

MAGISTERUPPSATS



When the cat is away, the (m)other will play:

regression and identity formation in Neil Gaiman's
Coraline

Emma Agnell

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Introduction

Neil Gaiman's gothic novella *Coraline* (2002) is both written for and marketed as a children's book, although it has been read and loved by both children and adults. The protagonist starts out as a self-proclaimed explorer who is actually dependent on her parents, not only in terms of food and shelter, but for entertainment and acknowledgement as well. The contradiction in these personality traits, as well as her tiny revolts in terms of choosing her own food over her parents' and exploring where she is not allowed, suggests that she is in the midst of separating from her parents and forming her own identity. This has been noted in various readings of *Coraline*, as many of them focus on the protagonist's identity formation.

The intent of this essay is to examine the other world of the novella as if it is a representation of Coraline's process of identity formation. Various perspectives will be used to discuss how the mother in the other world, hereafter called the (m)other, as well as the remaining characters in the other world, are manifestations of different parts of Coraline's psyche, that she negotiates between in order to be able to form her own identity.

The perspective to be used in this essay is psychoanalytical; the intended theoretical foundation for the analysis is comprised of assorted theories on identity formation and the uncanny. The concept of identity formation was chosen to establish the (m)other as Coraline's way of identifying with her same-sex parent in her dissolution of the Oedipus complex. The aim is to step away from the popular phallic *Coraline* and the incestuous core of Sigmund Freud's complex, yet stay in the oedipal arena to focus on the formation of her superego, and try to identify the symbolic representations of the ego and the id in the novella.

Analysts such as Peter Shabad and Thomas H. Ogden, in his interpretation of Hans Leowald, have shifted the focus away from the incestuous and phallic facets of the oedipal arena, to other aspects of the relationship between the child and the parents, such as neglecting relationships and non-incestuous maternal undifferentiation, respectively (1993; 2006). Shabad considers a "version of the oedipal drama [where] the boy casts himself as both father and son" (63) as a way for the child to escape the real oedipal drama. This, along with his thoughts on internalization of the negative aspects of one's parents' personalities will be used to examine a possible reversed relationship between Coraline and the (m)other in the other world. Ogden's theory focuses more on the urge for emancipation and a revolt against one's parents as a precursor for the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, instead of on incestuous fixations. Incest is nonetheless discussed, foremost in relation to a developmental regression towards the undifferentiated bond one has with one's mother in the pre-oedipal stage. This idea will be used in the discussion on regression in the novella. His thoughts on superego-formation are also of help when identifying the symbolism of, and in, the other world.

Freud's definition of the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*, is something both familiar and unfamiliar at once. The theory is closely related to infantile complexes, pre-oedipal narcissism and repression, which makes it very relevant to my analysis of Coraline's identity formation. One of the aspects of the novella, which has been given attention by readers, critics and academics alike, is the uncanniness of the copies, the personified "doubles" of the other world. The theory will be used to try to determine what they are doubles of, that is, what part of Coraline's psyche they represent. The uncanniness of the (m)other is intended to be read as the result of her being a double

of Coraline, not Coraline's mother, which supports the theory that they have a reversed relationship.

The reception of the novella

When looking at reviews that came out shortly after the novella was published in 2002, the initial reception seems to have been a positive one: Gaiman's prose and imagery is applauded¹ and Gaiman's ability to capture the child's perspective is praised.² However, more interesting for this essay is the fact that the uncanniness of the novella seems to have made an impression. The adjectives used to describe the novella are not scary or frightening, but “magnificently creepy”, “skewed”, “eerie”, and “spine-chilling”³. Several comparisons to David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, which has also been described as uncanny,⁴ have also been made.

Newer reviews of the novella are, however, harder to come by; the adaptations on screen and on stage have been stealing the reviewers' attention. Most contemporary reviews seem to be interested in the minimum age for which the book is appropriate, and while these evaluations comment on the entertainment value and scariness of the novella, they do not remark on prose or narration.⁵ However, a recent blogger (Inkslinger) reviewing the novella seems to agree with the early critics, praising Gaiman's “crisp dialogue and fantastically bizarre images” (n.pag).

The novella has won quite a few awards, the most note-worthy being the Bram Stoker Award for Best Work for Young readers (2002), the prestigious Hugo Award for Best Novella (2003), and the no less esteemed Nebula Award for Best Novella

¹ Pullman n.pag; DiNardo n.pag; Publishers Weekly n.pag; De Lint n.pag; Wagner n.pag

² KirusReviews n.pag; DiNardo n.pag.

³ Kirkus Reviews n.pag; Publishers Weekly n.pag; DiNardo n.pag

⁴ Lynch (x); Arnzen n.pag; Masschelein n.pag

⁵ Snow n.pag; Berman n.pag; Kennedy n.pag

(2003). While all three are prestigious awards, the Hugo award is more of a “popular vote”-award, as all members of the World Science Fiction Society can vote, and anyone can become a member (“Hugo Award History”). The Bram Stoker Award is somewhat more restricted: while anyone who is a member of the Horror Writers Association can nominate a work, only Active Members can vote, and only professional writers within the genre can become an Active Member (“The Bram Stoker Awards”). The last award, the Nebula, is the most “critical” award of the three; only authors who are published in “Qualifying Professional Markets” in either the science fiction, fantasy, or horror genre can join the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (which presents the award), nominate and vote (“Nebula Awards”). Appreciation for the novella is, shown by readers, critics and peers alike.

While it is impossible to say why the novella speaks to both children and adults, it is an interesting aspect to explore. The connection made between the ‘eerie’ novella and the uncanny throughout the reviews provides a clue, as the uncanny is so closely tied to the early narcissistic stage of the human psyche. The novella investigates human psychology and an event that most Westerners go through: the unavoidable separation from the parents. This is further shown by the frequent use of psychoanalytic criticism by critics. This psychoanalytical uncanny, which I speculate is responsible for the novella’s widespread popularity to some degree, is the facet of the novella that will be examined in this essay.

Literary criticism review of the novella

Coraline, being a relatively new novella, has not had a huge array of papers written about it; essays started being published in 2008 and while the works may use different

perspectives, they can be divided into two major focus areas: feminist criticism and psychoanalytic criticism.⁶

During the first year works began being published about the novella both perspectives were discussed. David Rudd, for example, discusses Coraline's identity formation in combination with the uncanniness of the novella. He focuses on Coraline's separation from her mother in terms of Freud's Oedipus complex and use Lacan's theory of the Symbolic and the Real to discuss the protagonist's negotiation of her place in the world. Richard Gooding has a similar perspective but focuses on Gaiman's use of uncanniness in the narration to portray Coraline's psychic development, and its part in the internalization of the father, in relation to the Oedipus complex. A third work published in 2008, by Karen Coats, also use psychoanalytical theories and talks about identity formation, but focuses on genre conventions and how these are used to make concrete the "inner dramas and psychic losses" (91), which are an unavoidable aspect of creating an identity separate from one's parents. The last article published that year has a feminist perspective. Elizabeth Parsons, Naarah Sawers and Kate McNally problematize motherhood, although they also discuss identity formation in Coraline's creation and acceptance of her gendered identity.

In subsequent years articles on the novella have continued to explore these two focus areas from different perspectives. In 2009, Karlie K. Herndon combines food-symbolism and identity formation from a psychoanalytical angle, and in 2010, Anne Balay discusses how Coraline's masculinity challenges binary gender roles, and comes to an opposite conclusion than Parsons, Sawers and McNally.

⁶ Although some that use feminist criticism may incorporate both perspectives (for example Parsons, Sawers and McNally) their focus is on feminist criticism and psychoanalytic criticism is subsidiary.

The most recent works, published in 2012 and 2013, have continued this trend. Danielle Russell published a third work on the novella with a feminist perspective in 2012, and again the focus was on the relationship between feminism and motherhood. Vivienne Muller draws attention to earlier works published regarding identity formation from Lacanian and Freudian perspectives, but her focal point is how archetypes and stereotypes are used to allow for these readings. Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard tie together Coraline's negotiation with adults about food and her negotiation in Lacan's Symbolic realm, and look at in what ways she uses food to establish a separate, independent, identity. The most recent work, published in 2013, by Christine Wilkie-Stibbs reads the novella as upholding an Oedipal hierarchy and the patriarchal family nexus.

I have chosen to work with articles by Muller, Gooding, Rudd, Balay and Coats. Muller's article "Same Old 'Other' Mother?: Neil Gaiman's Coraline" (2012) will be used as her psychoanalytic analysis of Coraline's identity formation is applicable to the regressive state Coraline enters, although her attention to archetypes and stereotypes limits her relevance and she will only be used briefly. Gooding's article "Something Very Old and Very Slow: Coraline, Uncanniness and Narrative Form" (2008) was chosen because of his thoughts on the separation of the real and the other world, and the symbolism he identifies in the other world and in Coraline entering it. Rudd's article "An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman's Coraline and Questions of Identity" (2008) will be used not only for his focus on identity formation and the uncanny, but for his attention to the Freudian Oedipus complex; it has been used in my section on Coraline and castration. Balay's examination of Coraline's possible masculinity, in her article "They're Closin' up Girl Land: Female Masculinities in Children's Fantasy" (2009) will also be incorporated into the discussion on Coraline's

'male' or 'castration-oriented' Oedipus complex. Lastly, Coats' examination of Coraline's identity formation from a psychoanalytic point of view in "Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic" (2009) is applicable throughout the essay. Her thoughts on the symbolism of incest are especially relevant.

Coraline and Castration

In this section I will discuss Coraline's identity formation from a somewhat phallic viewpoint, with a focus on Freud's Oedipus complex. Freud's focus when it comes to the formation of the superego is on (incestuous) sexuality and the fear of castration. He argues that the fear is dependent on two things; firstly, adult (foremost maternal) disapproval of a male child's masturbation and their threat to castrate the boy or remove his hand ("The Dissolution" 4086). The fear of losing one's eyes, which, according to Freud, can be a symbolic substitute of the fear of castration ("The Uncanny" 4086), is the most prominent theme of the novella.

However, the constant threat/demand of the (m)other, and her creations, to replace Coraline's eyes with button eyes can be read as a condition for Coraline to stay in the pre-oedipal relationship with the mother. The first time the possibility of the replacing of the eye is mentioned, it is not done threateningly at all but simply stated – perhaps *somewhat* ominously – as a condition for Coraline to stay,

"If you want to stay," said her other father, "there's only one little thing we'll have to do, so you can stay here for ever and always."

They went into the kitchen. On a china plate on the kitchen table was a spool of black cotton, and a long silver needle, and, beside them, two large black buttons.

"I don't think so," said Coraline.

"Oh, but we want you to," said the other mother. (43)

Here, the eyes stand for the regression she must go through to be able to stay in that symbiotic relationship. For now, however, focus will be on the relationship the eyes have with castration.

While Rudd called the (m)other's cut-off hand both "castrated . . . and castrating" (162), I choose to extend the description to the (m)other as a whole. Her castrated button eyes and castrating demand that Coraline do the same is akin to Freud's castrated mother that stands for the threat of castration ("The Dissolution" 4086-7). The (m)other's role as both castrated and castrating is emphasized as she once again castrates herself, cutting off her own hand, as Freud claims that a mobile amputated limb acquires its uncanniness from being closely connected to the castration complex ("The Uncanny" 3694). The threat of castration is further stressed when the (m)other threatens to hurt Coraline's eyes in other ways as well, such as blowing wind in her face to sting her "with invisible sand, sharp as needles, sharp as glass" (96) This forces Coraline to cover her eyes.

Secondly, in Freud, the fear of castration is dependent on the child's first view of the female genitals, which he takes as proof that castration is possible ("The Dissolution" 4087). This would in the novella be represented by Coraline's first view of the other parents and their button-eyes. The acceptance of the reality of the threat to the phallus/eyes is the precursor to the dissolution of the complex; if the boy were to take his father's place with his mother the punishment would be castration, and if he were to take his mother's place and be loved by his father he would take a feminine role, and castration would be a precondition, as he believes all females have been castrated (4088). For the novella, this would have to be somewhat rephrased, but with the same meaning; to stay "in the complex," (that is, the other world) and not have it

dissolved (that is, stay in the pre-oedipal relationship with the other parents) would result in castration, (that is, removal of the eyes).

Although Freud refers to the fear of castration with regards to boys and their mothers, there are several reasons Coraline can be analyzed with this male-oriented complex in mind. Firstly, Balay's discussion on Coraline's masculinity, and her interpretation of Coraline as "refusing to submit to femininity" (n.pag) supports this position. Balay sees Coraline's constant refusal to chose between two binary options, such as when she "could only think of two things to do. Either she could scream and try to run away . . . Or she could do something else. So she did something else" (112), as her refusal of two binary gender roles. She further calls her "unfeminine" (n.pag). This allows for her oedipal scheme to be read as that of a boy's. Secondly, Coats' statement that the mother is the incestuous interest of all children, regardless of gender (85), suggests that the mother is able to take the incestuous paternal role in the Oedipus complex. Lastly, Freud's own theory of both a positive and a negative version of the complex "due to the bisexuality originally present in children" ("The Ego" 3967) could be interpreted as meaning that a female child is in possession of the same 'maternal-oriented' complex as the male, if she has a masculine predisposition. Coraline fits according to Balay's identification of her as unfeminine.

However, in Freud's female version of the complex - in which the female child wishes to take her mother's place and give her father a baby, as a compensation for her lack of a penis - the onset of the dissolution of the complex is not due to a fear of castration, but an acceptance of an already accomplished castration and a fear of a loss of love ("The Dissolution" 4090). While Coraline has not gone through the "eye-related castration," if Freud is taken literally instead of symbolically, and it is assumed that Coraline has accepted her actual lack of a physical penis, the fear of a

loss of love can be found in Coraline's relationship with her parents. While her father's cheerful "[g]o away" (16) and similar exchanges do not seem to affect Coraline particularly, her reaction when seeing her parents happily talking about finally being able to do "all the things we always wanted to do, like go abroad, but were prevented from doing by having a little daughter" (60), suggests something else; as "[s]he hoped that what she had just seen was not real . . . she was not as certain as she sounded. There was a tiny doubt inside her, like a maggot in an apple core" (61). This reaction clearly shows that she does in fact fear the loss of their love.

Freud admits to a lack of "insight into these developmental processes" in the female child, but argues that "the Oedipus complex is then gradually given up because this wish is never fulfilled" (4090). Although one could claim that Coraline is gradually disillusioned when it comes to the other world, her oedipal "battle" to use Ogden's term is obviously not simply, passively given up, as she continuously opposes the (m)other throughout the novella.

The entrance to the other 'pre-oedipal' world

The symbolism of the other world will be examined in this section of the essay, along with what Coraline's choice to enter it represents. This will be done because it demands a regression towards a pre-oedipal stage and hinders Coraline from forming her own superego, is a consistent base throughout the essay. The obvious likeness to dolls the button-eyes brings to mind will, however, not be examined. For the purpose of this essay it is sufficient to acknowledge that the button-eyes are one of the obvious signs of regression to an early stage of development for Coraline, as she has already stopped playing with dolls (151). It does, nonetheless, strengthen the symbolism of the 'pre-oedipal' in the other world.

From Ogden's perspective it is particularly interesting to look at the drawing room. Herndon connects the maternal foremost with the key and the act of opening up the physical door to the other world (32), but if we take the location of both the act and the door into consideration, the drawing room acquires a maternal association as well. The significance of the room is hinted at from the first mention of it, when Coraline is bored and asks of her mother's permission to enter it;

"Can I go into the drawing room?" The drawing room was where the Joneses kept the expensive (and uncomfortable) furniture Coraline's grandmother had left them when she died. Coraline wasn't allowed in there. Nobody went in there. It was only for best.

"If you don't make a mess. And you don't touch anything." (6)

This "uncomfortable" room is the only room Coraline asks permission to enter. Furthermore, it is the place of both the start and end of Coraline's adventure, that is, her entering the other world and her final battle with the (m)other. The fact that Coraline then decides not to enter the drawing room is also significant since it represents a decision not to enter the arena of the superego. One could claim that (her relationship with) her mother hinders her from growing up, something Muller takes note of, "[h]er mother, busy at the computer advises 'I don't really mind what you do. . . as long as you don't make a mess' (15). Her father responds by proposing she count the windows and doors in the house to stay amused. These suggestions indicate the ways in which both parents restrict and confine Coraline to the domestic and familiar, and in so doing, *endorse her child status* [emphasis added]" (n.p). However, at this time I wish to focus on the room itself.

The significance of the room in relation to Coraline's superego formation is underlined by Ogden's thoughts on transgenerational superegos, as he claims that parricide is a "loving act" (656) because it internalizes the parents through the

formation of the superego, and in a way grants them immortality (659). This immortality is then extended beyond the child, to the grandchild, as the internalization of the parents includes the "unconscious psychological make-up of the parents" (661), that is, the parents' internalization of the grandparents, and becomes transgenerational. Coats agrees with this as well, that "children internalize . . . both conscious and unconscious legacies of their parents" (84). It cannot then, be a coincidence that several performative acts take place in the (grand)maternal, transgenerational drawing room. Gooding even takes note that the room is non-existent in the other world at Coraline's first visit (402), which is not surprising if one takes into consideration that her first step into the other world is a step towards staying in the pre-oedipal realm, and away from the arena, the room, that represents parental internalization.

Furthermore, Leowald claims the dissolution of the complex grants the child the ability to create non-incestuous relationships not only with the parents, but also with others. Because the incestuous part of the Oedipus complex is secondary to Leowald one should be able to compare it to Coraline's ability to communicate with adults. This was almost entirely lacking before the destruction of the (m)other, which is visible in this conversation with Miss Spink and Miss Forcible,

"I haven't seen either of [my parents] since yesterday. I'm on my own. I think I've probably become a single child family."

"Tell your mother that we've found the Glasgow Empire press clippings we were telling her about. She seemed very interested when Miriam mentioned them to her."

"She's vanished under mysterious circumstances," said Coraline, "and I believe my father has as well."

"I'm afraid we'll be out all day tomorrow, Caroline, luvvy," said Miss Forcible. (48)

Here, they do not even seem to hear her part of the conversation, ignoring her every statement, even contradicting them; when she states her parents are missing they tell her to send a message to her mother.

After she successfully internalizes her parents, however, Coraline is fully capable of having normal conversations with all adults, not merely her parents. They even begin to refer to her by her proper name, "'Coraline,' said Mr Bobo, repeating her name to himself with wonderment and respect" (158). Coraline enters the social arena, as a person separate from her mother, even earlier; Gooding states that the help she acquires from the ghost children and her parents in the final battle with the (m)other is evident of her "successful integration into a web of social relationships" (399). This is in line with Ogden's claim that the dissolution of the complex leads to an ability to form relationships. The significance of the extra "We are" in Coraline's promise, "'We're going to go home,' said Coraline. We are. Help me" (132), the second time without contraction, emphasizes the shift Coraline has made or gone through, not only in relation to being able to form relationships, but also in, her separation from her real mother. She is no longer part of a dyadic unity.

It is also noteworthy that at the first indication of her new ability to form relationships, Coraline has left the other (pre-dissolution) world/drawing room for the final time, and is on her way back to the 'real' world, with successful parental internalization and a formed superego; the importance of the room is shown once more.

Freud's psychic elements in the novella

The (m)other as the id

In this section the (m)other's role in Coraline's psyche will be examined, based on Freud's theory of the three psychic elements, the id, the ego and the superego. This will be done with help from his theory of the uncanny, primarily doubling, Coats' analysis of another of Gaiman's short stories, and some support from Gooding. The (m)other's roles as a double, the id and the death instinct will be tied together.

In looking at Lucy in Gaiman's *The Wolves in the Walls*, Coats states that Lucy takes,

the first steps toward growing up by suppressing her wild things. She has temporarily lost her home, but she proves that she has the power to reclaim it, to chase the wolves away. Gaiman slyly suggests that her psychic work in protecting her ego-home from the intrusion of id-dwellers will be an ongoing process when he introduces the spectre of elephants in the walls on the final pages. (81)

With some modification, this analysis can be of use as a guide. Even though Coats is referring to another protagonist, her statement can be applied to Coraline by changing the wolves to the (m)other, and the elephants to the cut off hand in the well. This would suggest that the (m)other in fact is a representation of Coraline's id, extended to the entire other world, and its inhabitants, by the fact that it, and they, were created by the (m)other (72). Gooding's statement that this "fantasy world" is "a safe milieu for the playing out of id fantasies" (393) supports this.

Furthermore, Freud's theory of the death instinct also ties the mother to the id. He states that the task of the death instinct is to "lead organic life back into the inanimate state" ("The Ego" 3974); and the choice of words here immediately reminds us of the (m)other's wish to replace Coraline's eyes with those of a(n

inanimate) doll, and ultimately turn her into one of her 'ghost children'. Death is closely related to the uncanny; the uncanniness is brought forth by the primitive belief that the dead has become the enemy of the living, and that its aim is to bring him too, to the other side.

While the most obvious interpretation of this is that it is the dead themselves that produce the uncanny sensation, it is clear that Coraline's lack of reaction to the presumably uncanny ghost children is due to the fact that they are evidently not her enemies; they are harmless, faint and pale, with sad, faraway and lost voices. They are also helpful, advising Coraline on how to defeat the (m)other, telling her to "[l]ook through the stone" (85). In fact, it is the (m)other who has the ultimate objective to send Coraline to the other side, to the 'inanimate state'. After Coraline asks the ghost children what the (m)other is going to do to her, they answer with a clear description of death,

"It doth not hurt," whispered one faint voice.

"She will take your life and all you are, and all you care'st for, and she will leave you with nothing but mist and fog. She'll take your joy. And one day you'll awake and your heart and your soul will have gone. A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten." (84)

This strengthens the (m)other's place as the 'uncanny harbinger of death'/the double and ultimately as the death instinct/id. Freud further connects the double with the id when he equates it with "those things which seem to self-criticism [the superego] to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of earliest times" (3687), that is, with the id.

He also compares it to the stage of primary narcissism where the ego is not yet differentiated - when the child is all id.⁷

Moreover, the (m)other is further tied to the uncanny by being capable of achieving her evil intentions against Coraline by some sort of ancient supernatural powers, another aspect of the theory (3693). Gooding's statement that the other world indicates "powers that are both ancient and enduring" (394) is reminiscent of Freud's theory that the id is the first part of the psyche; "ancient" compared to the ego and the superego, which develop later on. The cat's statement that the (m)other has been in possession of the other world for "a very long time" (73), although it may have been created even earlier, supports the "agedness" (Gooding, 393) of both it and her.

Another feature of Freud's doubling is the recurrence of seemingly inescapable situations, things or events that are similar ("The Uncanny", 3680). This occurs on several occasions in the novella, such as when Coraline is exploring around the other villa and encounters the cat,

And then it took shape in the mist: a dark house, which loomed at them out of the formless whiteness.

"But that's-" said Coraline.

"The house you just left," agreed the cat. "Precisely".

"Maybe I just got turned around in the mist," said Coraline. (72)

After the cat proudly states he would not have turned around in the mist, Coraline confoundedly asks, "[b]ut how can you walk away from something and still come back to it?" (72). This suggests that Coraline is the one caught in the inescapable return, back to the (m)other and the other world; whether involuntary, or to save her parents, it strengthens the (m)other's position as Coraline's double, and therefore, id.

⁷ While he does not mention the id specifically, it is referred to by definitions such as the one quoted in the text.

The cat as the superego

Having come to the conclusion that the other world, with the (m)other at the forefront, is representative of the id, it is rather easy to cast the cat in the role of the superego. This section will examine both the cat's behaviour and degree of internalization to underscore his role as Coraline's superego.

The cat leads Coraline through her identity formation and is closely tied to an already formed identity, stating that he knows who he is, unlike Coraline who is "spread all over the place" (34). His complete identity connects him to the final stage in forming the complete id, ego, and superego-psyche. Another clue to the psychic identity of the cat is his gender, or rather, Coraline's reaction to it, "[i]ts voice sounded like the voice at the back of Coraline's head, the voice she thought words in, but a man's voice, not a girl's" (33), which suggests an internalized father; it is however in relation to the (m)other, and her creations, that his place as the superego is verified:

"[Your other mother] is out," he told her. Fixing the doors. There are some vermin problems." He seemed pleased to have somebody to talk to.

"The rats, you mean?"

"No, the rats are our friends. This is the other kind. Big black fellow, with his tail high."

"The cat, you mean?"

"That's the one," said her other father. (68)

The (m)other refers to the cat as vermin later in the novella, and the dislike is mutual, with the cat constantly hinting at the (m)other's bad intentions and untrustworthy personality (73; 63).

Along with the other indications of his role as the superego, the animosity between the (m)other and the cat is ultimately evidence of the constant struggle between the id and the superego. Moreover, as the story progresses the cat changes

from coming with subtle, puzzling hints about the (m)other,⁸ to helping Coraline catch a rat (that is, he helps her to control her id/death instinct), to telling Coraline that it is acceptable to murder/eat the parents, "'There are those,' it said with a sigh, in tones as smooth as oiled silk, 'who have suggested that the tendency of a cat to play with its prey is a merciful one-after all, it permits the occasional funny little running snack to escape, from time to time. How often does your dinner get to escape?'" (74). It is as if he is saying that he approves of the parental murder, as a part of the parents will escape and live on, internalized in her. The knowledge and sanctioning of the psychical parricide does, once more, indicate that he is symbolic of the superego. At the final confrontation he is ultimately the one who 'conquers' the mother, albeit with help from Coraline:

And, hard as she could, she threw the black cat toward the other mother. It yowled and landed on the other mother's head, claws flailing, teeth bared, fierce and angry. Fur on end, it looked half again as big as it was in real life. . . . The cat made a deep, ululating yowl and sank its teeth into the other mother's cheek. (129)

One could say that he is Coraline's tool in controlling her id's desires, that is, that he takes on the role of her superego. Furthermore, here at the end of the novella the cat, frozen with fear, becomes unable to speak, which underscores his role as the superego as well.

In the beginning of the novella, he is voiceless as Coraline is yet to begin the process to form her superego – and here at the end he is voiceless as he/the superego is fully internalized. Only as Coraline steps away from the superego formation in the other world, is there a need for the cat to have a speaking role. In the quote one can

⁸ At their first encounter, shortly after Coraline has met the (m)other for the first time, he states that it is "sensible of [her] to bring protection" (36), although he never states what she needs protection from, and ignores her interrogative "Protection?" (36).

see how Coraline's internalization of him has made her capable of utilising her superego against her (m)other, that is, her id, by 'throwing' him at her.

Ogden's theory may also be helpful in identifying the cat as the superego. In his oedipal arena it is the parents' authority that is the opponent. If the parental authority is lacking, there is nothing to hinder the fantasised parricide, and the impulse or fantasy becomes too fearsome for the child to endure; these desires are therefore repressed by the child "adopting a harshly punitive stance" (656) towards them, that is, an unforgiving and punitive superego. As it has already been discussed that Coraline's entrance into the other world is a step away from an internalization of her parents, it is here legitimate to claim that the entrance into the other world is a step toward repressing the fantasised parricide - if Coraline were to stay with the (m)other instead of opposing her. This is shown in the cat's (the superego's) initial, harsh behaviour, before Coraline decides to fight the (m)other, as he is described by Coraline as irritating and arrogant,

"We . . . we could be friends, you know," said Coraline.

"We could be rare specimens of an exotic breed of African dancing elephants," said the cat. "But we are not. At least," it added cattily, after darting a brief look at Coraline, "I'm not." (35)

Or as in this quote, described as 'catty' by the narrator. Coraline's failure to start the process of superego-formation is shown by the fact that it is the first time the cat speaks. That, as well as, her entrance into the pre-oedipal arena of the other world has turned the cat into Ogden's 'harsh superego'.

On the other hand, if the parental authority is present, it acts as a 'brake' for the murderous fantasies and it is then safe to psychically go through with the parricide, and a healthy superego is formed. This is shown in the cat's behaviour, when it becomes less and less harsh, and more helpful, as when it helped her catch the

(m)other's rat, mentioned above. While Coraline may not have the most engaged parents in the world they do possess at least some authority, "[h]er mother made her come back inside for dinner and for lunch" (4), allowing for her to go through with the fantasy.

Although one could argue that their authority is not harsh enough to produce a revolt on Coraline's part, Gooding does note that Coraline's initial entrance to the other world has an overtone of defiance (397), partly because the drawing room is "taboo" to enter, and partly because Coraline's own feeling of disobedience as she "knew she was doing something wrong, and she was trying to listen for her mother coming back" (24). The same kind of rebelliousness can be found in her immediate exploration of the well immediately after being told to avoid it as it was dangerous. The occasional parental authority combined with Coraline's mild expressions of rebellion are, according to Ogden's theory, what allows for the superego to develop healthily.

The hostility between the cat and the (m)other, Gaiman's use of the cat's silence and speech, as well as the cat's changing behaviour as Coraline starts moving towards, instead of away from, the dissolution of her complex are all indicative of the cat's role as the superego.

Coraline as the regressive ego

As the ego-defence of regression may occur during a "lengthy development" of "the libidinal function" ("Introductory Lectures" 3403), this section of the essay will deal with the manifested regression throughout the novella as a evidence of "other world Coraline" being representative of the real Coraline's ego during her oedipal development. Freud states that regression occurs when "powerful external obstacles"

(3404) hinder satisfaction. Other aspects that support her being representative of the ego, in the other world, will be presented as well.

Although incest is secondary to Leowald's Oedipus complex according to Ogden, he does discuss why incest is considered wrong (661); a discussion that is appropriate to my own argument, especially in conjunction with Coats. Leowald claims incest is considered evil as it makes perverse the undifferentiated bond one has with the parental object, not because it defies the father's authority and challenges his claim to the mother (661-2). Ultimately, it is the destruction of the demarcation between the undifferentiated/differentiated relatedness with the same person that causes incest to be deemed taboo. Ogden then states that the incestuous part of Leowald's complex is a result of the tension between autonomy and a healthy pull toward unity (662). Coats formulates this in a way which reveals its applicability, "[t]he point of the mother/child incest is not the pleasure of sex after all, but the dubious pleasure of regressing into an infantile state of undifferentiation" (88). I would argue that regression is present, almost omnipresent, in the other world of Gaiman's novella.

Through Shabad's oedipal drama where Coraline is cast as herself, the (m)other can be read as representing the pre-oedipal stage in which the relationship, and of course Coraline herself, must stay in to continue to be fully nurtured and taken care of by her mother - what Gooding calls a "perpetual childhood" (398). The pre-oedipal necessity is depicted not only in the mother/child relationship, but very much so in the surroundings, such as the animate toys. Later in the novella the dangers of staying in this stage is shown by an amplifying series of events, or descriptions; the first being the stage of the trees, described as an "idea of trees: a grayish-brown trunk below, a greenish splodge of something that might have been leaves above" (70)

hinting at both an idea, a sketch which is not done, and perhaps a drawing done by a very young child. Secondly, the transformations of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible bring a set of conjoined twins, inside a womb, to mind, and the link to something unborn is emphasized by the sack of the women being described as "a spider's egg case" and the creature/s inside as "unfinished" (99). Lastly, the portrayal of the other father:

. . . something more or less the size and shape of a person.

In that dim light, it took her several seconds to recognize it for what it was: 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. (108)

This gives the reader a clear image of a foetus, not yet fully developed.

Furthermore, as Coraline is reminiscing about her early childhood, the focus is, to some degree, on her father dressing her. This - or rather the fact that it is described in the story - suggests a pre-oedipal time where her parents intimately nurtured and took care of her, mentally and physically. At the end of the story, Coraline shifts her focus from their common experience to an idolization of her father,

"And he said that it wasn't brave of him, doing that, just standing there and being stung [while watching me run away]," said Coraline to the cat. "It wasn't brave because he wasn't scared: it was the only thing he could do. But going back again to get his glasses, when he knew the wasps were there, when he was really scared. That was brave." (56-7)

This idolization is a return to an earlier stage of sexuality, to Coraline's first sexual object, which Freud states is the very nature of regression ("Introductory Lectures"

3405). The fact that the idolization was in combination with a pre-oedipal memory strengthens its ties to regression.

Moreover, in the novella, the ghost children states, "[the other mother] stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, and she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark" (82). The fact that the (m)other steals more than their animate life, that she steals their identity, can be connected to the attempt to steal their gender. This is represented by the fact that the only part of their memory she actually removes is their names, which could reveal their gender. The fact that they remember events like cutting their hair and entering the other world, and meeting the (m)other for the first time, as well as people from their real lives, as one claims that s/he "keep[s] pictures in my mind of my governess" (81), supports the theory that only gender-specific aspects of their memory is removed. Forcing the children into a state where gender is not "something [they] give a mind to" (82) can be easily connected to young children who do not distinguish between sexes in a pre-phallic, pre-oedipal stage.

Another aspect of the uncanny, according to Freud, is when the wish, or belief, children have that their dolls or toys can come to life recurs (3685). However, the animate toys and dolls do not affect Coraline in an uncanny way; she treats the toys in the other world like toys at home, even calling them "wonderful" (28), and the other people in the other world like people at home. Not until Coraline realises how to win over the (m)other, how to end her complex, that is, how to leave the pre-dissolution arena of the other world where she is a mere ego, and go back to the real world to become "real Coraline" again, is she able to differentiate between the "illusions", "ghastly parody[s]" (115) and the "things that already existed" (116). This may explain why Coraline is unaffected by the uncanniness in regard to the lack of

demarcation between the animate and inanimate; she has, in the other world, regressed to a state where she was yet to repress the infantile belief that all is, or can be, animate.

As another example, Coraline's reaction to instantaneous wish-fulfillment can be used. With the story "The Ring of Polycrates" as an example, Freud illustrates that a person whose every wish is instantaneously fulfilled becomes uncanny to others (3690); is it then not appropriate to assume that it is uncanny for Coraline to have her every wish fulfilled? Freud states that the overestimation of subjective mental processes - in this case the (m)other's - is connected to a primitive, animistic universe, which is suiting in several ways (3691). Firstly, if the other world/universe is a representation of Coraline's id (as suggested above), the whole other world would then become animistic, as it is a part of a human psyche. Secondly, Gooding's previously mentioned description of the other world as "ancient and enduring" (394), proposes it is a part of a prehistoric state of the universe. Coraline does, however, seem to not have an uncanny reaction to the wish fulfillment.

Coraline sighed. "You really don't understand, do you?" she said. "I don't want whatever I want. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted? Just like that, and it didn't mean anything? That then?"

"I don't understand," said the whispery voice.

"Of course you don't understand," she said, raising the stone with the hole in it to her eye. "You're just a bad copy she made of the crazy old man upstairs." (118)

Her reaction seems to have more to do with maturity, from when one takes the step from "demander" to "desirer", not with the uncanny; Rudd notes that at the early stages of development "the child does not desire so much as demand: satisfaction is

expected immediately, being seen as the way in which the mother can demonstrate her total devotion" (165). Moreover, the latter comment Coraline makes, regarding the other speaker's status as "just a copy", suggests that the lack of uncanniness depends on Gaiman's choice to use a supernatural world.

Lastly, returning to Coats' reflection on *The Wolves in the Walls*, the elephants introduce the idea that the protagonist's problems may never end, that is, the ego's perpetual struggle with the id-dwellers. In *Coraline*, the same perpetual struggle can be found when the (m)other's hand is not destroyed, that is, when it is implied that Coraline's struggle continues. The fact that the narrator states, "[s]he didn't want anything ever to get out" (157), underscores the potential for the opposite, that is, that it is possible that the hand will get out, that is, that the id-desires may resurface.

The reversed relationship: Coraline and the mother

The reversed behaviour of Coraline and her mother in the other world will be discussed in this section. Shabad's superego-formation will be used to show why this has occurred, and Freud's uncanny will be used to support it. One of the principal aspects of Freud's theory of doubling are characters who are considered identical based on appearance, such as the copies in the other world. However, as Coraline's shadow is described as a "thin giant woman" (9), she can be directly linked to the (m)other who is described as tall and thin (26). This is supported by "the connections which the 'double' has . . . with shadows" ("The Uncanny" 3698). It is also indicative of the mother-daughter relationship having been reversed in the other world, here by Coraline's appearance reminding of the (m)other's. The reversal is further connected to the double by the ability of mental processes to leap from one person to another (3686). In the other world this is shown by the (m)other being the one demanding

attention and love, while Coraline is the one who is rejecting and absent. While Freud referred to transferred mental processes between persons who look alike, I feel the subtle indication made by the description of Coraline's shadow is sufficient.

Before the other world opened up, Coraline's real parents could not really be concerned with her. They ignored her (21), told her to "leave me alone" (5) and to "go and bother Miss Spink and Miss Forcible" because they (the parents) were "busy" (16), which implies that she was bothering them. In the other world, however, it is Coraline who is turning the (m)other down, "I don't want to play with you. . . . I have no plans to love you" (74). One could even compare the real mother's "Mm. Very modern" (15) comment to Coraline's somewhat discouraging answer when talking to the (m)other,

"Did you have a nice time?" asked her other mother.

"It was interesting," said Coraline. (42)

The first time in the other world "interesting" was a positive remark, Coraline "looking forward to . . . an interesting day" (28) but here it almost seems to say that she did in fact not have a nice time. A few lines later Coraline asked her (m)other to stop stroking her hair, amplifying the negativity. Both the modern and the interesting comment are things one say to avoid using negative statements.

With the use of the uncanny it is not only possible to see Coraline's part in the reversed relationship with her (m)other. The (m)other's demanding personality, and her exaggerated need to be loved and satisfied are borderline pathologic. This can be seen when she locks her disobeying daughter away in a closet,

"There we are," she said. "This is for you, Coraline. For your own good.

Because I love you. To teach you manners. Manners makyth man, after all."

She pulled Coraline back into the hallway and advanced upon the mirror at the end of the hall. Then she pushed the tiny key into the fabric of the mirror, and she *twisted* it.

It opened like a door, revealing a dark space behind it. "You may come out when you've learned some manners," said the other mother. "And when you're ready to be a loving daughter." (77)

If focus is put on the final sentence of the quote, it is as if the (m)other is telling Coraline, 'you can come out when you love me'. These needs are originally the less dramatic needs of Coraline herself. They are the (m)other's version of when Coraline tries to get attention and love from her parents in the real world, for example when she claims she "was kidnapped by aliens . . . [t]hey came down from outer space with ray guns" (22). It is also a clear example of "forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-men, but at the same time *he is dimly aware of them in remote corners of his own being* [emphasis added]" (3693). That is, Coraline's id-wishes and desires, which she is 'dimly aware of in her own mind', represented in and acted out by the (m)other. This also underscores the (m)other's role as Coraline's id.

According to Shabad, the child's developmental process is dependent on the parents' ability to receive his or her "offerings", so the child may internalize "the emotional fuel" (65) needed for the child to continue to develop a separate personality. In Coraline's real world this fuel is lacking; there is no praise when Coraline's real mother is presented with the drawing of the mist (15).⁹ A lack of reception of the offerings may result in the child's identity to be formed with the sole purpose of disengaging from the parents, so that the wish for the positive reinforcement by the parent is repressed into the unconscious. Here it is not relevant

⁹ See the discussion on the 'modern'-comment above. It is the real mother's reaction to the drawing, and is in the essay interpreted as being used to avoid a negative comment.

to read Coraline's entry to the other world as a lack of oedipal progress anymore, but to consider how the process could be seen as reflecting Coraline's disengagement from her parents.

When disengaging from the parents at the same time as forming one's superego, the disillusioning behaviours of the parents are internalized. The identification with the negative qualities of the parent is, according to Shabad, a result of a need to "bridge the chasm between oneself and the psychically lost parent" (69). Coraline's and her mother/(m)other's reversed relationship in the other world is here being read as symbolizing an internalization of the negative, "neglecting" behaviours she perceives her parents to have. Ultimately, she has taken on the unfulfilling role in the relationship with the (m)other.

Shabad claims that to have a healthy development of one's identity after the negative internalization (that is, to undo the reversal of Coraline's and the (m)other's relationship), one must allow for these repressed wishes regarding parental relationships to have a place in the conscious internal life. It is not a relinquishment of these wishes that is desirable, but a relinquishment of "the necessity of their fulfilment" (73). That is, Coraline may still *desire* constant parental attention, without *demanding* it. If something positive about the repressed wish can be realised and internalized, such as "a vision of one's ideal childhood" (74), it enables one to let go of the necessity to fulfil said wish. In the novella, Coraline vocalizes a memory from her childhood:

"It wasn't the best place to go for a walk really. There were all these things that people had thrown away back there-old cooker and broken dishes and dolls with no arms and no legs and empty cans and broken bottles. Mum and Dad made me promise not to go exploring back there, because there were too many sharp things, and tetanus and such.

"But I kept telling them I wanted to explore it. So one day my dad put on his big brown boots and his gloves and put my boots on me and my jeans and sweater, and we went for a walk. (55)

This is a memory about a wasteland not far from their house. The memory brings forth two dear childhood experiences, no longer a part of Coraline's life. Firstly, the fact that her father (unexpectedly) decides to spend the day with his daughter. Of late he has merely told her to go away and bother someone else. Secondly, they are partaking in her favourite activity, exploring. After giving this event a place in her conscious, Coraline gains the strength to take on the (m)other and fight to get her parents back. That is, she gains the strength to halt the process of disengaging and engage again.

Lastly, Coraline's removal of her other father's eye must be taken into consideration. Firstly, it can stand for a sort of revolt against the doll-like regression the button eye represents. This is supported by the fact that the event takes place at the end of the novella, right before Coraline and the (m)other's 'final battle',

As the thing [the other father] reached her, Coraline put out her hand and closed it around the thing's remaining button eye, and she tugged as hard as she knew how.

For a moment nothing happened. Then the button came away and flew from her hand, clicking against the walls before it fell to the cellar floor.

The thing froze in place. It threw its pale head back blindly. . . (110-1).

Coraline as the castrator may seem contradictory to the rest of the analysis done, although with the reversed relationship in mind it is not. Here, Coraline takes on the castrating maternal role in the oedipal complex. Ultimately, she becomes a representation of her real (castrating) mother.

Concluding Discussion

Coraline's entrance to the other world has proven to be a step towards regression, which is shown in the doll-like (m)other's caring and nurturing pre-oedipal behaviour. The (m)other, this representation of Coraline's id, seems as if she wants to satisfy Coraline's every narcissistic need or wish. At first, Coraline approves. However, according to Freud, when the primary narcissism is left behind, the double transforms into the "uncanny harbinger of death" (3687). That is, when Coraline ceases to regress, the (m)other turns from dear to dreadful.

While in the other world, every character plays their part in Coraline's identity formation. The cat, the superego, tries to help Coraline to control her id, the (m)other. The (m)other, on the other hand, tries to force the cat/superego out to be able to entice Coraline to live by her id's desires. A lack of superego leaves nothing to control the id; *when the cat is away, the (m)other will play*. She tries to force Coraline to regress back to a stage when she is in full control, a pre-oedipal stage where the child is all id. She is trying to make Coraline, the ego, cease to exist by becoming a ghost child.

However, as Coraline moves towards a dissolution of her oedipal complex, that is, as she embraces the process of super-ego formation, she acquires the tools she needs to win over the mother. She starts to use her superego to control her id's desires and is able to leave the pre-oedipal arena of the other world.

One feature of the novella left untreated in this essay is the roles of the mice and rats. Perhaps it would be interesting to, in the future, look on the different parts they play in the different worlds. Their song changes throughout the novella, how come and in what way? The fact that Coraline can hear them in the 'real' world is also worthy of note. That she hears them at night may be indicative of what the other world really is, a dream.

In the beginning of this essay, the aspect of human psychology was mentioned to be the reason behind the novella's widespread appreciation. The novella almost follows an oedipal scheme. For children it is a guide through the paternal separation and identity formation. For adults it is an, perhaps unconscious, remainder of the past. However, the arena of identity formation is a minefield. Perhaps the novella, and the analytic articles written about it, can be used to help create pedagogical works that can support and guide children through it.

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Emma Agnell



Besöksadress: Kristian IV:s väg 3
Postadress: Box 823, 301 18 Halmstad
Telefon: 035-16 71 00
E-mail: registrator@hh.se
www.hh.se