other mother] old-school, maternal feminine stereotype is depicted here as evil" (376). The mother does not safeguard Coraline. On the contrary, Coraline has to be kept safe from the other mother. She is exactly the one who Coraline runs away from. This familiar character, one that claims to be Coraline's mother, is doing these awful things to Coraline. The uncanny is at work here due to the reversed identifiable features of the snug place.

The other identifiable feature of snugness is ownership. The way in which Gaiman represents the feature of ownership reinforces the sense of the uncanny in *Coraline*. The child usually owns the snug place. In Gaiman's book, the snug place is not owned by Coraline, but by the other mother. Because the ownership lies with the mother, the snug place is not Coraline's, but the other mother's. Coraline becomes an intruder of the snug place. The other mother tries to gain ownership of Coraline's individuality. According to Rudd,

> The other mother, as Coraline comes to realize, is responsible for this entire uncanny realm […] But what the other mother does not have is Coraline's individual look. Thus the other mother wants to replace Coraline's eyes with uniform, black buttons not simply to deprive Coraline of her individuality (her awry look), but because 'looking awry' poses a threat to this other mother. (164)

A child is in control in the snug place. Having control makes the snug place very appealing to children. But in the snug place in Gaiman's book, the other mother tries to take away even the last bit of control Coraline has by changing Coraline's appearance. The other mother provides Coraline with different clothes, which Coraline decides to change out of: "If I'm going to do this, thought Coraline, I'm not going to do it in her

clothes. She changed back into her pyjamas and her dressing gown and her slippers"(115). Coraline feels more strong and confident in her own clothes. Coraline's individuality is very important in order for her to be successful at escaping from the other mother. The other mother is not part of her identity, and Coraline will not let her be part of it by changing into the clothes she has provided for her. Coraline has to gain control of the snug place and can only do so if she stays herself and stays in control of her own identity. When Coraline refuses to wear the clothes the other mother has given her, she refuses the identity that the other mother wants to force onto Coraline.

As a punishment for wanting to leave the other flat, the other mother locks Coraline in a closet. This closet is also potentially a snug place because two identifiable features are at work for the closet. The identifiable features are tight and small. Griswold states, "a snug place is smaller" (10). Small places often offer coziness. The closet, however, does not offer any coziness:

> The mirror opened like a door, revealing a dark space behind it. 'You may come out when you've learned some manners,' said the other mother. 'And when you're ready to be a loving daughter.'
>
> She picked Coraline up and pushed her into the dim space behind the mirror. A fragment of beetle was sticking to her lower lip, and there was no expression at all in her black-button eyes.
>
> Then she swung the mirror-door closed, and left Coraline in darkness.
>
> Somewhere inside her Coraline could feel a huge sob welling up. And then she stopped it, before it came out. She took a deep breath and let it go. She put out her hands to touch the space in which she was imprisoned. It was the size of a broom cupboard; tall enough to stand in or to sit in, not wide or deep enough to lie down. One wall was glass, and it felt cold to touch. (95-96)

What is intriguing about Gaiman's construction of the closet is that the door is a mirror. Once Coraline is in the closet, she faces the backside of the mirror. She cannot look into it. Looking into a mirror is a moment of self-consciousness, becoming aware of whom you are physically, and at times even mentally. Coraline does not get the chance to look in the mirror and see for herself who she sees. Her other mother does want to have her and keep her, but will not let Coraline have her own identity or ownership of her soul. The same is true for the other three children in the closet. Not seeing anything in the mirror foreshadows how her life will be if she stays with the other mother—a life in which she will not be in control of her own soul. None of them is in ownership of their own souls or identities. Because Coraline, and the three children, face the back of a mirror in a place of darkness, they cannot experience their own mirror-moment. This stops them from developing. Therefore, Coraline has to save herself and the three children, and collect their souls in order to do so.

There is an uncomfortable snugness present in the closet. There are bugs present and the walls feel cold. Nothing like the cozy attic with hay at a barn, or a nice pillow fort; two snug places commonly known to children. The closet is both small and tight. Griswold says, "snugness is also associated with tight spaces" (9). Coraline cannot lie down, but has to sit up uncomfortably in this tiny, cold, dark space. The closet is dark and enclosed, which could offer Coraline coziness, but Coraline cannot leave the closet whenever she would like to. Besides being a snug place, the closet is a prison as well.

According to Griswold, children like to play in "womblike enclosures" (9). Womblike enclosures give children a feeling of safety and familiarity. Even though this observation reveals Griswold's psychological approach to children's fiction, it does not have to undermine the analysis of Gaiman's mode of presentation, as the adjective "womblike" is itself descriptive of a specific spatial as well as emotional effect. Many

children do indeed like to curl up in a ball and snug up against someone, or in their bed. Interestingly, adults like to do this as well; snuggling up against someone. Even though this idea is often projected onto children, it is in fact universal—an aspect for all ages. As mentioned before, many adults read *Coraline* too. One of the appealing aspects of the novel is that it forces adult readers to reflect on growing up. When growing up, people push childlike mannerisms and toys to the sidelines, but it is never truly gone. The snugness aspect of *Coraline* unlocks the child out of the adult reader, which makes it appealing for that particular audience as well.

Many children sleep in the fetal position. So it makes sense that a snug place, which is tight and comfortable, is referred to as a womblike enclosure. The closet represents the womb of the other mother. The other mother wants to have Coraline as her own child and says to her: "'It wasn't the same here without you. But we knew you'd arrive one day, and then we could be a proper family'" (Gaiman 39). Instead of going through the process of giving birth to Coraline, she decides to lock her up in a womblike enclosure, hoping and waiting for Coraline to come to her senses—in a way, waiting for Coraline to be re-born again. The scary part about this is that Coraline does not choose to be in the closet. This is another reversed feature of children's literature in Gaiman's novel. The other mother forces Coraline inside the closet. Coraline cannot leave whenever she would like to. Just like a baby in a womb who has to wait until it is ready to leave the womb.

It is not that odd that the other mother uses a place of snugness as her figurative womb. According to Griswold, "the snug place … is a bastion of security" (30). And so is a female's womb to a fetus. The snug place is also a place for thought, reflection, and a "Plato's cave of ideas" (Griswold 25). A womb is a place where physical development occurs. But in this case mental development is wanted. The other mother hopes Coraline

will realize in the closet that she is better off with her other mother and father in this other flat, instead of her own parents. Unfortunately for the other mother, Coraline decides to fight this and escapes the snug place. A common factor of scariness is scaring children into being good. The other mother seems to try to do the same thing with Coraline. But instead of learning how to behave through the threat of punishment, Coraline shows "mastery of fears" (Griswold 40). Coraline fights the scariness, which is embodied by the other mother, and becomes the heroine of the book.

In his presentation of the horrific setting of the "other apartment," Gaiman erased the boundaries between snugness and scariness and thus created an oxymoronic reading experience. He successfully accomplished this because he turned to the major generic themes from children's literature identified by Griswold—snugness in this book specifically—in order to adapt the adult-horror convention of the haunted house. Children recognize the themes that are appealing to them and are therefore drawn to the story because of the familiarity. The stylistic aspects are recognizable to children as well; it also draws them to the book. Once they notice the aspects are reversed, the story becomes scary—the aspects have become unfamiliar and this creates a sense of the uncanny. The unexpected elements in this book, and the element of the uncanny cause a thrill. This particular thrill provides the book with a sense of scariness. Children are drawn to this kind of scariness. Scariness presents children with a good scare; a thrill they can choose to experience or not simply by closing the book. It gives them a sense of being alive. Coraline represents this thrill and fear. She goes looking for it, finds it, fights it, and comes out as the winner. Coraline is the child who beats the scariness. And by reading the scary book, children beat the scariness as well. In contrast to the haunted-house motif that often chronicles the disintegration of a character's personality, Coraline becomes more self-assured as she rescues her parents and herself from the

other mother. Consequently, the potential is created that they will become more self-assured as well.

Chapter 2: *The Graveyard Book*; or, How the Dead can Raise the Living

The Graveyard Book is about a little boy who survives the murder of his family. The ghosts of the graveyard take the boy in and raise him. At this graveyard, the dead raise the living. The setting of this book and the circumstances that led the protagonist to this setting are horrific. But Gaiman managed to change the stereotype of the graveyard and transforms certain conventions of horror so that he created an enjoyable story for children set at a homely graveyard.

The graveyard in the opening scene of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) is a classic depiction of a traditional horror graveyard. The two characters—a brother and sister—go to the graveyard to mourn their dead father, but are attacked by a Zombie. Before the attack, it becomes clear that the sister does not like to be at the graveyard. It literally gives her the shivers. The brother tells a story about how he used to scare his sister at the graveyard, but it turns out that his sister is still scared, even though they are both adults. The entire mood of scariness and horror at this graveyard is typical of the use of graveyard settings in horror fiction. The graveyard created by Gaiman for *The Graveyard Book* contrasts greatly to the horror graveyard as it features predominantly as a home and safe-haven.

The analysis of Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* in this chapter will focus on the setting and the characters of the story. My aim is to show how Gaiman was able to create such a haunting setting and characters for this book without scaring his readers away. What is really scary about this novel are the characters who live in the "real" world, such as the shopkeeper and The Man Jack; not the graveyard. Even though the setting of a graveyard is nowhere near the snug setting that is often found in children's books, Gaiman managed to create a homely setting within a graveyard. The graveyard is not the source of horror for this story; the real world is. Gaiman adapts Griswold's idea

of aliveness as a central motif in children's literature. In doing so he transforms the horror motif of "raising the dead" into the homely motif of the dead raising a child.

As mentioned in the introduction, Griswold's five themes are often aspects of style, while others are motifs, rather than literary themes of children's books. In the case of *The Graveyard Book*, aliveness is a motif. The term aliveness explains itself; inanimate things have come to life in the story. Aliveness can vary from talking animals, to living toys. Children see "a presence of sentience in insentient things" (Griswold 111). Their imagination is more developed than that of adults. To work with characters of aliveness in a children's book is a success because of the children's view of inanimate objects coming to life. An example of this is when children talk in different voices when they are playing with their toys. The different voices are attributed to different toys, and the child brings these toys to life in their own imagination.

According to Griswold, "in the world of Children's Literature and in childhood, a cosmic urge to come alive seems operative everywhere" (116). Even at such a dark and scary place as a graveyard, the insentient objects come to life. The aliveness at the graveyard creates a sense of intimacy between the reader and the book. The reader can read about the living dead characters at the graveyard, but in the book itself, only the people with the Freedom of the Graveyard can see the dead people. This bond between reader and characters ties the reader and the book closer together. Bod's story becomes valuable, as Bod is a window into the world of the dead—a potentially scary world at the graveyard that turns out to be more attractive than the world outside the gates.

In the case of *The Graveyard Book*, aliveness is related to dead people. Why this is not odd to the child readers is because they have a larger willing suspension of disbelief: "We don't boggle when animals [or dead people] engage in conversation, as long as that happens in children's stories" (Griswold 103). If talking toys and animals are not scary

to children, then maybe a couple of loving parents who are dead but taking care of a living boy are not scary either. The fact that the dead people who live at the graveyard seem to be alive and have a living boy amongst them is acceptable for the child reader, because according to Griswold, children "lack a sense of self-importance … the child has yet to embrace the adult notion that thinking and feeling are capabilities exclusive to us and our kind" (109). Because of this lack, "consciousness is permitted to exist or acknowledged to exist in the world at large" (109). Children have a way of "non-dualistic thinking," as Griswold calls it (109). This type of thinking permits them to bring inanimate objects to life. In the case of this book, that also means dead people.

Gaiman uses familiar figures whom he brings back to life because, as Griswold states,

> we aren't surprised by talking animals in children's books, because they feel and think like we do; there is no shock that might come from a more naturalistic presentation of their differences. In fact, the talking animals [or dead people who live at the graveyard] of children's stories so resemble us, they sometimes seem to be mocking us with their impersonations. (104)

The people living at the graveyard are Bod's parents, friends, and teachers. These familiar figures are figures that "normal" children—who are actually alive— will also come across in their lives. In that way, Bod's life does not differ much from the child reader's life. Because Gaiman uses figures familiar to the child reader, they are friendly and above all caring, rather than scary, menacing, or vengeful ghosts.

The real-life adults in the story are scary, menacing and vengeful, dangerous even. One of those scary real-life characters is The Man Jack. He is the killer in this story. He keeps chasing after Bod, in order to kill him. He disguises himself as a nice, harmless, old man who visits the graveyard very often. Later on, the reader finds out that he only

visits the graveyard to try to catch Bod. The fact that this man wears a mask and pretends to be someone he is not, is very scary. The final shock of the story comes when The Man Jack reveals himself to Bod and Scarlett (Bod's only friend from the world outside the graveyard). Interestingly, the setting where this major shock is revealed is a very homely setting—the house of The Man Jack. Gaiman places characters in unforeseen places: a murderer in a loving home, caring friends and family at a graveyard. Traditionally speaking, a killer should not be at home, but at a graveyard; a dark setting more appropriate for a killer.

The shopkeeper is another character from the "real" world that is scarier than the characters who live at the graveyard. The shopkeeper represents human greed. When Bod enters his shop with a precious stone, the shopkeeper instantly wants to have it. He locks Bod up in the back room of the store, because he recognizes Bod as the kid who the Man Jack is after. The two characters are conspiring together. It is a character from the graveyard—who was considered immoral during her life—that saves Bod. The real, living people in this story are morally corrupt.

Some characters are attributed characteristics of aliveness. The obvious characters with these elements of aliveness in *The Graveyard Book* are the dead people who live at the graveyard. A reader could easily dismiss these characters as being dead or ghostlike. However, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator of the story ensures the reader that the dead people are really alive:

> You would have seen these things, in the moonlight, if you had been there that night. You might not have seen a pale, plump woman, who walked the path near the front gates, and if you had seen her, with a second, more careful glance you would have realized that she was only moonlight, mist and shadow. The plump,

> pale woman was there, though. She walked the path that led through a clutch half-fallen tombstones towards the front gates. (7)

The narrator tells the reader what he/she might have seen if he/she had actually been at the graveyard. At first, the narrator says that a woman could have been seen, but he then tells the reader that after a second, more careful look there actually is a woman at the graveyard, walking as if she were alive. This character contains elements of aliveness. As the first chapter progresses, the reader soon finds out that most of the characters who live at the graveyard possess characteristics of aliveness.

The child reader does not instantly dismiss the woman and the other graveyard characters as ghosts. Before the reader can do so, Gaiman makes sure that his narrator explains the distinction between ghosts and the people who live at the graveyard:

> You might think – and if you did, you would be right – that Mr Owens should not have taken on so at seeing a ghost, given that Mr and Mrs Owens were themselves dead and had been for a few hundred years now, and given that the entirety of their social life, or very nearly, was spent with those who were also dead. But there was a difference between the folk of the graveyard and *this*: a raw, flickering startling shape the grey colour of television static all panic and naked emotion which flooded the Owenses as if it were their own. (9-10)

The term ghost bears a negative and scary connotation for children. Generally, in children's fiction ghosts are traditionally portrayed as an entity covered by a white sheet and clanking chains. These entities would fly around and scare people. There is, however, one exception: Casper, from *The Friendly Ghost* (1945). The story was created in 1939, produced as a film in 1945 and subsequently retold as a comic book, cartoon and modern supernatural children's film in 1995. The fact that Casper is called "the friendly ghost" shows that ghosts in children's fiction are traditionally not friendly. It

has to be implied in his name that he is different than all the other ghosts. As shown in the excerpt from *The Graveyard Book*, even the Owenses do not feel comfortable around this flickering object. The negative energy that comes from the ghost "flooded the Owenses as if it were their own" (10). Ghosts are malevolent spirits who seek to revenge grievances they suffered during their secular life, hence the effect it has on the Owenses. The Owenses are scared of this malevolent spirit. The children who read this book can relate to the Owenses and the other living dead people at the graveyard because they share something that they are both scared off. Instead of reconstructing certain aspects of style in order to create a sense of scariness, as he did in *Coraline*, Gaiman now attributes qualities of aliveness to traditionally scary figures such as ghosts, but makes sure his child readers can still identify with them, which makes them more acceptable to the reader and not scary. The child reader is comforted and not scared because the dead people at the graveyard are not scary or dangerous. Therefore, it is more acceptable for them that a living boy will be living amongst them. The scariness in this book has more to do with moral attributes. The caring, benevolent and humble living dead people are good, and the greedy, malevolent and vengeful live adults are monsters.

As a living boy, Nobody Owens naturally has aspects of aliveness. However, he also shares some traits with the dead people living in the graveyard. According to Griswold, "likeness [must be] emphasized and otherness diminished" to achieve a sense of familiarity for the reader; or reader character identification (108). Because Bod shares some characteristics with the dead people living at the graveyard, it is easier for readers to believe that Bod can harmoniously live with them. Bod is told by his guardian,

> Soon enough you will master Fading and Sliding and Dreamwalking. But some skills cannot be mastered by the living, and for those you must wait a little longer. Still, I do not doubt that you will acquire even those, in time. You were given the Freedom of the Graveyard, after all. (32)

This quote shows that Bod possesses some of the same skills as the living dead people. However, he cannot acquire all of them. Gaiman emphasizes the likeness between Bod and the dead people, but he does not entirely diminishes the otherness. Had Bod been able to do all of the things the graveyard people can do, he would have been dead and the reader would be reading a story about a dead boy living with his dead friends and dead family at the graveyard. It would then become a story like *The Friendly Ghost*, a comedy about ghosts, which lacks the pleasurable horror of Gaiman's books because it is an obvious comedy.

One of the key features that makes Gaiman's novel a horror story is the presence of ghouls, werewolves and other supernatural entities. The way in which Gaiman represents the ghouls foreground the intertextual relationship between *The Graveyard Book* and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894-95). According to Christine Robertson, Gaiman "[transformed] Kipling's Victorian jungle into a Victorian graveyard set in the middle of twenty-first century England" (165). Robertson compares two specific chapters from *The Graveyard Book* to two chapters from *The Jungle Books*. One of those chapters is "The Hounds of God." Kipling's jungle has monkeys, known as the Bandar-log, and Gaiman's graveyard has Ghouls. Both chapters begin with the protagonist being dissatisfied by its tutor. In *The Graveyard Book*, Bod seeks escape, stumbles upon the Ghouls and is taken away by them until Miss Lupesco comes to rescue him. The chapter "Kaa's Hunting" is similar. Mowgli is kidnapped by the Bandar-log and taken away until Baloo, Kaa and Bagheera come to rescue him.

While scholars such as Christine Robertson have studied *The Graveyard Book's* intertextual connections to *The Jungle Book*, in constructing this preternatural realm, in which the usually separated lands of the dead and the living are intermeshed, Gaiman is also following the American Gothic Romance tradition as developed by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the middle of the nineteenth century. This tradition is outlined in the preface to Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851):

> … it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime even if he disregard this caution. (1491)

As modern-day Hawthornian romancer, Gaiman can choose to present the truth in a way that he seems fit for his narrative. Gaiman chose to present the character of Bod with both realistic and unrealistic characteristics. He makes sure Bod does not differ too much from the reader, but in order to make the story special he attributes a few characteristics to Bod that normal children do not have, such as fading and dream-walking. Bod is able to relate his graveyard lessons to the reader, enclosing the gap between the normal world where the reader lives and the graveyard where Bod lives.

An example of this is found in the chapter about the Ghouls. Bod wonders off to a grave and finds himself taken away by three beasts to their home, called Ghûlheim. As

the beasts take Bod away by flight, Bod sees another beast approaching. He tries to put both the situation and his fears into words for himself by thinking about what his father has told him:

> Mister Owens had an expression for two things he found equally unpleasant: 'I'm between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,' he would say. Bod had wondered what this meant, having seen, in his life in the graveyard, neither the Devil nor the Deep Blue Sea. *I'm between the Ghouls and the monster*, he thought. (Gaiman 83)

In this quote, Bod links the wisdom of the dead to a situation he is in as a living person. He makes the expression of Mr. Owens work for himself—a living boy, and thus making the statement relatable to the reader. The wisdom of the dead is being brought to life by Bod. Bod moves between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

At this point it is useful to briefly mention the grotesque characteristics of the Ghouls. Grotesque figures are quite common in children's literature because they are both humorous and pleasurably scary at the same time. The ghouls are grotesque, stylistically. They become almost humorous in their silly ugliness. According to Philip Thomson, the term "grotesque" is defined by a disharmony (20). Thomson explains:

> The most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous, or conflation of disparates. It is important that this disharmony has been seen, not merely in the work of art as such, but also in the reaction it produces. (20)

The disharmony that surrounds grotesque objects, characters, or settings is made up of several clashes, such as the comic and the terrifying, the extravagance and exaggeration, and abnormality (Thomson20-24). For the grotesque factor to be successful, it has to be placed within a realistic setting. If something is vulgarly funny in a fantasy world, it is

just part of the fantasy. When a grotesque character appears in a realistic setting, the sense of the grotesque is enhanced because the character seems so out of place within this setting. Thomson states, "the experience of amusement and disgust, laughter and horror, mirth and revulsion, simultaneously, is partly at least a reaction to the highly abnormal" (24).

As mentioned earlier, grotesque characters are common in children's literature. An example of a grotesque character in children's literature is the character of Ms. Trunchbull from Dahl's *Matilda*. Ms. Trunchbull is a big, very masculine woman who scares her students. Students may only look at her a certain way, and they will get punished in the most horrible way. At the same time, Ms. Trunchbull is a comical character simply because she is so scary and silly at the same time, especially when she gets scared herself.

Readers do not have to react negatively towards the ghouls in *The Graveyard Book*. The ghouls are in fact vulgarly funny. They are talking about eating people and making Bod one of them, while also teasing each other. Also, they have ridiculously funny long names. They are comical and terrifying at the same time. Because they are ugly and scary does not mean they are evil. They are merely irresponsible and a-moral.

Carroll's philosophy of horror can explain why child readers do not see the graveyard people as monsters. Carroll explains that:

> The monsters of horror … breach the norms of ontological propriety presumed by the positive human characters in the story. That is, in examples of horror, it would appear that the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world, whereas in fairy tales and the like the monster is an ordinary creature in an extraordinary world. (16)

Monsters in horror—such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and George Romero's zombie horde, are extraordinary characters living in the ordinary world of humans. But in the case of *The Graveyard Book*, the graveyard people are ordinary characters who live in an extraordinary world created by Gaiman: the shadowy, yet homely graveyard in which Bod grows up. They are like Carroll's fairy-tale monsters. The monsters that Gaiman created for this story do not fit the conventional definition of a monster in horror. The true monsters in this novel, when it is read in light of Carroll's theory, are the live adult characters of The Man Jack, Abanezer Bolger the shopkeeper, and two kids at Bod's school. They are extraordinary characters in the ordinary, "real" world. Instead of being caring and responsible adults, the Other Man Jack and Abanezer are malevolent characters ruled by greed. And instead of being friendly children, the two school kids, Nick Farthing and Maureen Quilling, are cruel as well. They are evil because their practices resemble that of The Man Jack and the Shopkeeper. Because Gaiman crafted these monstrous human beings that truly threat the well-being of children, the "ghosts" that are traditionally supposed to be scary in a horror story are no longer scary.

Another reason why child readers may not be scared of the graveyard people in Gaiman's novel is the fact that Bod is not scared of them. Carroll writes:

> For horror appears to be one of those genres in which the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters. Indeed, in works of horror the responses of characters often seem to cue the emotional responses of the audiences. (17)

Because the emotive response of the audience is parallel to the response of the character, the reader is not scared because the graveyard people are Bod's friends and family and he is not scared of them. They are caring figures to Bod, not scary.

Next to reversing the graveyard stereotype, Gaiman also reverses the stereotype of dead people. In horror, the idea of the living dead traditionally refers to vampires and zombies. Zombies are flesh eating creatures looking to devour humans. But the living dead in *The Graveyard Book* are not zombies. They clearly have other characteristics, such as souls. They love and care and feel mental pain and sorrow. The graveyard people also do not look like dead, decomposed people. They are the spirits of the dead people of course. Their bodies are corrupted but their consciences are clean, so to speak. According to Carroll:

> Within the context of the horror narrative, the monsters are identified as impure and unclean, they are putrid or moldering things, or they hail from oozing places or they are made of dead or rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things. They are not only quite dangerous but they also make one's skin creep. Characters regard them not only with fear but with loathing, with a combination of terror and disgust. (23)

Gaiman reversed the characteristics of horrific monsters as observed by Carroll. In the case of the graveyard book, Bod does not regard the graveyard people as scary and terrifying. Not only because they are Bod's friends and family, but also because they are not "made of dead or rotting flesh" and do not make his "skin creep" (23).

There are not many differences between Bod and the graveyard people, but a few are worth mentioning. The major difference is the dead people do not age, and Bod does. The dead people still speak and act the way they did when they were alive, as if they are at a stand-still. This enriches Bod's life and is part of his education he enjoys at the graveyard. He learns about their mannerisms and way of life of when those people were alive: "[Bod] was shaking hands and saying, 'charmed, I am sure,' because he could greet people politely in over nine hundred years of changing manners" (Gaiman 175).

Bod has a very rich and historical education at the graveyard. The fact that Bod is educated by his guardian Silas, other people in the graveyard, and later on by Miss Lupesco, a werewolf, diminishes an otherness and emphasizes a likeness between the reader and Bod. The likeness being education.

Another difference between Bod and the graveyard people is the need to eat. The graveyard people do not eat and do not have any food in their tombs or at the graveyard. To solve the problem of food, Gaiman decided to create a linking character between the living world and the dead world: Silas. Silas is Bod's guardian. He educates Bod and helps the Owenses taking care of him. Silas is neither a character of aliveness, nor is he a he living character like Bod. The narrator explains to the reader what Silas is: "Silas was regarded with a certain wary awe by the graveyard folk, existing as he did on the borderland between their world and the world they had left" (Gaiman 23). Silas is a border character, moving between both realms of the dead and the living. The reader needs a character that can explain both worlds to the reader. Bod is the one who experiences it, but Silas is the one who puts the experiences into perspective for the reader. Silas is the balance between both Bod's worlds; his world at the graveyard and his world beyond the graveyard. He also links the main plot about Bod with the subplot about the Jack of All Trades being an evil league of murderers. Silas, Lupescu and the other border characters are a defense league against them.

In conclusion, while in horror fiction the graveyard setting is stereotypically a dark and scary place, in which terror lurks, in *The Graveyard Book* Gaiman has transformed this stereotype and changed the graveyard into a homely place of comfort and care. The characters of the story, such as the graveyard people, all possess qualities of aliveness, rather than being the stereotypical dead graveyard people. For this story, Gaiman created a comforting and familiar setting for his readers out of a place that is

often scary and horrifying. Because Gaiman reversed the stereotypes and attributed characteristics of aliveness to some of his characters—a literary quality that is familiar to children as it is present in most children's books—is what makes this book not scary, but very attractive to the child reader.

Chapter 3: *MirrorMask*: Style As A Reflection of the Reader's Mind.

MirrorMask is a picture book written by Neil Gaiman and illustrated by Dave McKean. The book balances the senses of both a children's picture book and a regular reading book for a teenage audience. The book fits into the Gaiman reading experience because nothing about the book is standard: the images are a mix of photographs and drawings, the font sizes vary, the author and illustrator used two different fonts, and the line placements are anything but standard.

The story of *MirrorMask* simultaneously scares and intrigues its readers in a different way than *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book*. Gaiman chose a vague and ambiguous setting for this story. The protagonist goes to sleep and enters—sleeping or awake, the reader is never quite sure—a parallel universe made up of two worlds: the light world and the dark world. In this parallel universe, the protagonist comes across beetle police officers, flying cats, and floating giants. This book reveals that Gaiman consistently works within the Romance tradition of Hawthorne, in which dream and reality are fused on the level of plot and setting. Wagner, Golden and Bissette write: "As in *Coraline*, with the presence of dual queens (of Light and Shadow), Gaiman plays upon the common childhood fear that our parents (particularly mothers) will turn out to be something else entirely, either secretly evil or not our parents at all" (431). This story does echo parts of Coraline's story, such as an uncanny, and evil maternal figure. However, the majority of the scares in this book are caused by the scary experiences of the protagonist who suffers from identity issues. Gaiman took several horror-story conventions, such as an uncertain environment, villainous characters, monsters, and the protagonist overcoming evil, and adjusted them for a teenage audience. The result is an enjoyable book for teenagers that simultaneously scares and thrills its readers—I call this the Gaiman paradoxical reading experience.

MirrorMask is a book that is predominantly picture, rather than text. These images and other visual aids contribute to the overall reading experience. The chaotic and hybrid style of the book reflects what typically goes on in the mind of a teenage reader: anxiety about identity, future, and insecurity issues. The literary and visual techniques of representation enhance the level of uncertainty in this book of the reader, thus creating a sense of the uncanny. This is not done via defamiliarisation. According to Harmon and Holman, defamiliarisation is "a process of estrangement" brought about when "the familiar suddenly seems strange" (153). Defamiliarisation is used to show readers something familiar in a new way. It shines a new light on an object, event, or experience so that the reader can approach it as if it was new. This is a way of heightening the intensity of the reading experience. The familiar has become strange and new. This presents an emotion of enlightenment or awe, neither uncertain nor uncanny.

The protagonist of the story is Helena. Helena is not satisfied with her life, being the daughter of parents who work in a traveling circus. She prefers to get out of the circus and go into the real world—the world beyond the circus. Drawing is a way of escapism for Helena. Her caravan is decorated with all of her drawings. One night, Helena gets into a fight with her mother. Helena tells her mother she wants her to be dead because she does not understand anything about what Helena wants and needs. The next day her mother collapses and is rushed to the hospital where she awaits surgery. That night Helena has an odd dream. In her dream, Helena meets a man called Valentine. He is the one who will guide her through this dream world in which she has to find something that belongs to the white queen. Helena's dream quest is not without bad characters and monsters that want to lead her astray from her task. The same happens to Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). At the

beginning of the story the Mouse takes her to other animals and they have a "Caucus race" which slows Alice down. Later on, the White Rabbit takes Alice to his house and send her out to run errands for him. All the while Alice is trying to find her way in Wonderland, and out of it. Helena is similarly interrupted from her quest. She gets mistaken for a dark princess and is brainwashed by the dark queen who wants to keep her as her own daughter. In the meantime, the real dark princess lives in Helena's world and makes a mess of Helena's life. The dark princess is ugly towards Helena's father and rips all of Helena's pictures off the wall. Ripping the pictures off the wall symbolizes how the dark princess is ripping Helena's world apart. The dark queen is another link to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice stands up against the Queen of Hearts at the end of the story. The king and queen want Alice to leave the trial at the end of the story because she is too tall. Alice refuses and speaks up. The queen responds to this by shouting out that she wants to have Alice beheaded. Alice is being punished for standing up for herself. There are many resemblances between Gaiman's *MirrorMask* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. However, for this thesis I will not discuss this in further detail because most of Gaiman's stylistic tactics come from the gothic and horror tradition; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a fantasy novel.

MirrorMask was written with a teenage audience in mind. The book contains too many pictures in order for it to be a regular reading book, but it also has too much text in order for it to be considered a picture book for a younger readership. *MirrorMask* is a hybrid text. A teenage audience can handle the abundance of text, but it also still very much enjoys all the pictures. The teenage audience is a transitory audience. All audiences are in fact transitory audiences as humans are always growing older, moving towards different stages in life, but *MirrorMask* is aimed specifically at a teenage audience. They are at the stage where they are transitioning from child to adult.

Teenagers also make this transition in the literary world; they will slowly and eventually move from picture books to textbooks. Of course children do not only read picture books until they are teenagers, but the literary journey starts with mainly picture books, and gradually moves towards books with predominantly text. Gaiman created a story that will match the transitory stage of his audience.

The horrific aspects of *MirrorMask* do not only come from monsters and scary settings. Monsters and scary creatures might be acceptable, but the story's scariness cannot solely depend on this. The book has to appeal to the audience by portraying something or someone who is also in that same transitory stage as the reader. Part of the scariness in *MirrorMask* is related to identity—more specifically the identity of the protagonist Helena. Gaiman presents his readers with a protagonist, Helena, with whom they can identify because her life incidents are so familiar to them as teenagers. Not all children grow up in a circus, but strangled relationships with parents are not strange to any teenager.

Struggling with identity and the lack of a strong sense of self is a problem familiar to teenagers; they do not know yet who they are or who they want to be. Katherine C. Powell writes:

> Adolescent teenagers, who are undergoing the process of growth between childhood and maturity or adulthood, are usually thirteen to nineteen years of age. During this period of adolescence, biological, emotional or psychosocial conflicts are evident. Adolescents are learning to cope with changes while concerned with self-image, self-esteem, social expectations and academic achievement. They are trying to find out: (1) who they are, separating from their families; (2) what they are about, their interests and personalities; and (3) where they are going, in order to discover their place in adult life. Adolescents are also

> confronted with (…) responsibilities that are new experiences in which they may make decisions or adjustments to attain their own identity or success. They have to make choices, (…) and manage life to attain a healthy identity at the end of adolescence. Identity refers to the sense of self or a consistent unique character over a period of time. The additional responsibilities and social expectations adolescents face may create conflicts for them to resolve, while defining their own identities. (78)

Helena is going through those same issues. The three things teenagers are trying to find that Powell mentions are all present in the story. The first one, trying to find out "who they are, separating from their families" is made visible in the book by Helena herself who claims she does not want to stay in the circus with her parents; she wants to leave the circus and live her own life in the real world (Powell 78). Powell states, "the process for developing good self-esteem starts from early childhood, building upon the achievements that a person accomplishes as they grow older, and includes their own place in society" (83). Helena's place in society is very different from other girls her age. Helena's place is with the circus that travels around the country. It is hard for someone to establish their own place in society when their form of society is constantly on the move and not rooted anywhere. Also, the society that Helena lives in is made up of actors and entertainers who dress up, put on masks, and literally pretend to be somebody else. People who spend the majority of the day pretending and acting, surround Helena. It is hard for Helena to be herself, especially because she is also acting and performing roles constantly because she helps her parents in the circus.

Powell's second point—"what they are about, their interests and personalities" (78)—is illustrated by the drawings Helena has made and hung up all over her own caravan. The drawings Helena has created are part of Helena's identity. The drawings

never leave her trailer. This symbolizes how Helena might also never leave her circus trailer and the circus to go out in the real world.

The third and final point of what Helena is trying to find out is "where [she is] going, in order to discover [her] place in adult life" (Powell 78). The place Helena is going is the dreamlike landscape. It is in that place that she finds her own voice. Helena is a character that the teenage reader can sympathize with. As Helena is on a quest for her own identity, the reader moves along with her. Instead of discovering familiar literary themes and stylistic means relating to childhood, the teenage reader will identify with the protagonist's teenage problems, and this form of identification conjures up a feeling of familiarity—the same as snug places would do in a children's story. Besides creating a protagonist that the teenage readers can relate to, Gaiman's text illustrates some of Carroll's ideas about horror as expressed in his book.

According to Carroll, "horror appears to be one of those genres in which the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters. Indeed, in works of horror the responses of characters often seem to cue the emotional responses of the audiences" (17). The reader identifies and sympathizes with the protagonist. The readers are not scared because they experience the same emotions as the protagonist, and Helena is not scared. Furthermore,

> the characters in works of horror exemplify for us the way in which to react to the monsters of fiction … The emotional reactions of characters, then, provide a set of instructions or, rather, examples about the way in which the audience is to respond to the monsters in the fiction—that is, about the way we are meant to react to its monstrous properties. (17)

Carroll's set of instructions is changed. Gaiman does not want to scare his teenage audience away. Instead, he wants to draw them in. Gaiman makes use of the

transcendence of emotions that occurs in horror stories. A strong protagonist who is not easily scared by the monsters around her will ensure that the readers are not scared either. But at the same time, the familiarities of the core of her issues conjure up an uncanny experience, which scares teenage readers as much as it scares Helena, while gripping them nonetheless.

One of the key stylistic aspects of *MirrorMask* that allows Gaiman to simultaneously frighten and grip his readers through an uncanny reading experience is the eerie, unsettling mood that he creates. This mood and sense of the uncanny is enforced throughout the book. The book starts off with Helena clearly stating that the story she is about to tell the reader is not a made up story: "It's the first story I've written down, although sometimes I like to make up stories in my head. (This isn't a made-up story, though.)" (Gaiman 3). By emphasizing the part that she has not made up this story, she insinuates that this story really happened. The reader is set up for reading a true story. The protagonist, Helena, who narrates this part of the story, has enlarged the willing suspension of disbelief. As the reader reads along, they will have the knowledge that the story they are reading is in fact a true story told by someone who is just like them; a young teenager. But the places and characters she encounters seem like they are not real at all, or at least do not come from the real world.

In presenting his story, Gaiman employs imagery that creates a dreamlike setting. This dreamlike landscape is linked to the uncanny because the reader is never quite sure where the story takes place. The story and its setting evokes an uncanny response. Helena says during the beginning of her narrative:

> I went to bed and listened to rain lash the windowpane and the rumble of thunder until I fell asleep. In my dream, my reflection was laughing at me. In my dream, I was two different girls. In my dream, mum was on her way to be

> operated on, and when she opened her eyes they were black as glass … I woke up. (13-14)

In this quote, Helena immediately takes the power of the truth away from the setting by stating the story takes place in a dream. What happens in a dream does not happen in real life. However, those last three words of the quote trigger an eerie feeling for the reader—it turns out that the story is not set in a dream at all, unlike in *Alice in Wonderland* for example, in which it does turn out to be a dream. Gaiman played with the idea of setting for this book. By leaving the nature of the setting ambiguous, Gaiman creates an opportunity for an uncanny experience, and by doing so he creates scariness.

In *MirrorMask*, Gaiman again works in Hawthorne's romance tradition. In "The Custom House," introductory to *The Scarlett Letter*, Hawthorne writes:

> Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly—making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility—is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment … so spiritualised by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse—whatever, in a word, has been used or played with during the day is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. Ghosts might enter here without affrighting us. It would be

> too much in keeping with the scene to excite surprise, were we to look about us and discover a form, beloved, but gone hence, now sitting quietly in a streak of this magic moonshine, with an aspect that would make us doubt whether it had returned from afar, or had never once stirred from our fireside. (1372)

The setting for *MirrorMask*, like Hawthorne's romance territory, is "somewhere between the real world and fairy-land." Hawthorne's "Moonshine" theory is therefore applicable here. Objects and characters within this world are different than the same objects in the real world. There is a blanket of moonlight covering this world where the story of Helena is set. Metaphorically, this moonlight has covered the readers' eyes. Because the reader cannot answer the question whether Helena is dreaming or not, he/she will most likely feel unease while reading the story. This sense of unease adds to the scariness of the overall reading experience.

Gaiman played this trick with the setting on his readers to divert them, and provided them with an uncanny feeling while reading the story. At first he lets them think the protagonist is merely producing a dream to her readers, but then she says she wakes up. Even though the rest of the story is set in a dreamlike landscape, Helena is in fact awake. She somehow landed in this world where book eating cats live and beetles are cops. From the very beginning of the book, the reader is uncertain of where the story unfolds and if the story is actually a dream or not. The dream world is enforced through the story. Valentine says to Helena: "These are the dreamlands" (45). But at the beginning of the story Helena told the reader that she had woken up. This uncertainty echoes the uncertainty of many teenagers about their life and living situations. Uncertainty is scary.

The story of Helena echoes the story of Coraline. Helena is mistaken for the dark princess: ""I don't know what time you call this," she said. "I've been worried sick about

you." "I'm not your daughter," I told her. "You'll do," was all she said" (50). Something similar happens to Coraline when she enters the other apartment. The other mother wants to claim Coraline as her own daughter. Against her will, she puts Coraline in the closet. Helena is also taken against her will by the Dark Queen and lives under what seems to be a spell of the Dark Queen:

> I watched them as they took me, and they made me beautiful. It was like I was another girl, and I watched her clothes, her hair, her lips, as the dolls made her perfect. She was me, and yet she wasn't me at all. She wasn't angry. She didn't feel anything at all. She opened her eyes, and they were black as glass. She wasn't me anymore. They had made me into the thing the Dark Queen wanted me to be—perfectly passive and, looking back on it, perfectly pathetic. My life became something that pleased the Queen. I did what she wanted. I stood behind her, sat beside her. I played with dolls. And all the time the world continued to fall apart. (53)

Besides the obvious resemblance of another mother claiming the female protagonist as her own, the eyes also play an important role in both narratives. In *Coraline*, the other mother has buttons for eyes and wants to sew a pair onto Coraline. Coraline stands up against the mother and escapes. Helena was taken in, did not have a choice and woke up with a pair of eyes "black as glass" (53). Two sayings about eyes are at work in *MirrorMask*. The first one is "Seeing is believing." With their eyes, people can see and witness the world around them. When Helena's eyes are taken and replaced by black glass her view of the world is blocked. She cannot look into the world and see her own truth. The second saying at work is "Eyes are the windows to the soul." Helena no longer has eyes. They have been replaced by black glass. By losing her vision and the windows

to her soul, Helena has become paralyzed. Her soul and spirit are blocked by the glass. That is why she is so obedient to the Dark Queen and does not rebel against her.

Because Helena does not immediately fight back, her fight to overcome the Dark Queen is harder than Coraline's fight to overcome the other mother. I believe Gaiman chose a different fight against the maternal figure for Helena, because of the different age of the target audience for *MirrorMask*. Both Helena and Coraline are taken by a maternal figure, but Helena was changed by this figure, and Coraline was not. Powell states, "if adolescents are not given the chance to explore their new roles and cannot follow a future positive path, they may remain confused about their identity. Adolescents need to be able to complete these tasks, find resolution to conflicts or adjustments and reach their unique identity" (79). The change the Dark Queen forced upon Helena can be seen as a chance given to Helena to "explore [her] role" (79). Helena soon finds out that this role is not the role she wants and therefore she decides to rebel against the Dark Queen. But as Powell states, teenagers need to have that opportunity and choice in order for them to eventually follow their own future path (79).

Instead of playing a game in order to beat the Dark Queen, as Coraline did with the other mother, Helena becomes the narrator of her own narrative, and by doing so gains power. Powell writes, "For teenagers to become independent, their self-concept and self-esteem have to be strong to overcome adolescent conflicts" (79). The adolescent conflict that Helena has to overcome is defeating the Dark Queen. When Helena no longer let someone else be the narrator of her narrative, she has taken back control. This moment comes for Helena when she stands on the steps and plays with her ball. A man comes up to her and starts talking to her. Helena thinks in response: "The princess who was Helena who was me sort of looking down at him from a long way away didn't say a word" (56). At this point, Helena is not certain who she is and who the

princess is—is she both? The man down at the steps says to her that he knows Helena is still in there, inside the body of the dark princess, to which Helena replies: "It was a funny thing to say. I wasn't in there. I was so far away" (56). Helena soon switches and convinces herself that she is not in the body of the princess. She was somewhere else, far away, maybe in a different dream world. The moment of realization of the self and taking back the control occurs when the man throws the ball back to the dark princess/Helena:

> Then he threw the ball back to the princes at the top of the stairs, who was me, and I caught it. And then, because it was etiquette, or because the girl was lonely and it's not much fun playing with a ball on your own, I/she threw the ball back. And he caught it, and tossed it back to me. Then he added another ball in. the toss became a cascade became an intricate weave of balls and lights. She owned my head, the Dark Queen, but she didn't own my hands, and they remembered how to juggle. They remembered, and they pulled me back from a million miles away. The juggler dropped a ball, and I heard a voice saying something a princess would never have said. It was my voice. It said, "Butterfingers." And Valentine was looking at me with an expression on that funny, mask face of his I'd never seen before. I was me. I was more me than ever. (56-57)

In the passage above, Helena has found herself again and takes control of her own voice and identity. Even though her vision is impaired because of the glass eyes she was given by the Dark Queen, Helena manages to feel the truth of her own, real world instead of seeing it. As soon as Helena catches the balls and she starts juggling with Valentine, the act of juggling triggers a memory for her of her old/real life. The juggling wakes her up.

For the rest of the story, Helena refers to herself as "me" and "I." She is in control of herself and her own narrative, and has found her own identity. Helena writes her

other mother the Dark Queen a letter saying "[she has] to grow up" and is "going to run away and join Real Life" (59). Helena is growing up. She is going to wear her own mask, not one that has been given to her by the Dark Queen. Helena continues her quest for self. She sees the dark princess when she is looking through a window, into her old world at the circus. This symbolizes a mirror moment for Helena. The dream world that Helena finds herself in is a place where she can take a step back and look at the person she is becoming, or will be if she keeps up with her rebellious attitude towards her parents and her life at the circus after fighting the dark queen. Helena has to fight her own dark side. Fighting the dark side is a part of the scariness for this book. Helena has to face herself and the girl she is becoming. This is a mirror moment that most likely is scary for teenage readers as well. That is why Gaiman made sure to put his protagonist through this—the similarity between Helena's teenage life issues and that of the reader hopefully scares the readers enough, because even though the core issue may be familiar, the issue itself—not a strong sense of self—is scary.

The usage of visual images adds to the overall reading experience. In this book, there is a mix of photographs and drawings present. The photographs show real images, seen by a camera lens. Nothing in these images is imagined—the camera took a picture portraying the image as it exists in reality. The drawn images are pictures created by an artist's imagination. Those images could have been altered in the imagination of the drawer, or different in the mind of a different illustrator. They could very well be a false representation of reality. Even with the usage of different types of visual images, Gaiman created a vague and ambiguous sense of setting. The photographs present a real world, yet the drawings are more representable of an imaginary, dreamlike world. These specific representational techniques enhance the scariness of the world in the book. The reader can ask him-/herself whether Helena is dreaming or awake while

reading the book. The images[1] of a landscape that seems so unreal intensifies this question.

This dichotomy between illustrations illustrates the dichotomy teenagers may experience from within—being torn between being a child and wanting to be an adult. Drawings are significant for children's picture books. They are made up of mainly illustrations drawn by hand. The pictures are more representable of an older age group. They show a more realistic view of the world—a worldview teenagers may possess, but younger children may not.

The different font sizes in this book indicate various emotions. The first part of Helena's story is all in the same font size up until page seven. On page seven[2], Helena reproduces her mother's rules for finding things that were lost. These two rules have a great significance for Helena and are therefore in a bigger font size in bold. The best example of emotions being portrayed via font size is on page thirteen[3]. On this page, Helena is in conversation with her father about her mother's surgery. Whenever the emotions change from normal to being worried and mad, the font size is larger Whenever the emotional response of Helena is normal the font size becomes smaller. Shouting, screaming, and other emotional utterances are in a larger font size. The different font sizes and differentiation between regular and bold help the story come to life. This is a form of aliveness Gaiman, in collaboration with McKean has implemented in this book.

The line placements[4] also make the story come to life. They add movement to the story and conversations. This adds another sense of truth to the story. The reading experience is so lively, it makes the story comes to life as well. It is as if the reader is

[1] See Appendix A
[2] See Appendix B
[3] See Appendix C
[4] See Appendix D

really there, following Helena in this dreamlike world. Whatever happens to Helena, happens to the reader as well due to these visual aids that help the story move and come to life. *MirrorMask* is originally a movie created by Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman. McKean and Gaiman first created a visual story in film, and later put this visual story into words. In order for them to be successful they had to make the reading experience very visual, just like the movie. McKean and Gaiman accomplished this by using different fonts and font sizes, drawings, and pictures. Because of these techniques the story works extremely well in book form.

Gaiman has explored the classic horror conventions—such as uncertain environment, villainous characters, monsters, and the protagonist overcoming evil—and the uncanny, adjusted them, and created an attractive story for a teenage audience. In order for this book to be successful for a teenage audience, Gaiman created a protagonist that the readers can identify with. The protagonist Helena struggles with her sense of self and identity. The steps teenagers go through in their development from child to adult are all present in this book. As the protagonist is moving past one step, and going on to the next, the reader follows her. The familiar problems the protagonist has are in fact problems of uncertainty and fear of the unfamiliar. The familiarity of the issues that the protagonist confronts in the story is simultaneously the fear factor of this story, which creates the uncanny mood that is so unsettling and yet attractive to the reader.

The visual aspects of this story reflect what goes on in the mind of the teenage reader. The different fonts, font sizes, pictures, and illustrations are all representative of different emotions. *MirrorMask* is a hybrid text, and is perfect for the transitory teenage audience because it contains both pictures and a lot of text. This book is a step in between picture books for children and novels without any illustrations for adults. The

power of this book lies within both the visual and literary representation of its audience. And because these literary and visual techniques create a sense of the uncanny, this book fits in perfectly with Gaiman's own tradition of horror stories for children.

In Conclusion

There is a certain and definite uniqueness about Gaiman's children's books. His books are fun and entertaining, and wildly popular among young readers as well as adults. A reason for this could be that Gaiman is able to create a paradoxical reading experience for his reader—that pleases both child and adult readers—by making the unpleasant pleasant. He accomplishes this by transforming classic horror conventions—such as haunted houses, graveyards, and villainous characters—and transforming children's literature conventions, such as snugness, scariness, and aliveness. Gaiman uses traditional horror blueprints, and places the transformed children's literature conventions over them. Because of this transforming and fusing of conventions, his child readers are not scared away from his books. On the contrary, they are drawn to his books. The combination of horror and humour is very successful, and a carry on of the gothic tradition, as Coats said about Gaiman. Gaiman translates philosophical thoughts about morals to children, but in a very different way than the fairy tales do. The good and evil is always very clear, and a heroic character properly defeats the evil. The three texts studied show on a philosophical level that the real world is scary. Monsters will lurk. True evil resides in moral qualities of people, and behaviour is what makes monsters monstrous: not their physical appearance. My analysis of the texts and my findings point towards the fact that Gaiman, in fusing children's and horror conventions has initiated the development of a new hybrid, oxymoronic genre called cozy-gothic. Despite reversing and adapting horror conventions to his children's stories, Gaiman's stories are very attractive to the young reader because they conjure up an emotion of coziness. The books discussed in this thesis show stylistic aspects and themes of snugness and aliveness, and a homely motif, despite the scary characters and settings.

The children's movie *Paranorman* (2012) is a good example of a non-Gaiman text that builds on the foundations that Gaiman laid for this genre. It underscores what I have studied for this thesis. *Paranorman* was created by the same people who made the *Coraline* (2009) movie. The movie is about a little boy named Norman who can see and communicate with the deceased. The deceased people do not look scary, like the living dead people at the graveyard in *The Graveyard Book*. The characters in this movie who do look scary and monstrous are the zombies. Norman has to save his town from the zombies. However, it turns out that the monstrous and scary looking zombies do not mean any harm towards the people of the town. It is in fact the townsmen who are the evil characters. They instantly want to kill the zombies, and even before the zombies come to town, they are mean towards Norman because he is different. They bully him and gossip about him. This echoes the message/theme present in many of Gaiman's children's books: true evil lies in the characters and moral sense of people.

Another children's movie that fits into this fledgling genre is *Hotel Transylvania* (2012). This movie was released in the same year as *Paranorman*, but created by a different studio, which shows that the conventions of the new genre are reaching out beyond writers, artists and studios closely familiar with Gaiman's work. *Hotel Transylvania* is a movie about Count Dracula who wants to create a hotel for monsters that humans cannot find. He does this initially to keep his vampire daughter safe from humans. It turns out that all monsters seek refuge from the evil humans. The monsters in this movie are fun, hilarious, and at times even endearing. Again, the humans are portrayed as the source of evil, voicing an underlying theme of tolerance towards and acceptance of difference between peoples. Otherness is often not accepted in contemporary society and looked at as evil and scary; its disapproval is often portrayed in books and films for both children and adults. The one human character in the film

Hotel Transylvania, named Jonathan, who finds the hotel is the exception to the rule. Happiness follows for him and the monsters as soon as they realize they both are not dangerous and should be accepting of each other. This movie is an example of another children's movie/story that fuses the conventions of horror and children's story telling to explore a more philosophical theme: True evil resides in moral qualities. The success of movies such as *Paranorman* and *Hotel Transylvania* show that the genre Neil Gaiman pioneered with *Coraline*, *The Graveyard Book* and *MirrorMask* is coming into its own.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D