# Exploring Identity Through the Gothic: The Uncanny and Doubling in Gaiman's Coraline Compared to Selick's Film Adaptation

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## Introduction

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002) is an engaging Gothic story that explores identity in both its original novel form and Henry Selick's 2009 stop-motion animated film adaptation. It follows Coraline, a young protagonist who loses her sense of self, travels to the Other World, and battles to regain her identity. The Gothic motif of the uncanny and doubling is essential to the narrative in both versions, as the uncanny blurs the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and between reality and fantasy. The research and analyses conducted in the chapters to come reveal how the literary and cinematic versions of *Coraline* employ the Gothic tropes of the uncanny and doubling to depict Coraline's struggle with identity. By focusing on the central theme of self-discovery in Coraline's journey through the uncanny Other World**,** this research aims to determine which medium more effectively utilizes the Gothic motif of uncanniness to represent Coraline's initial state of ontological insecurity and her search for ontological security as she navigates the Gothic Other World. This thesis hypothesises that the film's visual and auditory aspects enhance the uncanny nature of the Other World, thereby foregrounding the theme of identity struggles more prominently and representing ontological insecurity as a more threatening condition of being for youngsters than the novel.

In *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996), Brian McFarlane emphasizes that adaptations are creative transformations that reinterpret and recontextualize narratives. He explains that there are elements of a novel that can be directly "transferred" to the film, and elements that "will require more complex processes of adaptation" (10). A film version of a novel is almost never a straightforward "transposition," of the source text to a new medium, but can involve deviations from "commentary" on the source text to the point where the film holds only an analogous relation to the source (McFarlane 10-11). For McFarlane, cinematic

adaptation studies should not focus on the issue of fidelity, but should critically explore the tensions and "kinds of transmutations" (23) created by the process of adapting a work of prose fiction for the cinematic medium. Gaiman's novel and Selick's film each convey the theme of identity loss and rediscovery in their distinctive way, utilizing the strengths of their respective mediums.

In Chapter 1, the overriding theme and Gothic tropes that appear in the novel and film will be identified, and relevant secondary sources will be discussed in order to support the relevance of the research topic. Chapter 2 will examine on Gaiman's *Coraline*, focusing specifically on the story's theme of an adolescent girl losing and then regaining a sense of her own identity. In addition, this chapter analyses the role of the Gothic tropes of uncanny and doubling in facilitating Coraline's search for ontological security. In Chapter 3, Selick's stop-motion animated film adaptation will be analysed and compared to the original novel. This chapter will focus on identifying alterations made during the adaptation process, highlighting how these modifications, especially through the use of stop-motion animation, enhance the Gothic elements and expand Coraline's journey for ontological security. By comparing the novel and the film, this research aims to illustrate how different mediums can influence and amplify the thematic and Gothic aspects of the story.

# Chapter 1 A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Identity Loss and Gothic Tropes in *Coraline*

The related Gothic tropes of the uncanny and doubling are central to both versions of *Coraline*. In fact, it is the centrality of these motifs that has caused readers and scholars to understand the text as a modern work of Gothic fiction. While the uncanny and doubling have been a persistent feature of the genre since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), various definitions of the uncanny and doubling have been developed, from Jentsch's (1906) and Freud's (1919) psychoanalytic approaches to Masahiro Mori's robotics influenced concept of the Uncanny Valley (1970) and David Punter's appropriation of the concepts for Gothic literary studies. A critical discussion of key secondary sources on these crucial psychological as well as literary-critical concepts will offer a more profound understanding of how they function within the Gothic genre and enhance the theme of loss of identity in *Coraline*.

## 1.1 Freud's Understanding of the Uncanny

In "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud explored the idea through the lens of psychoanalysis, in response to Jentsch's "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906). He analysed a German gothic text, E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1817), to clarify his own understanding of uncanniness. The word "unheimlich" was used by Jentsch and later by Freud in their initial German works on the uncanny. The term uncanny is referred to as "unheimlich," which directly translates to "unhomely." The terms "heimlich" means "homely" and "heimisch" means "native," which converges with "unheimlich" as it can "sometimes mean the opposite … depending on context or, in some cases, the speaker's intentions" (Hallam 14). In addition, "Heimlich" refers to being "surrounded," "secret," and kept near one's home. This indicates

Freud's reluctance to form a singular definition for the term "unheimlich." He contends that the "unfamiliar" is not the only facet that causes an uncanny sensation since "[s]omething has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny" (Freud 220). This can be seen in *Coraline*'s Other World, where the Other parents, on the one hand, resemble Coraline's real parents except for the addition of buttons for eyes, which creates a remarkable effect of alienation without losing the obvious resemblance to the real parents. This intermingling of the familiar and strange gives the Other parents their fundamentally unsettling and fear-inducing effect on both Coraline and the audience.

According to Freud, "The Sandman" exemplified the concept of the uncanny as Hoffman's representation of events blurred the lines "between 'heimlich'- the socially acceptable and explicable - and the 'unheimlich' - that which lies beyond the bounds of human reason… and we are invited to accept a version of events which is … 'Super-natural'" (Punter 130-1). For literary scholars, like David Punter, Hoffmann's tale (and similar works of German and British romanticism that feature the same motif) was a significant influence on the development of what today is defined as Gothic fiction. Consequently, the uncanny, as defined by Freud through his analysis of Hoffmann's tale, became a standardized Gothic trope. It is often seen in representation of nightmares or hauntings. The otherworldly settings and monsters of the Gothic allude to things repressed, forgotten, or in a state being lost that, nonetheless, through their surreal and/or grotesque presence remind people of something unknown yet commonplace.

Punter provides several examples of how the uncanny experience is represented in Gothic texts, including "anthropomorphism, which are … clearly related examples of uncanny shape-changing" and "strange kinds of repetition', a category which includes the double or doppelgänger and the experience of déjà vu" (Punter 131). The logic of the uncanny suggests

that experiences often go beyond the limits of reason and imply realms beyond a person's comprehension. This idea is closely linked to the Gothic theory of knowledge that does not derive from conventional sources.

According to "gothic logic," the feeling of uncanniness is a haunting, mysterious, and unsettling sensation that has an impact on people's belongings, identities, and institutions. It challenges the notion of appearance as well as the rules guiding how everything manifests. Due to this natural disaster, there is a significant disturbance of what is seen as a part of nature, which affects people, reality, and the whole world. This relates to how the uncanniness of the Other World impacts Coraline's view of the real world and herself as Chapters 2 and 3 will show.

## 1.2 The Uncanny Valley

The most recent term for a specific form of uncanny experience is the Uncanny Valley, which originated in the work of a Japanese roboticist, Masahiro Mori. He proposed the Uncanny Valley hypothesis, which postulated a nonlinear relationship between the likeability of robots and how much they are thought to resemble humans. According to his study, "in climbing toward the goal

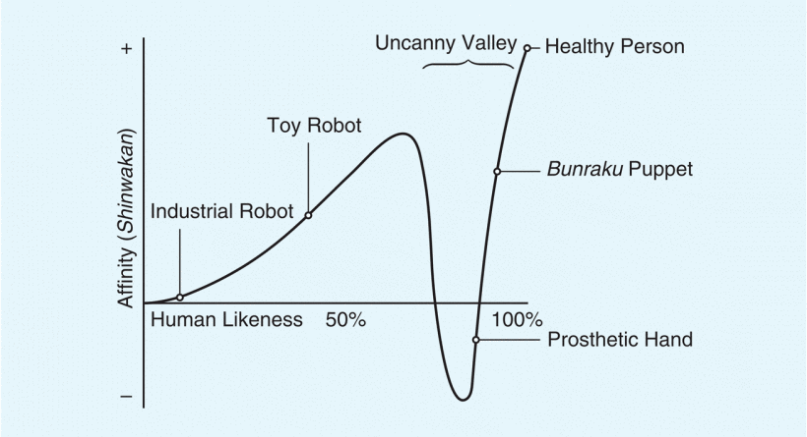


*Figure 1:* Mori, Masahiro, et al.*, "The uncanny valley [From the Field]"*

of making robots appear like a human, our affinity for them increases until we come to a valley" which he termed the "uncanny valley" (Mori et al. 98, Figure 1).

Masahiro explains how once the realistic "prosthetic hand" is shown to be artificial then the uncanniness becomes present. He gave the example of someone losing their "sense of affinity" when they are "startled during a handshake by" the prosthetic hand's "limp boneless grip together with its texture and coldness" (99). The designer contends a robot's expression becomes uncanny when its speed is reduced to a slow smile. This suggests that "because of a variation in movement, something that has come to appear close to human—like a robot, puppet, or prosthetic hand—could easily tumble down into the uncanny valley" (Mori et al. 100). From this perspective, puppetry is inherently uncanny the more realistic it is to the viewer. In Selick's stop-motion animated film adaptation, each character is manipulated frame by frame to create the illusion of life and is a puppetry masterpiece. And since the character models in the film are made from the same materials, Coraline views the other characters as real which makes their puppet-like movements feel uncanny to her. Within this puppet film, the plot prominently features dolls and puppets, reinforcing the themes of security and identity.

### 1.3 Doubling

One of the central forms the uncanny takes in much Gothic fiction is "strange kinds of repetition … which includes the double or doppelgänger and the experience of déjà vu" (Punter 131). Freud also related the uncanny to doubling and suggests that the object that causes this uncanniness is partly familiar. Doppelgänger is a German word that translates to "double-goer" (OED). In 1796, Jean Paul Richter defined doppelgänger in Siebenkäs as "So heissen Leute, die sich selbst sehen," which means "So people who see themselves are called" (Hallam 5). Given that "'double' can mean almost any dual, and in some cases even multiple, structure in a text,"

this term is quite ambiguous (Hallam 5). Consequently, various possible forms of doubling can occur in *Coraline* to enhance the overall uncanny nature of her experience in navigating the Other World.

There are various degrees of doubling, such as "characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike," and the relationship between the two is exacerbated when "one possesses knowledge, feelings, and experience in common with the other" (Freud 233). This connection might be accomplished telepathically or by other mental processes. Doubling may be defined as a type of "dividing and interchanging of the self," such as when a person "identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own" (Freud 233). Another form of doubling is the repeated incidents involving the same issue, such as "the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations" (Freud 233). Freud's remarks indicate the forms doubling can take in *Coraline*, such as the reoccurrence of button eyes, doubling of characters and the imitation of spaces of the real world.

Contemporary to Freud, Otto Rank researched the double in "Der Doppelgänger" (1914). He "investigated in various publications the Double figure in anthropology, folklore, and literature from a psychological standpoint" (Hallam 5). According to Rank, the double serves as an "energetic denial of the power of death" and is an "insurance against the destruction of the ego" (qtd in Freud 234). Thus, there is a probability that "the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body" (Freud 234). The invention of doubling as a preservation mechanism corresponds with dreams: "fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of a genital symbol" (Freud 234). As a result, the ancient Egyptians produced images of the deceased

on lasting materials. These concepts are rooted in "the Freudian theory of narcissism" and "morbid self-love," these elements of unbounded self-love "prevent the formation of a happily balanced personality" (Rank 15). The double, however, becomes "the uncanny harbinger of death" once this phase prevails (Freud 234). Accordingly, Rank asserts that "[t]he primitive concept of the soul as a duality (the person and his shadow) appears in modern man in the motif of the double, assuring him, on the one hand, of immortality and, on the other, threateningly announcing his death" (Rank 16). This type of doubling is comparable to the Victorian tradition of grave dolls, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.1 as relevant to developing an understanding of the function of dolls in the film adaptation of Gaiman's novel; these dolls represent death and an extension of life as a symbol of immortality.

### 1.4 Loss of Sight and Dolls

The uncanny is inextricably related to sight; uncanniness is often referred to "as 'intellectual uncertainty' by causing disbelief in what one is seeing, e.g. inanimate objects becoming animated, doubles and déjà vu" (Lester 225). Doubt on an intellectual level can lead to doubt on an ontological level, thus linking to ontological insecurity. From a psychoanalytical perspective, Freud discusses the dread of losing one's eyes. He states that "the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children" and "[m]any adults retain their apprehensiveness in this respect" (Freud 231). Freud connects "the fear of going blind" to "the dread of being castrated" (Freud 231) as he often does, but this highlights his own preoccupation with the masculine experience and sexual instincts. In particular, the dread of castration produces an unusually violent and enigmatic feeling that "gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring" (Freud 231). It allows this "substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ" to exist

(Freud 231). This substitution of the male organ and eyes was researched through "a study of dreams, phantasies and myths" (Freud 231). Such as the myth of Oedipus who blinded himself as "a mitigated form of the punishment of castration" after realizing that he had murdered his father and married his mother (Freud 231). As a result, "the fear of one's identity being fused or replaced with that of a parent" becomes directly linked to the loss of sight (Lester 226). Thus, *Coraline* is also linked with the fear of castration which relates to Freud's theory of the Uncanny. However, Coraline's fears centre around not being seen by her parent and the world, and as such losing her sense of self.

Coraline's need to be recognized, especially by her mother, is a key character feature in the story. A "sense of identity, or the possession of a sense of self, is shown to depend quite a lot on being noticed by other people" Anna Jackson explains in her work on the uncanny in Gothic children's literature (160). In Gaiman's narrative, "Coraline's utilisation of the sense of sight" is just as vital as the urge to be seen (Lester 234). For instance, when she throws the cat in the Other Mother's face to block her vision or when she uses her sight to locate the children's and her parents' lost souls. As a result, this employment of sight is crucial in Coraline's victory against the Other Mother and in finding her sense of self.

In *Coraline,* the eyes are not only removed but also replaced with button eyes. Eyes are traditionally thought of as the windows to the soul and are kept "shut; just as mirrors were covered when someone died, in case their soul might go into the mirrored surface and haunt the living" (Rudd 163). Such as the tradition of placing coins over the deceased's eyes because it is thought that they have to "pay the ferryman" (Rudd 163). The buttons are coin-shaped objects and play a similar spiritual role, except they seem to take the souls of the children. Meaning, "[t]he other mother offers to replace Coraline's eye with her own I" (Rudd 163). The

significance of the button eyes as imagery crucial to enhancing Coraline's uncanny experience in the Other World will be further discussed in Chapters 2.10 and 3.2.

The button eyes also give the characters of the Other World a doll-like appearance. According to Jentsch, when "an apparently living being really is animate" or "a lifeless object may not in fact be animate" then there is logical doubt regarding its existence, and it might evoke uncanny sensations (8). Children can be sympathetic or compassionate toward creatures other than people because of their innocence, and they can even become friends with the unknown. This is a result of kids' tendency to perceive things as living things and project themselves into them, like their toys. Since children frequently regard dolls as living people in "their early games" and "do not distinguish at all sharply between living and inanimate objects," dolls are intimately associated with childhood (Freud 233). The importance of dolls in the film is explored in Chapter 3.1.

### 1.5 Stop-motion Animation

Stop-motion animation is a crucial element that distinguishes *Coraline* (2009) from other Gothic films from the same era aimed at younger audiences like Disney's *The Haunted Mansion* (2003 and 2023) or *Goosebumps* (2015). Laika Studio Films produced the film, fusing traditional and modern methods of animation to generate a smooth stop-motion animation style for which the studio has become known. "Most stop-motion puppet animated films are produced" through manipulated animation where "the animator will incrementally, but directly, move a single puppet form" (Torre 98). However, in the film *Coraline,* they utilise replacement animation "whereby puppet parts (such as the head) are replaced (one frame at a time) with slightly dissimilar ones" (Torre 97). Subsequently, in the animation process, these replacements are

edited together to create more fluid movements and expressions. This further enables them to replace pieces of each puppet with changed elements, such as incrementally shorter or longer limbs, to "achieve exaggerated 'squash and stretch' movements" (Torre 99). These mixtures of techniques "enhance the movie's focus on domestic, familiar (heimlich) spaces and characters that become other-worldly and strange (unheimlich)" (Herhuth 196). Furthermore, the film is so well-produced and the motions are so fluid that "[t]he uncanniness of this puppet world stems not from jittery movement or visible wires/seams/thumbprints (as in older stop motion), but from an uncertainty about the nature of the materiality and tangibility of the puppets" (Herhuth 195). Thus, replacement animation and the representational techniques of puppetry heighten the film's uncanny atmosphere.

Travis Knight, an animator for *Coraline*, stated that they were "modelling and sculpting in the computer, printing them out on these wacky 3-D printers, painting them all by hand, and then fitting them and putting them on the puppets" (Jones 107). As a result, an enormous quantity of puppets was created for the film, and their expressive faces were expertly constructed. Most notably, as discussed in *Coraline: A Visual Companion* (2009), there were over 200,000 different expressions made just for the character Coraline. The thousands of 3-D printed and hand-painted heads were altered constantly to suit the expression of the character. As a result, "each puppet head is actually an amalgamation of potentially thousands of replacement parts all sutured together (through the process of animation) to represent a single form" (Torre 102). This method is wholly appropriate for such a film as *Coraline* in which the characters are doubled. It further indicates how the film's uncanniness is inherent to the production process as in the narrative.

The doubling of characters occurs in the Other World, meaning that there are two worlds in which the film occupies. The film's narrative, with its doubling of people and spaces, parallels the duplication and alteration within the production. In each scene, multiple puppets or puppet pieces need to be changed and moved to suit their movement. Then these moments of rearrangement are cut in editing to achieve a fluid movement. Therefore, replacements can "be conceived of as an embodiment of a multiplicity because they are the amalgamation of many things over time and space (conflated time, conflated objects)" (Torre 102). There are also "two alternating visual traces [which] emerge in the finished product of *Coraline* – one is the spliney (very fluid) animated movement which is associated with CG animation; the other is the textured and tactile qualities associated with stop-motion puppet animation" (Torre 104). These two contrasting visuals are the results of the combination of old and new stop-motion animation techniques. This stark contrast between the fluid movements and rigid qualities heightens the uncanny nature of the aesthetics.

In the Other World, items move as if they were alive, such as the furniture that shifts into position and Coraline's eager toys. That may "seem surreal but also the incongruous movement of things … can provoke a sense of the uncanny" for both the viewer and Coraline (Torre 105). When Coraline leaves the Other World, she finds herself in a barren white space. The cat states: "It's the empty part of this world. She only made what she knew would impress you" (*Coraline* 55:23-9). This alludes to the design process of stop-motion animation, where only elements that will be on camera are constructed. Torre, therefore, views "the Other World as being one big stop-motion set and the Other Mother as being the powerful animator behind it all" (Torre 109). This connection between stop-motion and the film will be further discussed in Chapter 3.10.

The character's movements in the film are very fluid. When these movements shift, such as "the Other Mother becom[ing] more insect-like (or perhaps more stop-motion-puppet-armature like) and the Other Father becom[ing] much more floppy and flabby" it adds to the horror aspect (Torre 106-7). This shift also indicates the weakening of the Other Mother's control over the space. Generally, the characters in the Other World are more puppet-like because of their button eyes, sawdust-filled bodies, and the fact that "occasionally their armature constructs become visible" (Torre 108). An example of their puppetry being noticeable is when the Other Father plays the piano, and "he is adorned with Mickey Mouse-style gloves which are supported and controlled by an elaborate array of external rigs" (Torre 108). This rigging resembles how "such a scene would have been animated in a typical stop-motion shoot" (Torre 108). According to Torre, this means that "the true-material nature of the stop-motion puppet form becomes" practically as significant as the role the puppet is supposed to play (108). In Chapter 3.8 the Other Father is examined alongside this puppet motif.

Puppetry is paradoxical because a puppet may appear both alive and active "but also a dead, inanimate materiality" (Herhuth 191). This indicates that puppetry not only falls under the Freudian uncanny but also Masahiro Mori's theory of the Uncanny Valley. Given that literary and philosophical accounts frequently address "how puppets expose a repressed belief in the supernatural or express a thingness and alienness that resonates with human experience" (Herhuth 191). Stop-motion's inherent uncanniness is due to "its fundamental production processes" (Torre 104). This means that the puppets need to be physically moved and "[a]s a result, the viewer will normally (and comfortably) recognize the inanimate real-world objects but will simultaneously be surprised by the movement of those objects" (Torre 104-5).

Cappelleto argues that “anthropomorphic dolls bear the appearance of life,” but are passive, “and automatons simulate” life as they move independently (327). However, puppets are between these two interpretations as “the puppet is a schema of action—not of posturing” (Cappelletto 327). The duality of puppets is seen as similar to “the duality of human experience,” which defines “the puppet … as a medium that expresses agency as a problem, as existing in a conflicted space between autonomy and passivity, between controlling oneself and being controlled by other forces” (Herhuth 191). A significant note is that the film does not glorify turning into a puppet but instead “depicts becoming [a] puppet as an unpleasant fate that the protagonist must avoid” (Herhuth 194). Therefore, Coraline is afraid of turning into a puppet and forever losing her identity.

### 1.6 Gaiman’s Perspective on Children’s Horror

In an interview, Neil Gaiman stated that he believes “it is really important to show dark things to kids — and, in the showing, to also show that dark things can be beaten, that you have power. Tell them you can fight back, tell them you can win” (Books 1:44-2:12). This can be seen in *Coraline* as the protagonist must confront doubles of her world when she travels through the door and succeeds in saving not only herself, but the ghost of lost children and her parents. Coraline first fears to lose but then finds her identity as a result of these uncanny challenges.

In *Coraline*, the apartment and its inhabitants are replicated in the Other World. The Other parents wish to keep her there permanently; thus she is trapped in an uncanny double of her own home. Traditionally in cinema, “[t]he home is considered a space of security and comfort for people of all ages” and this is especially true for children “who have yet to learn independence and rely on the protection of parents or guardians” (Lester 202). For Coraline, the

home becomes in itself an uncanny space as it is imitated in the Other World, and this "overt connection between the home and the uncanny comes from the term's literal meaning being 'unhomely', implying feelings of discomfort and unfamiliarity that are at odds with traditional conceptions of the home" (Lester 204). The Other World's home is familiar to Coraline, but subtle alterations make it feel unsettling to her and lead to a mistrust of the home.

Gaiman heightens the terror as the parental figures become monstrous in the otherworld, leaving the protagonist without the protection of the house or her family. As Reynolds stated, "[t]he frightening element in most of these stories arises more from what they imply about the threat to children from parents, adults, and official institutions than from any elaborate bogeymen and monsters" (132). This "feature [of] a malevolent parent, step-parent, or parent-in-law" indicates a "link between fairy tales and children's horror films" as both media frequently use such a trope (Lester 208). The connection between the two is further emphasized in Selick's *Coraline* (2009), as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

According to Lester, Coraline is forced to move because of her parents' jobs: "and suffers a sense of displacement" (223). This leads to a sense of homelessness as she has not yet settled into this new home and environment. The film begins with a *mise-en-scène* which "replicate[s] this feeling and simultaneously reflect the protagonist's unrest and dissatisfaction" (Lester 223). Coraline's parents are also unresponsive and neglectful as they are "trying their best to juggle an important work project, a house move, and a bored child" (Lester 233). The use of "absent parents is a vital narrative element of children's horror as it grants the child protagonists the power and agency to gain their own independence and responsibility" (Lester 233). Coraline's sense of homelessness prompts her to journey into the Other World, where the uncanny nature of this unfamiliar environment fuels her ability to express herself.

### 1.7 Ontological Insecurity

It is widely acknowledged, Robert Miles explains, that "the Gothic represents the subject in a state deracination, of the self-finding itself disposed [of] in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation" (3). However, Miles states that "these representations are in competition with each other and form a mode of debate" as "Gothic texts revise one another, here opening ideologically charger issues, there enforcing a closure" (3). This alludes to ontological security, which is defined as "the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time —as being rather than constantly changing — in order to realize a sense of agency" (Mitzen 342). This leads to a sense of stability, and then there is ontological insecurity, which is the uncertainty about one's surroundings and identity.

According to R.D. Laing, an individual in a state of ontological insecurity feels "more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question" (42). This individual can no longer "live in a 'secure' world than he can be secure in himself" (Laing 42). In Gaiman's novel and its film adaptation, Coraline's loss of identity leads to her entering the uncanny Other World where nothing is what it seems, further heightening Coraline's insecurity. For ontologically secure individuals "relatedness with others is potentially gratifying; whereas the ontologically insecure person is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself" (Laing 42). Consequently, when Coraline succeeds in preserving herself and then receives recognition from those around her, she will become a secure individual. Since viewing others and being viewed as "real and alive" is "self-validating data of experience" (Laing 41). The significance of ontological insecurity for *Coraline* will be demonstrated in Chapter 2.5.

## Chapter 2 Gothic Tropes in the Novel *Coraline*: Identity Loss and Recovery

Gaiman worked on *Coraline* (2002) for about 10 years. He began the novel for his daughter, Holly and later completed it for his younger daughter, Maddy. He wanted his daughters to know "that being brave doesn't mean you aren't scared. Being brave means you are scared, really scared, badly scared, and you do the right thing anyway" (Gaiman xv). Coraline's home was modelled after both the flat in Littlemead where Gaiman and his family lived as well as the house in which he grew up. The analysis of Gaiman's novel focuses on the Gothic tropes of the uncanny and doubling which highlight the central theme of a young girl losing and then regaining a solid sense of her own identity.

### 2.1 Coraline's Identity and Misnaming in the Novel

At the outset of the novel, Coraline and her parents move into a new apartment. This is an unfamiliar neighbourhood, and the house still does not feel like a home to her. Govender explains that "as a stranger in an unknown environment, [Coraline] is constantly having to re-assert her identity" and this search for identity becomes a central theme in the narrative (57). Meaning to spell Caroline, Gaiman accidentally typed Coraline instead. When he read this name, he "knew it was someone's name" and "wanted to kn[o]w what happened to her" (Gaiman xii). Her name originated in Greek mythology because "Cora derives from the Greek Korë or Corinna, with Kore being another term for the Greek Goddess Persephone" (Govender 58). Persephone is "abducted by Hades, the God of the Underworld, when (in some versions) she wanders too far from her mother," the Goddess Demeter (Govender 58). In addition, the initial portion of her name "Cora [is] from the Italian word 'coraggio' translates to courage, bravery or

heart in Italian, and it also alludes to a Spanish variant of the word 'corazón' which means heart" (Govender 57-8). Govender contends that by altering the "vowels in her name, people are metaphorically weakening (taking the heart out of) and rendering Coraline's identity displaced on both a psychic and outer level" (58). This also relates to the uncanny since her name is almost, but not quite, Caroline, and people frequently confuse it for Coraline; therefore, it is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Her name suggests the dangers of travelling too far from her family and how displaced her identity becomes through this uncanny misnaming.

Coraline's name is frequently mispronounced; Miss Spink, Miss Forcible, and Mr Bobo continuously call her "Caroline" (Gaiman 4–18). As a result, "Coraline is sharply aware that adults in general cannot remember her name and tend to forget that she is in the room" (Gooding 396). This inability to properly address her reflects how Coraline "experiences a divided sense of self" (Govender 57). As discussed in Chapter 1.1, Freud stated that doubling – a form of uncanny experience –can be classified as a "dividing and interchanging of the self" (Freud 233). Even when the mice pronounce her name correctly, Mr Bobo affirms his mistake by stating "[t]hey got your name wrong, you know. They kept saying Coraline. Not Caroline. Not Caroline at all" (19-20). As stated previously, the "sense of identity, or the possession of a sense of self, is shown to depend quite a lot on being noticed by other people" (Jackson 160). At the conclusion, Miss Spink praises Coraline and calls her "an extraordinary child" as "[n]o one had hugged her like that since she had retired from the theater" (191). Eventually, others acknowledged her when she acted kindly toward them. Accordingly, "Coraline's growth in the novel is observed through her subtle gestures with her family and those who surround her" (Torres-Fernández 38). Therefore, when those around her correctly call her name then she is not doubled as her identity is no longer divided.

Despite her curiosity and love of exploration, Coraline has a "distaste [for] 'exotic things' or people" (Govender 62). She does not take pleasure in her father's attempts to concoct new recipes and does not investigate the crazy old man. His "flat had smelled of strange foods and pipe tobacco and odd, sharp, cheesy-smelling things which Coraline could not name. She had not wanted to go any further inside than that" (139), which indicates her lack of curiosity towards the exotic. She is also unaware of the fact that the man in the top flat has a name, she usually refers to him as the crazy old man upstairs. She never thought he "actually had a name" and became excited at the opportunity to "say a name like 'Mister Bobo' aloud" (185). When Coraline corrects Mister Bobo and uses his name, he ultimately pronounces her name correctly and even repeats "her name to himself with wonderment and respect" (190). Once Coraline acknowledges the unique identities of others by addressing them directly with their name, she also is seen more distinctly as an individual, indicating that the closer someone's familiarity with another and the more precise the expression of this familiarity the less "uncanny" their interpersonal experience becomes.

In the novel, cats do not have names, but "people have names … because [they] don't know who [they] are" (45). This implies that humans come into the world ontologically insecure, unlike cats, and naming is a way of creating greater ontological security. The notion that it is not difficult to recognize the cat, even in the absence of a name, is confirmed when Coraline ultimately spots it. That said, naming remains important to children, which is illustrated by their tendency to name objects, like their cuddly toys. More generally, naming gives people, young and old, a sense of control over the objects or events. Pets are named to some extent with the purpose to control them directly by calling them to attention, to sit, to walk, etc., although cats generally do not respond to names in this manner, humans still address cats

and call out cats by their names to express their recognition as well as to create the pleasant experience of having authentic interpersonal relation with the pet. The lack of a name for the cat in *Coraline* suggests its independence from the world of humans, illustrated by its ability to move between the Other World and the Real World, within the novel.

In *Coraline*, names are also significant markers of life and agency. According to the ghost children that Coraline meets in the Other World, "names are the first things to go" once a human being passes away and people keep their memories "longer than [their] names" (98). This indicates how little names affect a person's identity, it is utilized as an identifier but not as someone's only trait to be recognized. People sometimes use physical characteristics or preconceived notions about someone's character to refer to someone whose name is unknown. An example is when Coraline refers to Mr Bobo as the crazy old guy. Therefore, naming also remarks on the characteristics of a subject.

When someone is given a name in the novel, they cease to be a stranger and become humanized. The parent's names are not revealed in the novel except for their last name, Jones. According to Govender, "her family name might suggest conformity" as Jones is accepted as a frequently occurring and normal last name (58). Coraline's mother goes by mom, mother, and, at one point, Mrs Jones. As a result, they are solely seen in their function as Coraline's parents. Parents will also occasionally address themselves in the third person in front of their children, which makes it harder for the children to see their parents as more than just their parental role. Children learn with time that their parents are more than their parental role and have their own life before having them. In Gaiman's novel, there is a connection between the lack of naming and the uncanniness of a character; once a character is identified, they are no longer a threat.

### 2.2 Coraline's Fear of Spiders and the Other Mother's Arachnid Symbolism

The novel establishes from the outset that Coraline does not like spiders; they make her "intensely uncomfortable" (11). The Other Mother is frequently compared to an arachnid such as when her "hand scuttled off Coraline's shoulder like a frightened spider" (54). The Other Mother's arachnid nature is a symbolic interpretation of Coraline's fears and thus inherently links the Beldam to Coraline's feeling of uncanniness.

The use of spider imagery for The Other Mother is also a threat to men because "[t]he animals most at risk from the black widow's bite are … male black widow spiders" (National Geographic). Female spiders are larger and more powerful than their male counterparts, after mating they usually eat the males. This brings a feminist aspect to the horror of spiders and relates it to the fear of castration. Similarly, the Other Mother's right hand is separated from her body, which depicts a Freudian uncanny image; Freud listed "dismembered limbs . . . a hand cut off at the wrist" as one of his examples ([1919] 1955: 244). Karen Coats discusses how "hands and spiders are traditionally linked to mothers in a child's psycho-symbolic world" (89). She contends that "it is no small leap to think that a breastfed child, especially, might bear a residual image of her mother as nothing but a breast with arms, i.e., a spider" (89). Therefore, Gaiman's interpretation of an Other Mother through arachnid symbolism is not far removed from a psychoanalytical understanding of a mother.

Coraline receives guidance from the ghost children on how to survive the Beldam and assistance closing doors. They represent Coraline's future should she fail to escape with her parents. They explain they cannot leave the Other World because the Other Mother consumed them until they were reduced to "snakeskins and spider husks" (101). After they were hollow, they were discarded in the dark as the light would only burn them. Only when Coraline

finds their "secret hearts" can their souls be set free (101). Each has the appearance of a marble and when she returned to the real world she placed them beneath her pillow. When she awakes from her dream of the ghost children, she finds the marbles have broken and look like eggshells, "like empty, broken robin's eggs, or even more delicate—wren's eggs" (180). This resembles hatched eggs which shows that the children's souls are free. Given that Coraline would stand in for the mother bird, the comparison to the wren's eggs is powerful imagery. Wrens are also "voracious insectivores, insect and spider predators," that capture their prey by "investigating" the area (Burden). Coraline similarly defeats the Other Mother by winning a game of exploration.

One day when Coraline is bored she enjoys watching a "natural history program where "animals, birds, and insects which disguised themselves as leaves or twigs or other animals to escape from things that could hurt them" (7). This is reminiscent of how the Other Mother, whom she frequently compares to a spider, changes her appearance to seem more familiar to lure Coraline. However, her shape-shifting is not to defend herself, but to capture Coraline. As the story progresses, Coraline develops a more confident sense of self and the Other Mother and Other Father gradually lose their resemblance to her real parents and become more monstrous. Thus, the initial uncanniness morphs into monstrosity, which reveals their malicious intent. The Beldam starts to get taller, "her head almost brushed the ceiling—and very pale, the color of a spider's belly. Her hair writhed and twined about her head, and her teeth were sharp as knives" (155). Coraline ponders, "how she had ever been deceived into imagining a resemblance" (155). The Other Mother becomes larger and more threatening as the Other Father turns into a fearful creature, paralleling the dynamic of black widow spiders. She also consumes large and black beetles, removing their legs first. This is similar to how spiders clip off limbs that

are hard to eat, "such as some of the wings, legs, etc., to get to the softer parts" (Crawford), which also makes it hard for the insect to escape. Coraline finds this act "[s]ick and evil and weird" (91), this act of repulsion indicates how this arachnid nature adds to the Other Mother and Other World representation of her fears.

### 2.3 Gothicization of Coraline's Cat and Doubling in the Other World

The black cat in the novel "is both a mentor and an ally of Coraline"; for example, it "help[s] Coraline struggle with the rats and the Beldam itself" (Torres-Fernández 37). Additionally, Coraline receives guidance from the cat, "by making her ask herself questions that will aid her facing and overcoming her fears preparing her for the catharsis of the story" (Torres-Fernández 37). Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) features a similar talking cat, the Cheshire Cat. The cat probes Alice's psyche and this "diagnosis foreshadows a long tradition of psychoanalytic interpretations of this most famous of Victorian children's books" (Buckley 2, 41). Coraline's cat, therefore, is Gothicized by Gaiman, who gives it the appearance of a standard witch's familiar: dark, nameless, and free from human control.

In the novel, the cat is described as "a large black cat" with green eyes. In the Other World, "[i]ts voice sounded like the voice at the back of Coraline's head," which functions "as a device that allows Coraline to articulate her thoughts on identity, naming, bravery, and parents" (43). This supports Gooding's theory that the cat is a "physical manifestation of the [fears and anxieties] Coraline now recognizes" (399). Therefore, the cat "voices the emotions and knowledge Coraline has been unable to accept" (Buckley 72). The cat explains that there is no other version of it because unlike people, who "are spread all

over the place," cats "keep [them]selves together" (43-44). As mentioned in 2.1, cats are autonomous uncontrollable animals, thus the fact that they are not doubled is logical.

In the Other World, the characters are doubled in various ways. Though Other Miss Spink and Miss Forcible appear identical to the real ones initially, they are doubles too. When they unbutton their coats, "their faces opened, too, like empty shells, and out of the old empty fluffy round bodies stepped two young women" (49). These doubles are physically opposed to Miss Spink and Miss Forcible: "[t]hey were thin, and pale, and quite pretty, and had black button eyes" (49). As stated previously, one of the forms doubling can take is "the repetition of the same features" (Freud 233), which means that the repetition of the black button eyes are occurrences of doubling. When Coraline goes into their home again to find the children's souls she observes a bulky object in the back of the theatre in the shape of a sac. Inside the sac, she discovers "a person with two heads, with twice as many arms and legs as it should have" (119). Their faces resemble "the younger versions of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, but twisted and squeezed together, like two lumps of wax that had melted and melded together into one ghastly thing" (120-1). The merging of the two Others is part of the Other World's uncanniness and stems from the fear of losing oneself. This imagery of a person's head and limbs being doubled and twisted into a frightful monstrosity represents a facet of the gothic motif of doubling. The merging of the doubles into a monstrous creature signifies a loss of identity prominent in the uncanny Other World, highlighting the importance of Coraline's search for ontological security.

### 2.4 The Dichotomy Between Rats and Mice

In the course of the novel, Gaiman emphasises the dichotomy between the rats in the Other World and the mice in the real world. Rats are associated with bringing forth disease and are the monstrous and ugly versions of mice, which have a more pleasant and friendly connotation. This adds to the assumption that the rats are working for the Other Mother as stated by the cat: "The rats in this place are all spies for her" (89). The rats' threats and ominous behaviour also halt once the Other Mother is defeated. Thus, as the cat indicated, the Other Mother "uses them as her eyes and hands," demonstrating she has authority over them (89). The line "We were here before you fell/You will be here when we rise" (38) makes them seem menacing in their song (38). Additionally, they sing "You'll all get what you deserveses/ When we rise from underneath" (140) and through rats' associations with the plague, they are considered anti-human. This alongside, their large quantity gives the rats a frightening appearance and highlights Coraline's uncanny experience of the Other World and her sense of identity being destroyed.

In the Other World, the rats run around beneath Mr Bobo's clothes and the biggest one is hidden under his hat. He greets Coraline and invites her to join him and watch the rats feed, but "[t]here was something hungry in the old man's button eyes that made Coraline feel uncomfortable" (38-9). The Mr Bobo in the Other World appears to be under the control of the rats. When Coraline meets him again and tries to grab the child's soul, his body melts as the rats' scurry away, leaving his clothes and transforming him from a weird figure into a monstrous one. The disappearance also indicates there might never have been an Other Mr Bobo, which parallels Coraline's theory that the mouse circus was most likely a fabrication. Coraline never sees the mice, and this shows that the Other World can be understood as an allegorical representation of her psychological perception.

### 2.5 The Mist and Ontological Insecurity

Mist reappears frequently in the novel, as the ghost children notify her that the Other Mother will take everything "and she will leave you with nothing but mist and fog" (101). Another instance is when Coraline attempts to escape through the forest but encounters a mist. This mist was unlike any other, as Coraline said that "[i]t felt to Coraline like she was walking into nothing. … The world she was walking through was a pale nothingness, like a blank sheet of paper or an enormous, empty white room. It had no temperature, no smell, no texture, and no taste" (85-6). The Gothic "represents the subject in a state deracination, of the self-finding itself dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation," however, "these representations are in competition with each other and form a mode of debate" (Miles 3). Miles here refers to human ontology, the state of existing in the world as a unified human subject, more specifically, Miles alludes to the Gothic's interest in ontological insecurity about self-disappearing, crumbling, under threat of forces beyond the control of the subject. In *Coraline*, this disintegration of the self is explored through loss of house and parents, and even doubts of individual identity altogether. The rising mist in the novel is a symbolic representation of ontological insecurity as it is a threat to Coraline's identity.

Coraline's loneliness and boredom are eloquently shown when she writes about herself for her mother. The terrible weather prevents her from playing outside, so she writes the word mist down, but the I vowel is placed below the consonants. In Coraline's writings she "is clearly the lonely 'I' which, punning on the word above, is not missed (i.e. she is overlooked)" (Rudd 160). This also divulges "that what is required to make Coraline's identity whole is just beneath the surface waiting to make its appearance" (Govender 61). Since "not only do adults see children to be real biologically viable entities but they experience themselves as whole persons

who are real and alive, and conjunctively experience other human beings as real and alive" (Laing 41). Once Coraline finally feels recognised and acknowledged by those around her she will regain her sense of self. In order for her to regain her identity and agency, she must travel to the Other World.

### 2.6 The Doorway into the Other World

Coraline's grandmother's antiques are kept in the drawing room, which she is usually kept from entering. In the room, there is nothing on the mantelpiece, which Coraline interprets as the space not having anything "that made it feel comfortable or lived-in" (32). In the Other World, the drawing room is extremely familiar and "[e]verything was exactly the same as she remembered" (84), except for one thing. "It was a snow globe, with two little people in it" on the mantelpiece (84), Coraline later questioned why the Other Mother would include such a detail. Then she realised that "[t]he other mother could not create," her power is limited to "transform[ing], and twist[ing], and change[ing]" (147). Since a snowglobe isolates an aspect of a space, miniaturises it, and then adds snow, this is the perfect object for the Other Mother to conceal her true parents as it is the source of uncanny experience in itself by presenting an often over-familiar scene in a new form and context.

When Coraline opens the door and the bricks have disappeared, "there was a cold, musty smell coming through the open doorway" (33). The door leads to the Other World and thus "links the heimlich and unheimlich realms" (Rudd 162). The door appeared differently for each of them, the boy went through "the scullery door" and "never saw [his] true mamma again" (100). Each time the Other Mother is waiting for them, replicating their home and what she thinks would impress them. Though it is possible that the Other Mother found or built the Other World, either way, she "had it a very long time" (88). The interior of the door is described as

"just darkness, a night-black underground darkness that seemed as if things in it might be moving" (54-5). As she crawls through the door, she "became certain that there was something in the dark behind her: something very old and very slow" (55). Throughout the novel, Gaiman uses this description of something old and slow for the doorway, emphasizing that there is more going on in the corridor than merely a passage.

The novel "offers a twenty-first century take on a variety of global fairy tale and fantasy tropes" (Miriam Harris 23). The doorway is representative of a portal, like the rabbit hole in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), that leads to a supernatural Other World. Carroll's novel is widely understood to fall into the category of literary nonsense, while Gaiman's text falls into children's, or YA, horror fiction. The air in the corridor extinguishes the light of her candle and the walls are covered with "something wispy, like a spider's web" (70). Upon her return, she observes that the wall feels as if it "were covered in a fine downy fur" and "[i]t moved as if it were taking a breath" (160). It also feels much further than before, indicating it could change shape. When she put her hand on the wall again "what she touched felt hot and wet, as if she had put her hand in somebody's mouth" (160). Coraline states that "[w]hatever that corridor was, was older by far than the other mother" (161). This demonstrates the Other Mother's "vulnerability, and caus[es] one to question her omnipotence" (Govender 48). The doorway creature has existed much longer than her and indicates the existence of more creatures. The Other Mother appears to be trapped in the Other World, which could be caused by her fear of the doorway. This suggests a dangerous interpretation of a fantasy portal, one that poses a threat to anybody who enters it and leads to an uncanny Other World. Within this Other World, Coraline experiences a place where identities become twisted and threatened.

### 2.7 Coraline's Father's Neglect and Domestic Roles

Coraline's father usually sits with "his back to the door" to face his desk (21). He never seems to have time for his daughter, which makes this position a sign of his neglect. According to Gooding, her parents "have the kinds of jobs—doing things on computers, mostly—that to children do not seem like work at all" (395). When busy with his work, he finds Coraline a "bother" (21). She asks her father if she can go outside and explore like they used to when she was younger, but he tells her to "explore the flat … [c]ount all the doors and windows. List everything blue. Mount an expedition to discover the hot water tank" (8). He focuses on material objects as the only game he can think of is a form of inventory and the most significant thing for him is for Coraline to leave him to his work.

When Coraline was younger, her father had more time for her and took her on a walk "on the wasteland between our house and the shops" (67). She regards herself as an explorer, but it appears that "her [earlier] explorations were aided by her parents" (Gooding 400). Her father stayed behind when they stepped on a wasps' nest to protect Coraline. She only had one sting and her father had thirty-nine stings all over him. Through his "explanation of the morality of bravery," her father provides Coraline with "an important entry into the symbolic order, and becomes a reference point for two of her defining qualities: bravery and the capacity to explore" (Gooding 401). However, further in the novel it is her father who first leaves. He goes to London for the day, "a child-sized abandonment" (Gooding 401), and Coraline is left to stay with her mother, who disregards her when it comes to choosing her school clothes. After these occurrences, Coraline engages in her "first journey into the other house" (Gooding 396). The Other World "is a place where all wishes are fulfilled" as though in response "to an anger that is implied but never articulated" (Gooding 396). Gaiman shows how close of a familiar bond they

once had, which is contrasted with how things are in their new home. This leads to the father's absence having a larger impact on Coraline, especially how lost she feels and her need for parental support to buttress her sense of self.

### 2.8 The Monstrous Doubling and Puppet Identity of the Other Father

When Coraline first encounters the Other Father, he is in his office room and is presented with his back to her, similar to how her father is first shown. He turns around while seated at the keyboard, revealing his black button eyes. At another time, she finds him "sitting in the study, at a desk which looked just like her father's, but he was not doing anything at all" (83). When she visits the Other Father, he "read[s] gardening catalogues as her father did when he was only pretending to be working" (83). Since in the novel "[t]here are various degrees of doubling," the Other Father has her father's appearance and attempts to imitate her father but does not know how to perform his tasks (Chapter 1.3). As the story progresses, he gradually "looked less like her true father" as his face seemed "like bread dough that had begun to rise, smoothing out the bumps and cracks and depressions" (83-4). This vagueness makes it easier for Coraline to distinguish between the real and the other.

When Coraline last sees the Other Father, he is deteriorating in the cellar, "the thing was pale and swollen like a grub, with thin, sticklike arms and feet. It had almost no features on its face, which had puffed and swollen like risen bread dough" (130-1). He is referred to as "the thing" because he is othered by being from the Other World, which alludes to his doubling of the real father and his lack of identity (130). This also demonstrates a gradual transformation from being familiar yet strange to becoming overtly monstrous. His voice "no longer even faintly resembled her father's" and she even describes him as "monstrous, … but also miserable" (131).

This monstrous doubling is a Gothic tradition, such as in *Frankenstein* (1818), *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). For example, in *Frankenstein* "the physical ugliness of the creature reflects the psychological ugliness of his creator, Victor" (Shelley xxix). The double represents what they do not expect of themselves or the dark side of their character. There is also a "malevolent matriarchy" present in the Other World as the Other Mother dominates over everyone and the Other Father "plays a secondary role, where he is mostly hushed by his wife for revealing information" (Govender 45). The Other Mother is in control of the Other Father, which leads to his othering and doubleness. Thus, the Other Father is shown as alive but also as an object that the Other Mother puppeteers. This puppeteering is shown in a more literal sense in Selick's film adaptation, which adds another dimension of uncanniness to the film.

### 2.9 Coraline's Mother's Traits and Her Role in the Novel

Coraline's mother's appearance is never described directly: she is always depicted through traits that Coraline recognizes of the Other Mother. Her mother's occupation is not stated throughout the book, but all that is known about her is that she has dark hair and her study smells like flowers (20). Although Coraline's mother states she does not "mind what" her daughter does "as long as [she] doesn't make a mess," she does give some activities for Coraline to do when she gets bored while her mother is working (7). Her parents share the sentiment that she should not bother them when working. However, Coraline is at an age where she "feels too old for the kinds of solitary play that her toys afford, and she is bored with television and videos and her books" (Gooding 395). Her mother is busy working and is unsure how to play with Coraline at this age.

Coraline's mother is unaware of Coraline's school start time, and her parents are not the kind to "keep track of every day and every hour" (179). She tells Coraline to remember her to acquire her new school attire because she is a forgetful and busy person. When they go out shopping, her mother does not notice when Coraline wanders off. She also "ignored her" (29), as she and the shop assistant decided what would be best for Coraline to get. She wants to buy green gloves to stand out and be the "only one" who has them (29). However, her mother ignores her pleas, and she loses a sense of individuality.

Coraline chooses to remain at home while her mother buys groceries. When alone, she breaks her mother's rules of not entering the drawing room and takes the key to unlock the door in the corner. This reads "as a fairy tale of an intrepid child's successful transgressions against adult authority" (Gooding 397). Coraline's impulse to explore the newly appeared corridor and Other World is, therefore, "a characteristic act of defiance against adult prohibitions" (Gooding 396). Furthermore, as the story makes clear on several occasions, she chooses to discover this new world because she considers herself an explorer. She recalls past moments with her father, but she does not recount much about her mother. However, when she is in trouble it is her mother's voice that inspires her to succeed. She hears "her own mother, her real, wonderful, maddening, infuriating, glorious mother" tell her "[w]ell done, Coraline" (159). These words of affirmation reveal "Coraline's burgeoning awareness of her real mother's otherness and acceptance of her own varied feelings toward that otherness" (Gooding 399). Thus, when they meet again, she tightly embraces her mother, who worries about her scraped knees, finally taking notice of her. This reveals that identity is not only a matter of appearance for Coraline, but also of emotional acceptance.

### 2.10 Button Eyes, Coraline's Witchcraft, and the Other Mother's Uncanniness

Coraline initially encounters the Other Mother while she is cooking in the kitchen. A voice that "sounded like her mother" calls her and implements an "experience of déjà vu," which is common in doubling (34, Punter 131). She has her back to Coraline and resembles her mother with the exceptions that "her skin was white as paper," "she was taller and thinner," and "her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp" (34). When she turns around, Coraline notices that "[h]er eyes were big black buttons" (34). Traditionally, eyes are seen as the windows to the soul. Therefore, the button eyes can be interpreted as the loss of her soul and "individual subjectivity" (Buckley 73). As Rudd explains, "[t]he other mother offers to replace Coraline's eye with her own I," which implies the threat of being "sutured to the mother forever" (163). The Other World inhabitants' button eyes give them a doll-like appearance and provides an extra degree of uncanniness to Coraline's experience of them, as she cannot be certain that "they were looking at her" (55). The button eyes give an unknown nature to these creatures as they appear as animated dolls or puppets, thus making the puppet medium of the film a greater form of uncanniness. As discussed in Chapter 1.4, children find it difficult to challenge this distinction between living and inanimate objects; "children frequently regard dolls as living people."

Coraline is associated with witchcraft because "[s]he has prophetic dreams, obtains a witch companion (or familiar) in the form of a black cat, and can move between worlds, evocative of shamanistic practices" (Govender 53). In addition, the stone with a hole that she carries is a "witch stone" which is stated as being "most useful in preventing diseases of the eye, seeing through the disguise of a witch and of protecting against evil or charms" (Govender 53). Through this stone Coraline finds the children's souls, which leads her to defeat the Other

Mother, avoiding the fate of button eyes. Thus, this "stone's link with 'special' sight and safety" is in contrast with "the doll-like black button eyes that are at first glance associated with a loss of sight and danger" (Govender 53). The Other Mother considers cats as "vermin" and aligns herself with rats (83), which switches the role of hunter and predator. The novel reverses the stereotypes of evil witches and innocent dolls, as the "witch (stone) [becomes associated] with positivity or insight, and doll (button eyes) with negativity or loss of sight" (Govender 53). Thus, what is trusted in fairy tales cannot be in the Other World and leads to a feeling of unsafeness even in the imagination.

The most noticeable indicator of her uncanniness is her button eyes, but there are other anatomical abnormalities as well that combine to evoke a horrifying and unnerving sight. Many proportions of the Other Mother were slightly off such as her teeth being "a tiny bit too long" (72). These alterations in a figure similar to her mother and who can replicate her voice, add to the Other Mother's uncanniness. The cat seems to know or have met a creature like the Other Mother, as it knows that "her kind of thing loves games and challenges" (76). This indicates that she is not human and makes "a subtle allusion to fairy tale narratives where barren creatures or hags have ominous intentions and steal children that they themselves cannot produce" (Govender 47). The Other Mother's role as a fairy tale antagonist perfectly suits *Coraline,* as she is initially very charming and friendly and once defeated will allow Coraline to gain a sense of identity.

Initially, the Other Mother "represents Coraline's projection of the ideal 'good mother' who draws upon traditional norms of motherhood and femininity" (Lester 242). Unlike Coraline's real mother, she is an excellent cook and she "cleverly uses food (notably nutritious food, not candy) as a lure, and as a marker of maternal care and affection" (Govender 43). Compared to her mother, the Other Mother "is more overtly fashionable and attractive, with

sleek, neat hair, red lipstick and nail varnish" (Lester 242). When she first speaks to Coraline, she employs many clichéd expressions, such as "'one big happy family,' which in addition to her doll-like appearance (emphasised through her button eyes) intimate her artificiality and insincerity" (Govender 43). Also, the Other Mother's lack of a reflection and distrust mirrors, alludes to the vampire trope as it suggests the Other Mother drains the life out of those she captures. As previously discussed, "[d]oubling may be defined as a type of 'dividing and interchanging of the self'" (Chapter 1.3). The Other Mother can imitate others but cannot be doubled, as she produces no reflection of her own. This could be because she herself has buttons for eyes and therefore, has no soul. She can replicate others due to her lack of self. She is shown as a puppeteer of the Other World as she shapeshifts, "controls each person (her puppets) and every detail, but alas can only operate that which is confined to the duplicated world" (Govender 44). The Other Mother's powers are limited in the novel and her motherly and femininity are artificial, which indicates her as a lesser threat.

The ghost children refer to the Other Mother as "the beldam" (173), meaning a malicious elderly woman. The role of the antagonist makes it evident that the Other Mother is viewed as evil: in comparison, Coraline's mother is good. However, "[t]he Other Mother fulfils Coraline's unconscious desire to have her real mother's all-consuming love and attention" (Govender 49). Her motives behind wanting Coraline are not completely clear, she partly "wants something to love … that isn't her" and "might want something to eat as well" (76). It "reflects a childish misapprehension of the nature and possibilities of parental love" (Gooding 397), as she mimics a mother figure to devour children. When Coraline rejects her affection, the Other Mother pulls away. From the exploring game, it is explicit that the Other Mother needs Coraline's consent to take her soul, or even to touch her. The game also turns into "a test of Coraline's capacity to

surmount an infantile desire for permanent (re)union with the mother" (Gooding 397). Coraline is difficult for the Other Mother to catch because she is "caught ambivalently between wanting to be a child (wanting to be cared for) and being free to do as she pleases" (Govender 49). The Other Mother cannot plausibly continue to give Coraline what she wants when Coraline is unsure of that herself. The artificiality of it all and the threat to her real parents enables Coraline's self-awareness and sense of agency, leading her to find herself. Coraline's search for ontological security and a stable identity is emphasized by the uncanniness and doubling she experiences. She overcomes these experiences by confronting them and recognizing the artificiality of the Other World, which dissipates the uncanniness and allows her to regain her sense of self.

## Chapter 3 Adapting *Coraline*: Enhancing Uncanniness through a Puppet Film and Deepening the Search for Identity

The stop-motion animation film *Coraline* was directed by Henry Selick and released in 2009. Since it is a stop-motion animation, it took the production crew four years to make the film. The characters are manipulated like puppets and this choice of film adds to the overall experience of uncanniness**.** Because it is a film, most of the information is visually shown, which makes naming less crucial. In the film production, key elements of *Coraline* are not just transposed, to use McFarlane's terms, but in fact are adapted which allows for "transmutations" (McFarlane 23) to take place that significantly alter the original, or lead to the addition of new features. Christian Metz stated that those who have read the novel will not receive the film they imagined since "the actual film is now somebody else's [f]antasy" (Metz 12). Significantly, McFarlane explains that the concept of "fidelity" (8) is much less significant in adaptation scholarship than the central issue of alternation in the process of adaptation. He explains that a film adaptation can be simultaneously different from and true to the source text, as "fidelity" can refer as much to the overall "spirit" (9) of the work as it does to the narrative itself.

In the adaptation of *Coraline*, the "story" (McFarlane 23) is ostensibly the same as in the novels. And even if the story has a "different plot" (McFarlane 23), and different "character functions" (24), the central theme remains unchanged. The examination of Selick's film, therefore, will concentrate specifically on identifying subtle yet significant alterations that happened in the process of adapting the prose fiction into a puppet film; it will explore how the inclusion of puppet animation's special qualities heightens the film's uncanniness and further develops the Gothic atmosphere and darker aspects of the theme of Coraline's search for identity.

### 3.1 Horror Film Clichées and the Use of Dolls

A well-known horror film cliché is the employment of animated dolls, such as in *Child's Play* (1988), *The Conjuring* (2013), and *The Boy* (2016). It is so prevalent that even in horror films where a doll is not the antagonist, as in *Deep Red* (1975), dolls still appear in shots of the film to bring forth an ominous atmosphere. Originally, puppets "were amongst the first of the typical kinds of children's toys we see in stories to become violent" (Monahan 10-1). These stories follow the "notion that ventriloquism and mental illness go hand-in-hand and that the ventriloquist incorrectly believes his dummy is alive" (Monahan 7), as in *Magic* (1978) where the doll, Fats, becomes the Mr Hyde-like double of Anthony Hopkins's character Corky, who under severe mental strain eventually falls under the control of his unconscious drives which he has projected onto Fats and commits murder. Dolls are seen as uncanny because "they can be described as both 'alive' and 'not alive'" (Chapter 1.4). Children have a "tendency to perceive things as living things and project themselves into them" (Chapter 1.4); therefore, showing the doll as not only conscious but also threatening is an invasion of their safe place. The doll is a symbol of childhood and innocence, thus the corruption of such an object is a corruption of innocence. However, the point of using a doll is to "project the fear onto the doll" instead of instilling "fear of childhood" (Monahan 20). The film *Coraline* contains an extra dimension of uncanniness as it is a stop-motion animation film in which all characters are already dolls, animated by puppeteers. This includes the button-eyed animated characters in the Other World and a doll figure within a world constituted entirely of animated dolls. Where McFarlane writes of adaptations often being spiritually faithful, but containing "a commentary" on, or even a "deconstruction" of, the source text (22), Selick's film adaptation can be considered an

intensification of the source text with respect to the central Gothic tropes of the uncanny and doubling.

In the first scene of the film, a doll floats towards outstretched skeletal hands with needle fingers through a window covered in spider webs. These hands are intended to represent the Other Mother. She sets the doll down in the middle of a set of embalming tools from the eighteenth century, which also includes a bone saw. In addition to being evocative of death, this also recalls the Victorian tradition of grave dolls. These dolls, also known as mourning dolls, were created in response to a child's passing. "A wax likeness was made and presented in the child's own clothes" during the burial (Cherrell). The doll was frequently "weighted with sand and heavy cloth" and given "cut[s] of the child's own hair" to increase its realism (Cherrell). This doll is the first appearance of Coraline that the viewers see and creates suspense from the outset, as the Other Mother creates one that resembles her and foreshadows her potential death.

Firstly, the Other Mother cuts the doll open straight down its back, which is similar to the initial stage of the embalming process where clothing is cut off from the back of the deceased. Then the Other Mother unhems the doll's mouth and throws out her cotton filling. For centuries, "cotton sheeting [have been] used in the embalming room … to help with mouth closures" and to make the cheeks appear fuller (Wilcox and Funeral Service Academy). Once the cotton is removed from the doll, the Other Mother places sawdust inside of the doll. Since the time of the Egyptian mummies, sawdust has also been employed to give the corpse a lifelike appearance. The Other Mother then proceeds to sew the mouth shut which is commonly known as mouth closure in the mortician field, because eyes and mouth muscles relax once someone dies. The Other Mother, therefore, is preparing Coraline for her funeral and suggesting the characters in

the Other World are dead. This is also “the first occurrence of a character replacement” (Torre 107), the doll is an exact copy of Coraline except for the button eyes.

The Other Mother works on an old sewing machine decorated with painted flowers and beetles. It is covered in cobwebs, suggesting that she has not done this in a while. She lets the Coraline doll go back through the window, and it floats outside. The sky from the window shows that it is night and there are stars, similar to when Wybie explains to Coraline that the well is “supposed to be so deep if you fell to the bottom and looked up, you’d see a sky full of stars in the middle of the day” (6:27-33). Coraline receives a newspaper-wrapped package from Wybie with the message “Hey Jonesy, look what I found in Gramma’s trunk. Look familiar?” (9:04-11). When she opens the package, she finds an old button-eyed, blue-haired, yellow raincoat-wearing doll that resembles her (Figure 2). The doll’s overall “resemblance of the transformed toy to Coraline (except for the button eyes) is uncanny,” as the doll even retains her distinctive features (Torre 107). This is feasible because the character Coraline is already essentially a doll, due to the stop-motion animation, which makes the resemblance even more uncanny. Since children have a “tendency to perceive things as living things and project themselves into them, like their toys” (Chapter 1.4), Coraline does not immediately view it as unsettling. Even though she states that she is “way too old for dolls,” she still carries it everywhere with her and even places it on its own chair (9:21-2). She regards the doll as a living person and, more importantly, a friend.

Figure 2: Coraline’s Doll from the film *Coraline*, 2009

Coraline's doll stares at her, which is common with dolls or puppets in horror films, but it is not overly threatening like other dolls in the genre. The cat senses the doll spying on them and sometimes it appears to move or be moved. In one scene it appears behind a mattress, which leads to Coraline finding the door. The doll usually sits in the same seat next to her bed where the Other Mother sits. The doll's connection to the Other Mother is undeniable as it "serve[s] as spies in Coraline's ordinary world" (Herhuth 197). Wybie shows Coraline a photo of his grandmother and her twin sister, holding a doll. This makes Coraline realise that the doll "used to look like this pioneer girl; then Huck Finn junior; then it was this Little Rascals chick with all these ribbons, and braids" (1:02:27-35). There is only one doll that the Other Mother remakes to look like the human she wants to capture, for example when it is remade into her mother on one side and her father on the other. As the Other Mother's eyes in the actual world, the doll appears in different locations and stares at Coraline. Since, as Ramalho stated, "[t]he Gothic uncanny is not dependent on vivification, but on its possibility" (32), the film gains another dimension of uncanniness from the doll's sense of possibly being animated and doubling of characters.

### 3.2 The Threat of Button Eyes

The Other Mother calls Coraline her "little doll" as she hands her a box with a spool of black thread, a needle, and a pair of black buttons for her eyes (51:43). The button eyes make the Other characters appear as animated dolls or puppets. She offers to alter the colour of the buttons and on command, all buttons shift to the colour she said. The Other Father tests the needle on his finger and states that it is "so sharp you won't feel a thing" (52:07-10). The last word is interrupted by the other mother kicking to silence him. This demonstrates the monarchical structure and how the Other Father is forced to comply. In the Other Father's song about

Coraline, he calls her “a doll” and that she is “as cute as a button in the eyes of everyone” (17:54-9). He also sings “Our eyes will be on Coraline” (18:08-12). The song is very upbeat and endearing, but it also has an ominous undertone of the threat of being watched and converted into a doll.

In the film, the Other Mother can mimic real people, even their human eyes. This is a new concept in Coraline’s story as the one distinguishing feature of the Other World characters is their button eyes. Without the button eyes to differentiate the characters in the Other World from those in the real world, the status of all characters would become doubtful to both Coraline and the audience. This leads to many fan theories about when Coraline entered the Other World and if she ever truly left. The fact that the Beldam can imitate human eyes but decides to greet the children with button eyes is because it would be harder to persuade them to sew buttons for eyes if she did not look like that from the start.

As stated previously, the button eyes are similar to pennies placed on the eyes of the dead to help them pay the ferryman and protect their souls. Therefore, they “function both as a literal threat of physical harm and as a symbolic threat of the dehumanizing, or de-souling, of Coraline” (Owen 143). Another interpretation that the film suggests is the button eyes as not only the loss of their soul but also of their death. Once the Other Mother loses control the characters of the Other World quickly perish. This indicates she was the only power holding them active. Therefore, the greatest threat in the film is the threat of losing one’s identity, dying, and being animated by puppeteers like a doll. As a lifeless, soulless being, animated only by the strings of a puppeteer, a character would have the same status as a Haitian zombie, enslaved to a higher power. As such, the threat to ontological security in the film is directly tied to the loss of individual agency.

### 3.3 Wybie: A Tale of Two Lost Children

Figure 3: Wybie from the film *Coraline*, 2009

Wyborne Lovat, known as Wybie, is about twelve years old and lives in Coraline's new neighbourhood. He only exists in the film, and first appears to be tall, wearing a three-eyed turret lens mask with "multiple lenses that offer different perspectives on the world" (Cook 33). His diminutive stature and slumped shoulders reveal how harmless he is when he removes the strange mask and is presented from an eye-level shot, rather than a low-angle shot, as in Figure 3. His grandmother owns the Pink Palace but usually does not let people with children rent and Wybie has never been inside. Although his grandmother is unaware of the Other Mother, she considers it to be dangerous because her twin sister vanished from the home when they were little. Wybie is unsure and thinks she might have run away. He initially mistakes Coraline for a water witch, as she has a makeshift dowsing rod and is standing in a mushroom circle on top of the well. A mushroom circle is also known as a "fairy ring" (OED), which within folklore is understood to be a magical entry point to another world and represents the presence of magic in this world.

When Coraline tells Wybie her name he repeats it incorrectly and states "It's not real scientific, but I heard an ordinary name, like Caroline – can lead people to have ordinary expectations about a person" (7:03-10). This "begins a pattern of misrecognition that continues through Coraline's encounters with her other neighbours" (Herhuth 198). In retaliation Coraline calls him why-were-you-born; this exposes a cruel side to children less overtly present in the novel, and demonstrates they are simultaneously innocent and capable of harming others. In McFarlane's words, this new aspect can be understood as a commentary on the source text,

giving a more detailed look at child psychology. Coraline and Wybie are two lost children who are extremely similar, but they struggle to acknowledge this. For this reason, they regard one another as rivals. Wybie feels threatened as Coraline infringes on his territory and this insecurity leads to his mistreatment of her. He is accustomed to being alone and she is guarded as everything is unfamiliar to her, thus they want to dispute with one another out of defiance.

Childhood plays a crucial role in the film, as "Coraline is neglected and left to wander (into danger), whilst Wybie is a character who appears, hovers and disappears regularly, unable to function within either setting of the real or fantastic world" (Batkin 219-20). Coraline states that Wybie is "just like them" alluding to her parents who do not listen to her (31:27-9). She feels that "[i]n addition to not knowing her, they have little interest in listening to her (let alone getting her name correct), and they would rather tell her about themselves and what they assume to be true about her" (Herhuth 198). Though Wybie has the three-eyed turret lens mask which allows him to see from different perspectives, he does not initially believe Coraline. Later in the film, when Wybie enters to save Coraline from the Other Mother's right hand, he expresses his regret about thinking the idea of an alternative world to be a fabrication. He also finally calls her by her real name which makes Coraline smile. When they become friends in the end, they realise their presence does not threaten the identity of the other.

The Other Wybie is cleaner, with better posture, and the signature button eyes. He does not speak because the Other Mother "thought [Coraline would] like him more, if he spoke a little less" (36:42-4). She does appreciate this mute Wybie but also worries whether it had hurt when the Other Mother had "fixed him" (36:45-6). The Other Mother does not like it when the Other Wybie appears depressed and guilty, consequently in another scene, a terrible smile is sewn over his mouth. He seems to have some degree of autonomy because he helps Coraline escape; but he

cannot leave himself since he is made out of sawdust. This suggests that the Others are grave dolls and are hence already deceased. When she goes back to look for her parents and the lost souls of the ghost children, she discovers the flag at Mr Bobinsky's house has been replaced with the other Wybie's empty coat, complete with pinned-on gloves, slacks, and sneakers. She erases Coraline's only friend in the Other World, which indicates how menacing the Other Mother is with regards to the identity of the children.

### 3.4 The Cat between Worlds

Figure 4: The Cat from the film *Coraline*, 2009

The cat first follows Coraline as she explores, eventually creeping onto the screen with the camera positioned just behind it. The "first on-screen encounter" Coraline has "is with a black cat who startles and stalks her as she looks for an old well" (Herhuth 198). It is a black cat with blue eyes referred to by masculine pronouns. Coraline talks to the cat and he becomes a "reluctant … familiar" to her (Maier 180). This plays into the theory that Coraline is a witch, something Wybie accused her of being.

The cat has an intriguing form in the novel, with long limbs, a long tail, a clipped ear, and large eyes (Figure 4). The transfer from suggestive literary description to this concrete visualisation of the cat as a puppet with Gothic characteristics brings forth an uncanniness to the creature's appearance.

The cat, who has no name, can travel to the Other World just as the cat in the novel. Of all the characters, his character resembles the novel's description the closest, except for his attachment to Wybie who is a new character. The cat is still independent as he does not want to be owned and does what he pleases. As in the novel, he vanishes and returns, but he can also

Figure 5: Promotion for the film *Coraline*, 2009

cause half of his body to be in one location and the other half in another. He has "been coming here for a while" and explains it is "a game we play. She...hates cats and tries to keep me out. But she can't, of course" (45:35-49). The fact that he can travel between worlds is hinted at in some of the title art used to promote the film. The name is shown with the cat as Coraline's "l" and the cat appears to be leaving a well-lit door (Figure 5). This foreshadows the cat's ability to find hidden doors to travel through and his importance in the film as the link between worlds.

The cat informs Coraline that the Other Mother is "Not like any 'mother' [he has] ever known" (45:53-6). Then, he clarifies that even though she believes "this world is a dream come true," she is actually "wrong" (45:59-6:04). The cat was cautioned by the Other Wybie, which is similar to their connection in the Other World where the cat can talk but Other Wybie cannot yet he understands him, and in the real world where the cat cannot speak but Wybie can understand him. In the real world, the cat told Wybie to follow Coraline which is why he did so in the beginning. In both worlds, they can understand each other without words. Only the children seem to be able to communicate with the cat. Grownups are too fixed on work and material objects; thus, are never visually shown in the same shot as the parents. The film keeps the singular cat and gothic atmosphere, but giving him a close relation to Wybie, the cat's function is altered, in McFarlane's terms (24), as he transforms into a free character who is also a protector of children. The cat is a protector and simultaneously an omen of the evils lurking near. This paradoxical categorization of the cat as both a menace and a protector increases his uncanny nature as well further enhancing the overall Gothic atmosphere of the story.

### 3.5 Of Mice and Rats

The mice in the film have been transformed into kangaroo mice. Coraline falls under the category of adaptation known as commentary "where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect … when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation" (Wagner 222). This indicates that the alteration of kangaroo mice was done because it is visually more intriguing, and they are ideal for a mouse circus as they appear very friendly. The mice know her name this time too and when the Other Mice perform their circus act, they even arrange themselves to spell out her name. As in the book, Coraline does not see the mice of the real world; however, the mice of the Other World do appear to guide her to the door.

The fact that the kangaroo mice are from the Other World is noticeable because they have small button eyes. This is unlike the novel, which uses the dichotomy of mice in the real world and rats in the Other World to indicate that the Other World reflects the characters' monstrous doubles. The button eyes are crucial to the film's appearance of the Others in the real world, since the adaptation process is about "reinterpreting" or "deconstructing the source text" (Klein 10). The film has kangaroo mice which once defeated are revealed to be large dead rats. Since nothing can be trusted until it is dead, this creates an additional layer of deceit that is added in the film further enhancing its horror features, and making Coraline's quest for identity more harrowing.

In the scene where the cat bites the mouse, the mouse transforms into a "rat whose body quickly goes limp as the sawdust filling drains through its open mouth" (Mihailova 66), which is less gruesome than the novel version of these events. This makes the film easier for children to watch. Animators frequently make children's film adaptations of literary works, such as Disney's

versions of several of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*; often the film versions are adapted into more family-friendly entertainment than the original source material. This is also true for some of Roald Dahl's more grotesque children's fantasies. With respect to *Coraline*, such alteration of the source also leads to less bloodshed, as human beings are transformed into puppets, the representation of which "highlight[s] the materiality of puppets" (Mihailova 66). In addition to conveying the story in a family-friendly way, the film version uses puppets to heighten the uncanny experience of the narrative.

### 3.6 The Door: A Tunnel Between Real and Unreal

In the living room, Coraline discovers a box with her mother's collection of snow globes and places them on the fireplace mantel. In the film it is better to present an object that will be referenced, the snow globes are used from the beginning to foreshadow their later role. Coraline often stares at and touches the snow globe from the Detroit Zoo, which has two bears and a fountain on it, since it reminds her of a joyful childhood memory. In the novel, the absence of decoration in the real world made the presence of a snow globe in the Other World more conspicuous. As a result of this, Coraline realizes where her parents are hidden by the Other Mother. However, in the film, she hears the noise of someone wiping wet glass and then sees her parents in the snow globe. These alternations were made because the appearance of strange noises suits the audio-visual medium and their imprisonment this way makes it even harder for Coraline to save her parents and escape the Other World. Placing the parents in the snow globe also heightens the uncanny experience, as they have shrunk to the size of miniature dolls in a small landscape, yet they appear to be still alive. Not only in terms of function, but also visually,

Coraline here reverses roles with her parents as she is now larger and has more agency, and her parents are smaller and reliant on Coraline to save them.

In the corner of the living room, there is a small door that has been wallpapered over. Coraline persuades her mother to unlock it because she is eager to see what is behind it. Mel unlocks the door and pulls it open to reveal a brick wall, which disappoints Coraline. When she opens the door later that night after following the kangaroo mice, she discovers an extended purple-and-blue tunnel with a hopping mouse moving toward a bluish light at the other end. A blast of wind is blowing, and ethereal music is playing as she makes her way into the tunnel. There is no such tunnel in Gaiman's novella, instead, the door opens to a "dark hallway" (Gaiman 33). The film adopts a more whimsical approach to the corridor, presenting it as a colourful tunnel that she must pass through to travel worlds (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Tunnel from the film *Coraline*, 2009

The tunnel leads to the Other World and is a "corridor between the real and unreal the mundane and fantastic, the invisible and vibrant" (Batkin 208). As a vortex, the tunnel signifies the transition from the real world to the world of dreams or fantasies. This traditional visual cue in film clarifies that, in the film, the Other World is a symbolic world, rather than a parallel reality. It serves as a link between two different worlds Coraline visits in her (mental) quest to

locate her true home, the place of belonging and sense of self that give her ontological security. When Coraline opens the small door to discover her parents, the tunnel is filled with old children's toys and clothing, along with cobwebs and dust. This establishes the tunnel as a phenomenon that has existed for a long time. The tunnel trembles as Coraline rushes to her door after breaking the Other Mother's hand in the process, and the door grows closer each time the Beldam pounds. In the end, she manages to close and lock the door. This close proximity of the Other door implies that, in contrast to the novel, the Other Mother is capable of shortening the tunnel to the extent that it is non-existent and she is the only genuine threat.

### 3.7 The Father's Relationship with Coraline

Coraline's father, Charlie Jones, is in his forties, relatively tall, but is usually hunched over with thinning dark hair. The first time he is shown, he is busily working on a CRT computer monitor while surrounded by empty coffee cups and boxes of gardening magazines. He does not turn around to greet her but looks at her through the reflection on the computer screen (Figure 7). "The family is fractured, distanced and preoccupied" (Batkin 213) as they reside in different rooms in the home.

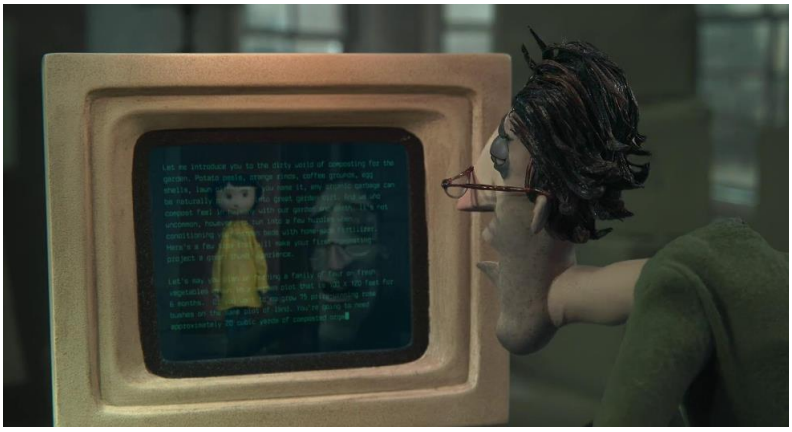

Figure 7: Father from the film *Coraline*, 2009

Instead of the heroic scene of the father and the wasps, the film features Coraline accidentally turning off the electricity that causes his computer to shut down. He screams in frustration most likely losing his work in the process. By focusing on his frustration with malfunctioning

technology, the film demonstrates how preoccupied he is with material possessions rather than his family.

In the kitchen, the father is cooking and singing the twitchy witchy song dedicated to Coraline. Unlike the Other Father's charming rendition, he does not execute the song with ease. Coraline despises his food and it is purposely presented to the audience as unappetizing, such as "when her father offers her some gelatinous-looking vegetable bake" (Harris 53). Coraline declines her father's cooking because it "looks like slime," which leads to her going to bed hungry (14:21-3). She does not sleep soundly, which leads her to spot the kangaroo mice and follow them, discovering a tunnel behind the door. Therefore, "the breach opened within the family space by Mel and Charlie's averted gazes that precipitates her entry to the Other World" (Miller 229). Her parents are physically present in the home, but they pay no attention to Coraline as she runs through the house in the middle of the night and even departs to the Other World. In the novel, Coraline's parents are away when she first travels; therefore, the film's addition of their presence in the house when she leaves to the Other World visually demonstrates and enhances how neglected she feels.

The film also shows Charlie in a playful light, such as when he pretends to be offended and states "Orange? My monkey slippers are blue" (22:36-9). He refers to his wife as the Boss and he salutes her, turns on his heel, and marches out the door when she instructs him to get to work. Before leaving for work he pinches Coraline's nose and says, "Well, I guess I'll see you around, you dizzy dreamer" (41:01-3). She is embarrassed and states she is no longer five years old. She is at a challenging age when she does not want to be coddled but still yearns for her parents' attention. Near the end, Charlie is shown wrestling with a blue stuffed toy squid as if it is an alien face-hugger then; feigning death, he falls on the bed. Then he tucks her into bed and

kisses her good night. Their relationship is strengthened as Charlie is in her space, they are no longer divided in different parts of the house.

### 3.8 The Other Father's Struggle for Independence

When Coraline first encounters the Other Father he has his back towards her, but rather than focusing on his computer, he is picking notes on a piano. "There are no digital screens or buttons to be seen" in the Other World, "but plenty of pulleys, levers and spring mechanisms" (Mihailova 71). Her father cannot play the piano, but neither can the Other Father; instead "Mickey Mouse-style gloves which are supported and controlled by an elaborate array of external rigs" (Torre 108) emerge from the piano and onto his hands, compelling him to play (Figure 8). This is comparable to how the Other Mother manipulates the characters in the Other World and how the creators' puppet them behind the scenes. He looks like her father but happier with more hair and button eyes. He looks eccentric, wearing an orange polka-dot robe over black silk pyjamas and orange monkey slippers.

Figure 8: Other Father from the film *Coraline*, 2009

The voices of the father and the Other Father are provided by separate actors; the characters' glasses correspond to the actor playing the role. The decision to employ two different voice actors leads to a further distinction between the two characters and is evocative of the uncanny concept of doubling as the familiarity of the almost identical father figure is audibly disturbed by a new voice. The Other Father does not cook, but he does love to eat, as seen by the mountains of food he consistently puts in front of him. When Coraline wants to go to bed to

avoid having her eyes buttoned, he states “Before dinner?” (52:22-3). This suggests that he may only be fed when Coraline is present and expresses a desire to eat. Like a toddler, he has no control over his consumption and must wait for the mother figure to feed him, emphasizing his monstrous dependency.

The Other Mother considers him Coraline’s “better father” as he “is (unlike her real father) funny, talented and an excellent gardener” (33:59, Torre 108). In the Other World, there is a charming garden and when the flowers keep tickling Coraline the Other Father remarks “Oops, daughter in distress” (35:17-8). He assists her by hacking them into a bouquet and presents it to her. Subsequently, he places her on the mantis (Figure 9) and flies up in the air to reveal the garden is a portrait of Coraline. He made it for her because “Mother said you’d like it” and the Other Mother “knows you like the back of her hand” (35:57-6:01). These acts of kindness are fabricated by the Other Mother to gain Coraline’s affection.

*Figure 9: Other Father on Mantis from the film Coraline, 2009*

When she sees the Other Father in a different scene, he appears ill; his glasses are misplaced, and his hair is dishevelled. When he speaks, his voice is slowed down. He states “All will be swell, soon as Mother’s refreshed. Her strength is our strength” (54:18-26), then a white-

gloved hand pops out of the piano to cover his mouth. The Other Mother has complete control over most of the things in the Other World, as these objects and subjects only do as she commands. However, the doubles of the real world closest to her, such as her father and Wybie, tend to let helpful information slip or even have opinions of what is happening. For example, the Other Father informs Coraline that something has occurred to the Other Wybie even though he is not allowed to speak without the Beldam present. The Other Mother's weakness permits him to be more autonomous until the piano hands take control of him and force him to physically turn away from her.

The Other Father can be interpreted symbolically as a pumpkin, he is shorter than before, his sagging face a pale pumpkin colour, and his hair turned into vines. The base the Other Mother used to make the Other Father must have been a pumpkin which is why he returns to that state, like the mice were originally rats. He informs Coraline that there is only one key, and the Other Mother pulls a vine to shut his mouth. She also calls him "pumpkin" and he mutters "Squish squash, pumpkin sauce" (1:10:43-7), solidifying the theory of what he was initially. The Other Father gradually descends into a pumpkin instead of a melting loaf of bread, as is described in the novel. This allows this shift to represent a more fairytale-like narrative, referencing Cinderella with the pumpkin changing into a carriage or mice acting as assistants, and is better suited for a children's film visually.

When Coraline goes out to the garden to find the first soul, she sees that the soul is the stick shift knob from the praying mantis tractor, which the Other Father is forced to operate by the mechanical piano hands. He resembles a pumpkin/man hybrid and even states "Sorry, Mother making me" and "don't want to hurt you" (1:14:36-48). Just before falling the Other Father kicks away the mechanical hand and with his free hand pulls the shift knob off. He gives

it to Coraline, and thus, the Other Father uses his one moment of bodily autonomy to sacrifice himself for Coraline. The Other Father's function has changed; he plays Coraline's hero in the film rather than her real father, which gives him a sense of familiarity as a father figure and blurs the distinction between what is real as good and what is othered as evil.

### 3.9 The Modern Mother and Self-Expression

Mel Jones, Coraline's Mother, also in her forties, is busy working on her laptop in the kitchen. She wears a neck brace because of a car accident involving a truck (Figure 10). Coraline recounts her previous day to her mother and wishes to go out to plant flowers in the garden. Her mother's job focuses on writing about gardening, and she even has an "I love Mulch" mug, but she detests mud and is not amused by Coraline's enthusiasm for the garden. Coraline states "I can't believe it -- you and Dad get paid to write about plants and you hate dirt" (8:44-9). Similar to how they "are only gardeners in title," since they seldom pay any attention to their daughter, they "are only really parents in title" (Torre 110). Mel is portrayed in the movie as having little interest in anything, including her career, which keeps her busy all the time and causes her to become estranged from Coraline.

Figure 10: Mother from the film *Coraline*, 2009

Mel does not cook because the chores are divided, she cleans the father cooks and Coraline "stay[s] out of the way" (14:13-4). This does not fit "the traditional family 'with a homemaking mother and a bread-winning father'" (Batkin 208). Since "family and childhood are

at the core of American society and have always been viewed traditionally as a foundation for individual and collective identities" (Batkin 207), the loss of a traditionally present family leads Coraline to wander to find her identity**.** When Mel is about to leave for groceries, she invites Coraline to join her and tells her she can "pick out something you like" (43:05-7). However, earlier that day, she did not allow Coraline to pick out her own clothes and had stripped her of the opportunity to stand out. This indicates that Coraline cannot express herself, which means Mel contributes to her loss of identity. Mel's lack of attention and affection makes Coraline feel ignored, driving her to seek validation and a sense of belonging in the Other World.

Mel is a familiar figure to Coraline, but she is also emotionally distant, resulting in an uncanniness in her character. In the film, she is portrayed not only literally as a puppet, but also metaphorically as a lifeless puppet who is very cold to and detached from her daughter. Mel's detachment creates a sense of uncanny, as she acts as both Coraline's real mother and a stranger. The sharp contrast of the Other Mother, who appears kind and loving but is ultimately evil, creates another layer of uncanniness. The duality between Mel's real, but flawed, motherhood and the Other Mother's motherly threat emphasizes the uncanny experience and the theme of Coraline's struggle to find her identity.

Coraline's mother is a neglectful and sometimes absent parent but not completely ignorant "of her own shortcomings as a parent; she frowns in doorways and hovers uncertainly in rooms" (Batkin 213). Near the end, when they tuck Coraline in bed, Mel slips a slim box beneath the blankets next to her daughter. Inside the box are the gloves she wanted previously, demonstrating acceptance of Coraline and her right to self-expression, so important to developing a strong sense of self. Then when they are gardening outside, Mel says "You were right, Coraline. I really hate dirt, but the tulips look nice" (1:33:31-8). She acknowledges her

flaws, makes time to be present for Coraline, and finds an activity they can all enjoy together as a family. Ultimately, the film emphasizes the importance of family for the child's development and sense of self.

### 3.10 A Threatening Other Mother

Figure 11: Other Mother in the film *Coraline*, 2009

When Coraline enters the Other kitchen she sees her mother cooking at the stove, wearing an apron with her back towards her. The kitchen appears cosier and better decorated. Then she turns and has black buttons for her eyes. Coraline tells her she is not her mother, and she clarifies "I'm your Other Mother, silly. Now go tell your Other Father that supper's ready" (17:13-7). The Other Mother is healthier and more feminine than Coraline's real mother as she wears red lipstick, no neck brace, and red nails (Figure 11). The red nails contrast with Coraline's blue ones, signifying her desire to conform to a certain ideal of beauty and Coraline's need to stand out. The film emphasizes the Other Mother's femininity by juxtaposing her vibrant looks with the real mother's grey appearance; this contrast between vibrancy and dullness creates another form of uncanniness.

In the real world, Coraline skipped dinner so when she is in the Other World the smell of the delicious food persuades her to trust the Other Mother. They begin eating when the Other Mother rings a bell, but she does not eat. In another dining scene, the Other Mother does not eat again and instead gives sausage bits to the snapdragon flowers in the vase, which is uncanny since it literalises the notion of carnivorous plants and adds to the danger Coraline is in. The surroundings hint at the Other Mother's concealed dark nature, as it is always nighttime in the

Other World. When she finally eats, she bites the head of a living chocolate beetle from Zanzibar, reversing the roles as the so-called humans eat insects and the plants eat meat. Because she never appears to consume the food she makes, this version of the Other Mother frequently raises questions about whether something is wrong with either the food or her. It becomes evident that she is some sort of monstrosity as soon as she eats the live chocolate insect.

In the film, the Other Mother has the power to make it rain and, unlike the real mother, loves mud. She states mud is great for poison oak, suggesting she was aware Coraline had come into contact with some. Later as she tucks her into bed, she "shows concern and applies a mud-cream (something the real mother would never touch) to heal Coraline" (Torre 110). This thoughtful gesture highlights the differences between her and the real mother even more. When she returns to the Other World, no one is home but a lunch is ready and waiting for her. There is also a note: "Dearest Coraline, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible have invited you downstairs after lunch. I hope you like the new outfit I made you! Love, Mother" (44:31-41). She receives a pair of blue boots, black pants, and a sweater with stars. The Other Mother knows Coraline so well she provides her with her dream clothing and allows her to express herself, thus helping her in finding her identity. Additionally, the clothes are handmade showcasing her homemaking skills that suit a traditional housewife.

The Other Mother "only made what she knew would impress" Coraline so when she tries to run away in the forest the world starts turning into nothingness (55:25-9). The blankness is reminiscent of an empty set, which as stated previously "the Other World [can be viewed] as being one big stop-motion set and the Other Mother as being the powerful animator behind it all" (Torre 109). The cat claims that the Other Mother wants something to love that is not her or maybe "she'd just love something to eat" (55:40-2), in a manner similar to the novel. Coraline

finds it “ridiculous” because she believes that “mothers don’t eat daughters” (55:44-6), which raises the point that she is not her mother but an imitation of her whose kindness is a trap.

The Other Mother becomes enraged at Coraline, and as she counts down, her features start to change, becoming taller and more angular. She morphs from an uncanny appearance to a monstrous one as she becomes very thin, almost bone-like, looming over Coraline (Figure 12). Then she grabs Coraline by her nose and throws her into the mirror at the end of the hallway. In the novel, she does not get this physically forceful with Coraline. Thus, the Beldam’s ability to harm Coraline while appearing as her mother’s double makes her even more threatening. Especially since the Other Mother can fully imitate Coraline’s real mother, with human eyes and all. She locks the door that the closet bug moves in front of and then swallows the key. In the book, the Other Mother keeps the key with her; in this original version, it looks practically impossible for Coraline to escape, as more precautions are taken to ensure her safety. She is imprisoned in a house similar to her own and having her space invaded by a monster in the form of a trusted parent evokes a sense of uncanniness. In both versions, the Other Mother is initially very loving and later becomes threatening. However, the film intensifies these dynamics and Gothic tropes, adding layers of uncanniness to the narrative. Once Coraline realises the Other Mother seeks to destroy her and the Other World is a threat to her integrity, she can escape and find her sense of self.

Figure 12: Other Mother's Real Form in the film *Coraline*, 2009

When she last encounters the Other Mother, her face resembles a cracked mask, she is bonier, and her hands are just like the metal skeleton hands with needle fingers from the beginning. She possesses an arachnid-like tail section and is extraordinarily tall, nearly touching the ceiling. In this version, she takes away the stone with a hole in it and even attempts to take the souls of the children from Coraline. She is not only more caring but also more deceptive as "the Other characters in the Other World [are all] masked" (Herhuth 201). The Other Mother is made more uncanny in the film adaptation by initially being more kind and familiar with Coraline, but then becoming more menacing and having more agency. This enhances the theme of Coraline's personality growth as the shift becomes more evident in her journey from attraction to repulsion. In the film, Coraline regains her identity and finds ontological security through the increased threat posed by the monstrous Other Mother.

## Conclusion

This thesis explored how Gothic tropes of the uncanny and doubling are used in the literary and cinematic versions of *Coraline*, highlighting Coraline's journey for self-discovery through the Other World. Both versions of *Coraline* effectively convey themes of ontological security within Gothic literature and cinema. In conclusion, the Gothic motif of the uncanny blurred the lines between the familiar and the unfamiliar, highlighting Coraline's ontological insecurity. The doubling of characters in the uncanny Other World forced Coraline to gain agency and regain her own identity. Thus, the Gothic motifs of uncanny and doubling in Gaiman's *Coraline* effectively facilitated the exploration of the theme of loss of identity.

The makers of *Coraline* made changes to Gaiman's original story as it transitioned from a novel to an audiovisual medium of puppet cinema. Selick's adaptation contains alterations such as the inclusion of a doll or kangaroo mice and stop-motion animation to enhance the uncanniness of the narrative. The transition to puppet film enhanced the narrative with visual elements that complemented and expanded upon the Gothic tropes of uncanny and doubling. The shift from novel to film altered the exploration of the loss of identity by emphasizing visual storytelling and changes in the characters. The film juxtaposes Coraline's neglectful parents with the seemingly perfect and loving Other Mother, intensifying her need to be seen and heard. As the Other Mother gradually becomes a monstrous figure, Coraline is placed in more danger, prompting her search for a sense of self. As McFarlane would suggest, the film remains true to the spirit of the novel but strengthens the Gothic aspects to create a scarier and more harrowing quest for self-discovery.

Coraline ultimately regains her sense of self in both Gaiman's novel and Selick's film adaptation, but through different approaches. In the novel, Coraline journeys for ontological

security by confronting the Other Mother and the doubles. Her struggles are primarily internal, yet she shows bravery by asserting her identity in the uncanny Other World. In contrast, Selick's film adaptation uses the visual and auditory medium of stop-motion animation to emphasize the theme of identity. Coraline is in more danger but also has more help and guidance from other characters. She must find her sense of self by travelling through the Other World and acknowledging those around her. By doing so, she will be seen by others and become an ontologically secure individual.

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