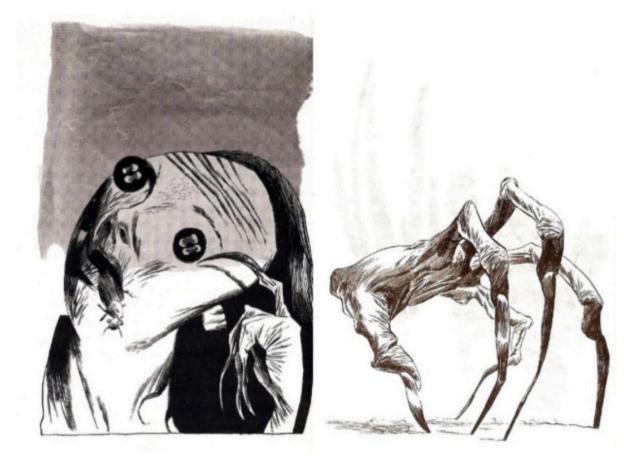# "Something Called Protective Coloration":

The Uncanny in Children's Literature

A Case Study of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

Joni Schers

4079671

BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

Supervisor: Simon Cook

Second Reader: Barnita Bagchi

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Abstract

This paper explores the presence and impact of the Freudian uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) in children's literature; a subject that is still underexplored in academic debate. Taking cues from earlier research in the field, as well as an extensive exploration of how childhood and children's literature originated, the paper illuminates the reasons why scholars have felt reluctant to address this topic and aims to provide evidence for the claim that the uncanny is a positive development in the field of children's literature, closely following Bruno Bettelheim's argument about the importance of fairy tales to exorcize psychic tension. The findings are presented in an extensive case study of Neil Gaiman's 2002 children's novel *Coraline*, which contains all elements of the uncanny and has been widely read by both children and adults.

Key Words: Freud, Uncanny, Unheimliche, Neil Gaiman, Coraline, Gothic, Children's Gothic, Children's literature, Psychoanalysis.

Contents

Introduction

"… and we do love you; but we want to be naughty."
"Then I should know you did not love me," the mother said.
"And what should you do?" asked Blue-Eyes.
…
"I should have to go away and leave you,
and to send home a new mother,
with glass eyes and a wooden tail."

–Lucy Clifford, "The New Mother" (1882)

"If you want to stay," said the 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 her other mother. "We want you to stay. And it's just a little thing." (Gaiman, *Coraline* 43)

The other mother in Neil Gaiman's 2002 award-winning children's novel *Coraline* is one of the most terrifying mother figures in children's literature, with black buttons for eyes and snake-like hair reminiscent of Medusa. Her aim is to consume Coraline and she will do anything to succeed in her quest of robbing the child of her identity. The fear of losing one's eyes is an important characteristic of the Freudian uncanny, serving as a disguised fear of the castration complex. *Coraline*, in fact, incorporates all elements of Freud's study and its popularity among both children and adults serves as evidence that the uncanny can have a positive influence on the child's development. The fact that uncanny elements have been present in children's fiction since the eighteenth century suggests that despite all effort to avoid its presence, children keep returning to Freud's theories and Gaiman is part of a group of writers who try to make this desire explicit.

"The word is not always used in a clearly definable sense," argues Freud about the uncanny at the outset of his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* (the "Uncanny") (123). Freud is not alone in failing to define the concept and this notion of indefinability is what has prompted various studies of the uncanny in different fields, from psychology and philosophy to literary studies. This thesis will focus on the last.

Gardner Lloyd-Smith calls the uncanny a "nothing" or "no-thing" concept (Preface ix). Cixous argues that Freud's essay reinforces the notion of the uncanny because it "is a question of a concept whose entire denotation is a connotation" (528). Indeed, the uncanny is a never-ending chain of relational signifiers, never leading to what is signified. Its inexplicability is the main contributor to its terror.

This phantomlike nature of the uncanny has caused critics to take varying views of its nucleus. Freud takes issue with Jentsch's[1] earlier argument that the uncanny is caused by intellectual uncertainty.[2] According to Freud, the uncanny always leads back to a return of repressed impulses ("Uncanny" 147) and has thus at some point been familiar. Ironically, the very *structure* of Freud's essay is deeply rooted in intellectual uncertainty (Haughton xliii) as he keeps promising explanations that do not come.

The uncanny was a reaction to the 18th century Age of Reason (Castle 8, Coats 79) which replaced "superstitions and folkways" (Coats 79) with rationality and "scientific investigation" (Coats 79). Although Freud excludes any discussion of the Gothic in his essay, critics of Gothic fiction often draw upon his theories, as the genre seems to embody most elements of the uncanny, including anxiety, repression, and paranoia.

While an increasing number of studies have explored the phenomenon in literature, not many have addressed the concept in children's literature. Coats, one of the first to analyze

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[1] Freud's essay is a direct response to Ernst Jentsch earlier, and first, psychological study of the uncanny, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," published in 1906.
[2] Freud repeatedly quotes Jentsch claim about 'intellectual uncertainty,' while the latter never actually mentions it in his study. Jentsch speaks of 'intellectual certainty' instead (15).

it, argues that the uncanny "is precisely what is excluded from children's literature" (qtd. in Gooding 392) and Rollin has written several essays on the subject; her best-known on the uncanny nature of Disney's Mickey Mouse. She expounds the view that children's literature has the tendency to repress uncanny elements (31), which is the reason why Mickey Mouse's character has softened over the years.

However, the Gothic has always been a part of children's literature and as Jackson et al. point out, "[p]erhaps the really strange development of the eighteenth century was the transformation of the Gothic narrative into an adult genre, when it had really belonged to children's literature all along" (2). If, as Freud argues, the uncanny marks the return of the repressed, and bearing in mind Jackson et al.'s previous claim, is not the very act of repressing the uncanny in children's literature – whether its existence or its research – uncanny too?

In a 2001-02 special edition of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Seelinger Trites argues that the uncanny is "one of the most important principles that motivates international children's literature" but that it is underrepresented in academic research (162), which is a counter-argument to Coats' earlier claim. The few studies that do exist manage to locate the phenomenon in children's fiction but do not go beyond linking the uncanny elements to the child's subconscious. Gooding comes closest to explaining the effect on children's literature as a genre by focusing on the possibility of a "double readership" created by the uncanny, resulting in a "cognitive and affective dissonance" (392) between child and adult readers.

This thesis aims to contribute to the discussion of the presence of the uncanny in children's literature and will illuminate how this presence enriches the literature for the young. The first chapter explores Freud's theory and discusses how the uncanny can be appropriated to literature, especially focusing on the concept's *need* for literature, which

Freud himself admits in his essay. I will use David Mclintock's translation. The third explores

the uncanny in children's literature. It will include theory about the changing view of the

child, with Locke, Rousseau, and Wordsworth as the main contributors to a change in attitude

that dictated different agendas about what the child was and what children's literature should

contain. It will explore why and to what extent the uncanny is repressed in children's

literature, but also to what extent it occurs in contemporary children's literature through a

case study of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, which contains all elements of the Freudian uncanny.

"A Strange Theoretical Novel": The Uncanny in Psychoanalysis and Literature

But how can you walk away from something and still come
back to it?
– Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*

To reach a closer understanding of the concept as Freud envisioned it in his 1919 essay "The

Uncanny", it is important to look at the semantics of the original German word, *das*

Unheimliche. Freud argues that, whereas *Unheimlich* appears to be the antonym of *Heimlich*,

the latter actually has two opposite meanings. He argues that *Heimlich* can both mean

"belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly" ("Uncanny" 126), and

"concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from

others" (129). In the first sense it translates as a feeling of familiarity and homeliness, in the

second of concealment and secrecy. Freud reasons that because the meaning of *Unheimlich* is

contained within its antonym, the concept of *das Unheimliche* "applies to everything that was

intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open[3]" (132).

Freud associates the resurfacing of the familiar to the psychoanalytical concept of

repression, the prefix *-Un* in *Unheimliche* being the indicator of the repressed material. As an

example, Freud gives the desire to return to the womb. The "female genitals", he argues, are

sometimes perceived as uncanny by "neurotic men" because they represent an entrance to

"the place where everyone once lived" (151). This desire does not limit itself to neurotics, but

also occurs in dreams. When people experience déjà vu in a dream, the place they believe

they have visited before represents the mother's womb and Freud reasons that what was once

'homely' has become 'unhomely' and the prefix thus represents the repression of these womb

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[3] The English 'uncanny' – the most suitable translation for *Unheimliche* – does not have the same connotations. The *OED* informs us that 'uncanny' is related to something "mischievous" and "unreliable" as well as to "partaking of a supernatural character". 'Canny' in its fourth meaning means "supernaturally wise, endowed with occult or magical power [*Scottish, Obsolete*.]. Whereas the German ambiguity results in the familiar becoming unfamiliar – something belonging to the family, but also concealed from it – the English ambiguity reaches to the spheres of the supernatural and to the supernatural explained. What is uncanny is dependent on the spoken language (Royle 11).

fantasies.

Freud argues that the cause of repression "involve[s] the emergence of a wishful impulse which [is] in sharp contrast to the subject's other wishes and which prove[s] incompatible with the ethical and aesthetic standards of his personality" (*Five* 20). Throughout his argument, Freud distinguishes between two types of repression that cause an uncanny feeling when they resurface: animistic beliefs and infantile complexes. Peel criticizes Freud and argues that it is difficult to establish a clear distinction between these two forms of repression. What first seems to refer to the Jungian notion of a collective conscious – in the case of animism – soon collapses when Freud limits this theory by claiming that all individuals go through a similar stage in childhood. Peel adds, "he almost reduces animism to one of the individual's infantile complexes" (411) and the two concepts merge. However, Freud acknowledges this and argues that "in real life it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the two species of the uncanny … as primitive convictions are closely linked with childhood complexes" (155).

The belief in magic, the "omnipotence of thoughts" (147), and the return of the dead are symptoms of Freudian repression that occur in both animistic beliefs and infantile complexes, because they mark the return of the familiar. Freud argues that "anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts" (148) remain subjects on which our thoughts have little changed from those of primitive times, which he attributes to the intensity of our initial emotions and a lack of scientific certainty about anything concerning death (148). He adds that this human fear of the dead is caused by the belief that the dead become the enemy of the living (149).

Infantile complexes include the unconscious "compulsion to repeat" (145) – often manifested in the figure of the double, and the fear of being buried alive, which, according to Freud, is a repressed desire to return to the mother's womb (Royle 144). Freud does not

explain *why* live burial replaces these womb fantasies, as most questions in his essay remain unanswered.

Freud turns to E.T.A Hoffmann's 1816 short story "The Sandman" – claiming that Hoffmann was "the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature" ("Uncanny" 141) – to reach a closer understanding of the concept. According to Jentsch, the most uncanny effect in general is an apparent "lifeless thing" coming to life (13). He calls to mind automata, figures of wax, and lifelike dolls. In the case of "The Sandman", this is expressed by the automaton Olimpia, who is so lifelike that the protagonist does not realize she is inhuman for a long time.[4] However, what constitutes the most uncanny effect in Hoffmann's story, reasons Freud, is the figure of the Sandman, who is associated with "the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" (138), which in turn is directly related to the castration complex[5], both in fiction and in dreams. In "The Sandman" this fear is constantly connected with the death of Nathaniel's father and the Sandman "always appears as a disrupter of love" ("Uncanny" 140), as the figure of the Sandman – who is Nathaniel's father's double – prevents Nathaniel from forming meaningful relationships with Clara or even Olimpia.

Freud argues that the concept of the double (the *Doppelgänger*) often evokes a sense of uncanniness because in primitive times it used to be an "insurance against the extinction of the self" which emerges from "the primordial narcissism" dominating the minds of "both the child and primitive man" (142) The fear that comes to be connected to the double is caused by

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[4] Freud argues that this cannot be traced back to an infantile fear because children actually *wish* for their dolls to come alive, so the effect has to come from an "infantile wish" (141).
[5] The castration complex is a symbolic or literal unconscious childhood fear that in males reveals itself as the fear that their penis will be removed by the father, who is sexually interested in the mother, and in females as a compulsion to prove that they have a similar symbolic equivalent of the male genitals. This fear of castration in boys causes the abandonment of Oedipal desire in the mother and a new alignment with the power structure of the father. Girls blame their mothers for their lack and transfer their desire for the mother onto the father.

the surmounting of that primitive phase. The double no longer represents immortality but "becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (142); a symbol of castration.

Only near the end of his essay does Freud make a distinction between real-life instances of the uncanny and those found in the realms of fiction. The former – consisting of childhood complexes and animistic beliefs – "has far simpler determinants" (154), but it does not occur as often as instances found in the world of storytelling: "the distinction between what is repressed and what is surmounted cannot be transferred to the uncanny in literature without substantial modification, because the realm of the imagination depends for its validity on its contents being exempt from the reality test" (155). As a result, he adds, many phenomena that would be considered uncanny in real-life would not be in the world of fiction and vice versa (155-56). Freud argues that uncanny elements in literature are only perceived as such when the distinction between reality and fantasy is blurred.[6] Therefore, fairytales – which often include many of the right tropes – are not uncanny, because from the onset of the story, the author does not make a pretense to realism.

All of the aforementioned elements and symptoms of the uncanny are informed by the "death drive" (*Todestrieb*), which, as Royle argues, is "always already enmeshed in literature, fiction and storytelling[7]" (96). Freud first mentions the concept in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). It consists of an opposition between life drives (*Eros*), characterized by a striving for unity, and the death drives (*Thanatos*), characterized by a need to undo this unity to relieve all excitation. Freud argues: "the aim of all life is death ... inanimate things existed before living ones" (qtd. in Puri 634). "The Uncanny" was written a year before Freud first mentioned the death drives, therefore the latter are not directly referred to in his essay, but are

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[6] When something that appears to exist solely in fantasy appears in real life or when a "symbol takes over the full function and significance" of that which it symbolizes ("Uncanny" 150).

[7] As Royle argues: "a good story is one that knows that it has to end, but insists on not ending too quickly, on going on a journey that ends in its own fashion, on its own terms" (95).

nevertheless present. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud informs the reader that "the death instincts are by their nature mute" (qtd. in Royle 86), as opposed to the noisy life drives, and are thus represented by silence.

Freud pays no attention to women in his essay. Yet, they play an important role in the death drive. Royle quotes Elisabeth Bronfen: "woman functions as privileged trope for the uncanniness of unity and loss, of independent identity and self-dissolution, of the pleasure of the body and its decay" (87). The mother "threatens" death when a child identifies with her. Due to "the prohibition on incest", the child is forced to form an identity of his own (Kofman qtd. in Royle 87).

Ironically, Freud's theory – before he draws the distinction between real-life and literature – is inherently rooted in literature. He refers to various literary works, including Schiller's "The Ring of Polykrates" (145-46), Goethe's *Faust* (149), Schaeffer's *Josef Montfort* (181), and Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (139) to aid his research. Moreover, his non-literary examples are rooted in literature as well. As Royle argues: "his ostensibly *non*-literary examples keep turning, in the very moment of his handling them, Midas-like, into literature" (52). Even his autobiographical stories are written in prose reminiscent of a novel, by leaving the reader in suspense about how his stories are going to end. As Cixous points out in her elaborate study of Freud's *Unheimliche*, the style of the essay resembles "a strange theoretical novel" (525) and Royle adds that Freud's "storytelling" makes his essay "irreducibly literary, touched and energized by the fictional" (18). Freud alternates between a first and third-person narrative, referring to himself as "psycho-analyst" and "the writer of the present contribution" in the first sentence of his essay (123). By doing so, he fictionalizes his work at the outset of his essay by becoming a character in his own research. Moreover, Freud becomes his own double: the psychoanalyst becomes the protagonist of his own study. Instances in which Freud's writing reinforces the notion of the uncanny are frequent. Another example is the

aforementioned merging of animistic beliefs and childhood complexes, just as *Heimlich* merged with *Unheimlich*.

As Freud argues, fiction can produce more uncanny effects than real-life experiences. and "in his stories [the writer] can make things happen that one would never, or only rarely, experience in real life." He confronts his reader with a "superstition" he thought he had "surmounted" (157). Any work of fiction is by default a work of telepathy ("the omniscience of thought") – the reader is able to read characters' thoughts, mainly by means of an omniscient narrator – of doubling, and of "strange coincidences" (Royle 192). As Royle argues: "there are no novels without coincidences, without narratorial foreknowledge, clairvoyance and telepathy" (196) because these elements are already contained within the act of *writing*.

What is important is that the uncanny is an effect of reading (Gardner Lloyd-Smith ix): it is not a concept that is present in every text, but "a ghostly feeling that arises (or doesn't arrive) … as an effect of reading" (Royle 44), which is a different experience for every reader. Freud demonstrates this by recalling a story from *Strand Magazine* that produced an uncanny feeling in him ("Uncanny" 151). Freud's distinction between the uncanny in real life and in literature proves not only problematic but also impossible, as the uncanny actually *requires* literature in order to exist.

"Spirits and Goblins": The Uncanny in Children's Literature

Oh! give us once again the wishing cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat
Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!
The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap
One precious gain, that he forgets himself.

– Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, V, 342-47

2.1 Inventing the Child: Locke, Rousseau, and Wordsworth

Stories in medieval times were told orally as many people were illiterate. These included myths, legends, and folk and fairytales and were attempts to understand the world. These tales were designed for adults because childhood was not recognized: only at the end of the eighteenth century was it considered as a distinct developmental period (Townshend 23). With the invention of the printing press – Johannes Gutenberg in Germany (1440), followed by William Caxton in England (1476) – the fairytales were written down.[8] Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) followed. Although chapbooks such as these were written for adults, children read them as well "throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries" and adopted them as their own (Grenby 290). Stories such as *Robin Hood*, *Faust*, and *Jack the Giant Killer* were popular (Grenby 281, Jackson et al. 2) and writers and poets including Charles Dickens, John Clare, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge have expressed their enthusiasm in reading these during their childhoods (Grenby 286).

Views of fairytales and chapbooks changed during the Enlightenment period, which coincided with a changing view of the child, first explored by Locke. As opposed to the common held view of "original sin" (Benziman 169) in the eighteenth century, Locke

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[8] First by Giovanni Francesco Straparola in *The Facetious Nights* (1550), later by Giambattista Basile in *The Pentamerone* (1634). These collections contained the fairytales that the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault would later make famous.

believed that people were born as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, and not with innate ideas and identities. In order to become a worthy member of society, Locke argued, children had to receive proper education. In his 1663 treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, he argued that that children should preserve their innocence for as long as possible, by keeping from "frights of all kinds" (64). By arguing that a person will be shaped by his early experiences, he made a start at recognizing the period of childhood as a separate entity. His belief in the preservation of innocence led Locke to argue that children should be read stories devoid of "all impressions and notions of spirits and goblins, or any fearful apprehensions in the dark" (77). He was, therefore, strictly against chapbooks and fairytales because they contained exactly those frightful apprehensions and he blamed the children's nursemaids for spreading such stories about "raw-head and bloody bones" (77). Influenced by Locke, children were encouraged to read didactic tales such as Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life: With Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (1788) (Jackson et al. 1-2) and Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, published in successive parts between 1795 and 1817 (Townshend 21).

During the Romantic period, middle and upper class children received education from a governess, while the working classes went to informal schools, as their parents could not afford a tutor. As a consequence, more children learned to read and near the end of the eighteenth century children's literature developed. Influenced by Locke, chapbooks changed considerably and were now solely designed and printed for children, with more didactic contents (Grenby 291).

The publication of *Émile; or On Education*[9] in 1762 by Rousseau had the most considerable impact on the changing view of the child. Rousseau believed – like Locke – that

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[9] *Émile* initially caused a great scandal in France and Rousseau was no longer safe in his own country. He was accused – among other things – of destroying the "foundations" (Steeg 2) of Christian faith by the Archbishop of France. Rousseau had to flee and his book was burned. It

man was initially good. However, whereas Locke believed that society is required to control people through a strict education, Rousseau argued that society corrupts man's innate goodness. He argued: "everything is good; in the hands of man, everything degenerates (11). In order to avoid this corruption, children should be allowed more freedom in nature. Education should be adjusted to the different developmental stages a human being goes through and the child must be educated in such a way that his nature is preserved as long as possible.[10] However, as opposed to Locke, he argued that children should gradually be exposed to the dangers of the world, to make them resilient to them (15). Such a statement was "unwittingly" beneficial for the Gothic in children's literature (Townshend 28). Rousseau did not blame parents or nursemaids for telling children fearful stories, but for not exposing them to the children in a gradual fashion. In light of this gradual exposure to fear, Rousseau argued that "those accustomed to darkness do not fear it at all" (99). *Émile* influenced children's literature as well as the concept of recreational reading for the child. While the fictional Rousseau "hate[s] books" (147), he does allow his Emile to read Defoe's 1719 *Robinson Crusoe*, which set the right example of an education in nature (147).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, childhood as an idealized state of innocence further developed and became a common topic in Romantic poetry. The image of the child as rooted in nature became popular (Austin 75) and one of the poets who used childhood as a central theme in his poetry was Wordsworth. His autobiographical poem *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem* – published in its entirety in

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was because of this scandalous nature of the work that it attracted much attention from society and mothers started to "nurse their own infants" (Steeg 3).

[10] Whereas Locke's earlier work was written as an effective educational treatise, Rousseau's could never succeed as such. He admits that his goal – the wish to retain someone's natural instincts in a civilized world – is an unattainable paradox. Therefore, *Émile* should be read as a work of philosophical pondering rather than an educational model. When a citizen from Strasbourg sent Rousseau a letter claiming he wanted to raise his son like the fictional Emile, the philosopher replied: "So much the worse, sir, for you and your son, so much the worse" (qtd. in Douthwaite 135).

1850 – was influenced by Rousseau's *Émile*. Wordsworth also believed in the natural goodness of the child and that children should grow up in nature, but he attacked Rousseau's ideas on education, mainly the prescribed literature. Wordsworth's ideal child as expressed in *The Prelude* "is imagined as roaming alone in nature" with as little human interference as possible (Benziman 177). He argued that the strict educational system and didactic literature that replaced chapbooks "limit[ed]" the child's imagination (Benziman 187). He attacked children's literature of the time in Book V of *The Prelude*, referring to it as an "evil" and a "pest" that "might have dried [him] up, body and soul" (229). A few stanzas later, he pleaded for a return of the chapbook stories and fairytales that children and adults used to read before a specific literature for the child was invented because these would revive their imagination (342-47).

Although the three previous thinkers largely recognized childhood as being a distinct developmental period, no clear definition and demarcation of what – and which age groups – exactly constituted childhood had been achieved. Austin elaborately explores this and mentions factors such as the absence of "standardization of birth" until 1836, the changing "age of marriageability" (78), the differences between social classes, and "the eligible age of employment" (79) which – among other things – played an important role in complicating this definition of childhood. This confusion caused Romantic narratives often to demarcate the period of childhood by experience rather than age. The death of a parent, for example, initiated the child's entrance into adulthood (Austin 80, 82).

The same difficulty occurs when trying to provide a clear definition of children's literature, as for some it constitutes any text read by children, or one that is especially aimed at them. It can include the books they read at school or those that feature a child protagonist (Grenby 277). For the purposes of the case study in this thesis, children's literature will be discussed as recreational books marketed for children up to the age of about twelve years old,

with a child protagonist, as featured in *Coraline*, which the author has called a "children's

novel" (*View* 135) and has by various critics also been recognized as such (Coats 86, Pullman,

Rudd 159, Buckley 58).

2.2 The Uncanny in Children's Literature

    Children these days are unlikely to name an educational book as their favorite read.

They like the very "goblins" Locke aimed to shield them from and books such as the *Harry*

Potter series are still popular and widely read (Jackson 157). As Jackson et al. point out, the

fact that Locke and others were so preoccupied by keeping the child from reading scary

stories, "indicates that the children of the eighteenth century were no less likely to prefer these

[didactic] stories" either (2). And indeed, Gothic elements still persist in children's novels of

the time. Although Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) is indebted to Rousseau's

Émile, portraying Mary Lennox as a stubborn child whose attitude changes only after

spending time in nature, it also incorporates eerie elements from Brontë's Gothic novel *Jane*

Eyre (1874), such as "the haunted house and grounds" (Jackson et al. 3). Furthermore, the

anonymously penned *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* – published by John Newbury

around 1765 only three years after the publication of Rousseau's *Émile,* despite its moral

function – featured the theme of exorcism (Townshend 16). As the story develops, it turns out

that the ghost people think they see appears to be Margery (Goody Two-Shoes) herself

(Townshend 16). Remembering Todorov's distinction between the "supernatural explained"

and "accepted", it can be argued that *Goody Two-Shoes* contains elements of the uncanny

(supernatural explained) and the concept has thus been a part of children's literature for a long

time, even during the years of its repression. Wollstonecraft's attempt to banish the marvelous

in her *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), makes room for the uncanny by "haunting" her

"assassin" with recollections of his victim (Townshend 22). Although this is not exactly the

uncanny in the form as it is known today, Wollstonecraft nevertheless provides the foundation on which the uncanny rests, with themes of repression and the unconscious.

A year before the publication of *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was published, which is considered the first work of adult Gothic fiction. As Townshend points out, "Goody Two-Shoes takes off in a direction quite different from that of the emergent Gothic tradition in refusing, from the outset, to countenance the ghost as anything other than the figment of a foolish, irrational mind" (16). It can thus also be argued that the uncanny was part of children's literature *before* it was part of adult fiction, mainly because Gothic adult fiction initially explored the marvelous rather than the uncanny. An example is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which Jonathan Harker first leans toward the uncanny in believing that the apparition of the vampire is a figment of his imagination, but later makes a shift to the marvelous in accepting the existence of Dracula, thus acknowledging the supernatural event as real.

The child's familiarity with the Gothic also dates back to the early oral tradition. As Townshend argues, "[a]t least since the early modern period, British culture had consistently associated ghosts and children with the oral tradition in storytelling, and this primarily through that most maligned and misunderstood cultural personae: the Old Wife" (17). Scientific knowledge "during the early modern period" rejected her supernatural remedies and caused a "cultural prejudice" against the belief in supernatural activity (Townshend 17).

Before turning to the uncanny in children's literature, it needs to be stated that writing about the child – unless done so by that child – is by definition an uncanny experience. In her essay about Blake and Wordsworth, Benziman describes the child in Wordsworth's poetry twice as uncanny (180, 182) because the child's very essence becomes estranged from the poetry, reducing the child figure to the realms of the other. As Wordsworth once said, "the Child is Father of the Man" ("Heart" 7), meaning that the quality of childhood is the

foundation for adulthood and the "true core" of man is "the child-within" (Benziman 179).

However, this is problematic – in all writing focalized from the child's perspective – because

when an adult writes about childhood it will always be filtered through adult beliefs,

experiences and recollections. Hence the uncanniness of the child, because what was once

familiar to the adult – childhood – and should be part of himself, has become estranged; other,

for an adult is incapable of entering a child's consciousness in a way that is completely free

from adult experience. Nikolajeva adds the problem of difference in "linguistic skills" (173)

between adult and child, emphasized by the trend of dual readership in children's literature,

which implies that a narrative is aimed at both adults and children whom do not have the

same linguistic capabilities. The choice of narrator hardly makes a difference, as both a

heterodiegetic narrator – "an omniscient adult narrator focalizing a child character" – and a

homodiegetic one – an "adult first-person narrator focalizing himself as a child" (Nikolajeva

174), "occupy an unequal power position over the child character, possessing greater

knowledge, life experience, and linguistic skills" (Nikolajeva 174). The act of writing

children's fiction is inherently rooted in the uncanny.

It could be argued that the act of repressing academic debate concerning the subject is

rooted in the phenomenon as well. As explained before, the uncanny has been part of

children's literature for a long time and has, therefore, at some point, been familiar to the

collective consciousness of the child. Due to the notion of preserving innocence and shielding

children from anything that could harm them, the uncanny has been repressed and was mostly

replaced by innocent didactic stories. As, per Freud, any return of the repressed causes fear, it

could thus be argued that this reluctance to discuss the uncanny in children's literature marks

the return of the repressed. The growing academic debate on the subject supports this claim.

A difference between adult Gothic fiction and the genre found in children's literature

serves as one of the arguments in favor of the Gothic and the uncanny in the literature for the young. As Jackson et al. point out:

> one would expect that in the most traditional scenario of children's Gothic, the child characters would mimic their female counterparts in adult Gothic as the innocent, unwitting victims of an external malevolence. Their rescuers would also come from outside their ranks, and the narrative arc would produce a climactic encounter between the forces of evil and the forces of good whose denouement would include the sound expulsion of the evil that threatened them. (7)

The reluctance to publish such a children's version of the Gothic is understandable when one still believes that outside forces of evil cause irreversible damage. However, even if the child is perceived as such an innocent figure, much literature for the young has – unlike in adult Gothic fiction – provided the protagonist with a tool or "weapon" of some kind to "fight their attackers", such as Roald Dahl's Matilda has psychic powers (Jackson et al. 7). The child is thus not completely helpless like his or her female counterpart in adult Gothic fiction and has, apart from fleeing the scene, the option to banish evil himself (Jackson et al. 7).

However, the ethical view of the child has changed over recent years and forces of evil are no longer solely considered as external but as part of the child's own psyche. During the last two centuries, the notion that children are innocent beings has largely made room for a view that grants them a sense of "complicit[ness] in their own exploitation" (Jackson et al. 7). Coats treats children's Gothic as a "symptom" (77) of a repressed trauma, which clearly shows this shift in attitude.[11] She argues that the Gothic was a response to Enlightenment values when supernatural "superstitions" had to make room for scientific proof (79). The

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[11] In her view, the Gothic in Children's Literature was established to fill the gap created by the loss of the traditional fairy tale (79). Bruno Bettelheim has argued that fairy tales deal "with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind" and by projecting fears on the characters in the stories, children are able to "reliev[e] preconscious and unconscious pressures" while his ego and courage simultaneously grow (6).

reason, she argues, why this literary genre speaks to children is because childhood is characterized by overcoming certain belief systems, while still being haunted by fantastical ideas (79). When they read uncanny rather than marvelous stories, children learn that there are rational explanations for the darkness they are experiencing and that they are complicit – at least partly – in evoking those dark forces, as they learn that the darkness is inside of themselves (Coats 78).

Another difference between the Gothic in adult and children's literature, is that most Gothic and uncanny children stories combine horror with a considerable amount of humor, which serves to undo the child's fears. This has been referred to as "the comic Gothic" genre since "the late 1980s and 1990s" (Cross 57). Casting their fears in a comical light allows children to realize that their fears can be overcome and are, perhaps, irrational (Coats 83).

In determining whether the uncanny would be too frightful, the child's susceptibility to the concept needs to be considered. Recalling Freud, the uncanny feeling arises "when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" ("Uncanny" 155). This means, by definition, that a child lives *within* this period of repression. As Gooding adds, "[the child] has not yet surmounted the animistic stage of development" and thus the period of repression is "ongoing" (392). This means that many occurrences that adults will find uncanny will not have the same effect on children. One of the themes in *Coraline* – which will be extensively discussed in the next chapter – is overcoming, or in Freudian terminology, surmounting "an infantile desire for permanent (re)union with the mother" (Gooding 397). Since children will be unable to perceive it as such, they will read *Coraline* as an adventure story, as Gaiman admits: "kids … read it as an adventure and they love it … [they] don't realize how much trouble Coraline is in – she is in *big* trouble – and adults read it and think, 'I know how much trouble you're in'" (Interview).

Although the child does not understand the nature of the uncanny elements in the book, the reading experience nevertheless helps them to overcome their complexes by turning the moments of fear into strength. Children are attracted to evil forces which represent the return of the repressed, and although they might not understand it as such, they will nevertheless realize that this evil exists in the world they live in, as an outside force or, in the case of the uncanny, as part of themselves. Gaiman argues: "children do like to be scared in a safe context" (Empire Magazine 1:44). Jackson et al. add that Gothic and uncanny stories create a space of "safe fear" (11) in which children can experience danger, while remaining in the safe confinements of their homes. The child will mostly identity with the hero or heroine of the story and develop a sense of strength and bravery, while the story simultaneously serves as a "cautionary tale" (Jackson et. al 12). As Bettelheim envisioned fairy tales as the place for psychic release, uncanny children's fiction serves the same purpose. Children do not recognize the depth of "the trouble" they are in; they nevertheless release psychic tensions by projecting their anxieties onto the characters, which, in turn, is a step forward in overcoming their traumas.

The Other Mother's Web: Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

> She's gone
> But I'm alive, I'm alive
> I'm coming in the graveyard to
> Sing you to sleep now
>   –Tori Amos, "Graveyard"

Coraline, published in 2002, is a story about a girl finding a portal to another world inside her home. She and her parents have moved to an old house, divided into flats. When her father tells her to explore the house, she discovers a hallway behind the door leading to the other world. As Rudd argues, the setting of the story, the house and the other house, which according to Coraline is "very familiar" but not "exactly the same" (25) reinforces the notion of the German *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, as something familiar and homely which has become estranged. All characters, except for Coraline and the cat, are doubled. At first, the other apartment seems much more "interesting" (28,43) to Coraline because her other parents are "ready to love [her] and play with [her] and make [her] life interesting" (58). After a while, however, Coraline realizes the other world is frightening and returns home, only to find her parents missing. The other mother has kidnapped them and Coraline needs to return to save them. The other mother's goal is to trap Coraline and keep her in the other world forever, and the young girl goes on a quest to save both herself and her parents from the other mother's web.

The inspiration came from Lucy Clifford's short story "The New Mother" (1882); a cautionary tale about two girls living with their mother in a cabin in the woods (Coats 86) who are tempted to behave naughtily. Despite their mother's warning that if they do not behave, she will leave and send a new mother "with glass eyes and a wooden tail" (Clifford 23), the children continue to behave badly and this creature eventually shows up, replacing their real mother forever. Pullman locates *Coraline* "somewhere between" Catherine Storr's *Marianne Dreams* (1958), in which a girl keeps returning, in her dreams, to a world she has

drawn during the day, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books ("Review"). These stories all thematize the exploration of darkness in life.

A few studies have explored the uncanny in *Coraline*, most notably Rudd and Gooding. They mainly focus on how the story can be read in Freudian terms, but little attention has been paid to the effects of the uncanny on children's literature as a genre. This case study will aim to explain how the author has turned the uncanny into a positive force in his children's fiction.

Coraline is bored and lonely. She feels she is not heard; her neighbors repeatedly misidentify her as Caroline (2,11,13,14,16,48) and her mother does not want to buy her the "Day-Glo green gloves" (21) that would make her stand out at school. This already foreshadows the main theme of the novel, which is Coraline's battle against the other mother to be independent from her and thus develop her own identity and desires. As Coats argues, "[w]hen a child develops the capacity to be bored, it is a signal that he or she is developing a separate sense of self, a need to assert his or her desires over and against the desires of the mother" (87). Coraline finds that even in the real world she prevented from becoming her own person. This is foreshadowed by Miss Spink, who reads her future and tells her not to "wear green in [her] dressing room" (18). This loneliness and wish to form her identity are graphically represented on the page as well. When Coraline tries to draw the mist surrounding the house, she leaves the page empty except for writing "mist" (15):

M   ST

        I

The "I" stands out, representing Coraline's desire to be recognized – to be called Coraline instead of Caroline – and to be allowed to distinguish herself from others. It can also be read as a pun on the word "mist", in that the "I" is not missed (Rudd 160). Or perhaps it foreshadows Coraline's inclusion in this mist, as a blinding "embrace" offered by the other

mother (Rudd 160). Even this foreshadowing is foreshadowed when the narrator describes the mist[12] as hanging "like blindness around the house" (19). The themes of blinding and blindness recur many times in the novel and I will return to them later.

The notion of foreshadowing is an effective way to symbolize the return of the repressed. One does not immediately recognize the meaning of these recurring symptoms, yet their repetition warns the patient, makes him aware, that something uncanny is happening. As Freud argues in "The Uncanny": "it is only the factor of unintended repetition that transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny" (144). The foreshadowing in *Coraline* is a retroactive force, like the symptoms of repression are. For instance, Coraline dreams of singing "black shapes that slid from place to place, avoiding the light, until they were all gathered together under the moon. Little black shapes with little red eyes and sharp yellow teeth" (9) which foreshadow the singing rats with "fifty little red eyes" (28) in the other world. When Coraline sees them, she experiences a sense of déjà-vu, another instance of "unintended repetition", and a marker of the uncanny.

The word 'déjà-vu has had two contradictory definitions since 1960 when it, apart from meaning "an **illusory** feeling of having previously experienced a present situation," also came to mean "the **correct** impression that something has been previously experienced" (Royle 173, emphasis added). It can thus both mean illusion and reality and this is another factor explored thoroughly in *Coraline*. The girl's journeys to the other world occur in her dreams – although this is never explicitly made clear, for she is usually "almost asleep" (8,150) – and therefore the sense of déjà-vu is illusory. However, although the other world is accessed by imagination, is it always there in people's collective unconscious. This means that Coraline's struggles and fears are universal and part of the cycle of growing up. The notion of such a never-ending cycle is symbolized in Coraline's bracelet with animal charms

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[12] Gaiman might have read Strachey's translation of Freud's essay, which speaks of "the *unheimlich* mist called hill-fog" (3).

chasing "each other around the perimeter of the bracelet, the fox never catching the rabbit, the bear never gaining on the fox" (94). It also occurs in the description of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, who are repeatedly described as being "round" (1,39) and "circular (11). In the other world, Miss Forcible and Miss Spink are still actresses and their performances last "forever and always" (42). The theater in the other world symbolizes the universal quest for identity, while the other world in general represents the Freudian pre-Oedipal stage, characterized by the mother being the sole love object of the child, the father not yet to appear as competitor.

Gaiman further expresses the universality of the child's experience by heavily referring to ancientness. On the first page, he mentions the word 'old' four times. Moreover, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible have "ageing" dogs (1) and live in a "dusty" room filled with "black-and-white photographs" (16), a "crazy old man" (2) lives in the flat above Coraline's, and her house's garden has an "old tennis court" and "old rose garden" (2).

In light of the necessary separation from the mother figure to be able to form a separate identity, it is noteworthy that Coraline can only enter the other world when she is alone. The moment her mother is present, the door opens to a brick wall. And as Gooding points out, the first time Coraline enters the other house, the drawing room is absent (402). The drawing room symbolizes Coraline's first steps in creating her superego and identity, and there is no place for a room as such in a world preoccupied with keeping Coraline in pre-oedipal spheres (Agnell 14). That the drawing room marks the first step in a difficult process is symbolized by its storage of "uncomfortable" furniture (6). Near the end of the story, when Coraline has gone through the process of identity formation and returns to her own home, she is "curled catlike on her grandmother's uncomfortable armchair" (135), suggesting that she has faced the difficulties on her path. The other world is a dark place because everyone tries to keep Coraline from forming this individual identity. As Miss Forcible performs Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on stage: "what's in a name? … that which we call a rose by

any other name would smell as sweet" (41-42). By suggesting that names are unimportant, she implies that it is not necessary to be an individual person. The black cat, however, informs Coraline that cats do not need names because they know "who [they] are" (35), implying that for humans, identity is tied up with one's name. At this point, Rudd refers to Jacques Lacan's theory of the Symbolic order – "a web of language", in which everybody is a signifier trying to "negotiate [their] position" (160). Indeed, relationships and identities are formed through linguistic communication. Ironically, nobody in the other world mispronounces Coraline's name – as part of the other mother's trap – yet, they simultaneously try to rob her off her identity.

One of the main characteristics of the uncanny is, according to Freud, the notion of blinding. When Coraline first enters the other house, she notices that her other parents' eyes have been replaced with "big black buttons" (26). Later, when Coraline re-enters the house, her other mother informs her that in order to be allowed to stay, she needs to replace Coraline's eyes with buttons too (43). The eyes are often described as the window to the soul and imagination. Looking into someone's eyes will provide information about his or her emotions and the pupil is literally an entrance into the eyes. By replacing them with buttons, the other mother has utter control over Coraline's destiny, as she, Coraline, would – quite literally – resemble a doll.[13] The removal of the eyes is also a symbolic representation of the Freudian castration complex, which is the fear of literal or symbolic emasculation. It is a metaphor for removal of the penis, a symbol of power. Both the eyes and the penis are organs through which human beings express desire. All of the other mother's desires are informed by the death drive – "lead[ing] organic life back into the inanimate state" (Freud qtd. in Agnell 16) – and the black button eyes would imply a "regression" (Agnell 12) to Coraline's pre-

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[13] Selick's 2009 film adaptation of *Coraline* starts with the creation of Coraline as a doll and her coming to life and moving on her own by means of the stop-motion animation technique. Selick has thus focused on the notion of Coraline becoming a puppet in the other mother's puppet show by turning her into a doll.

oedipal stage. *Coraline* reimagines Freud's castration complex – where the boy replaces the father as love object of the mother – by the continuing threat of castration if Coraline chooses to stay in the other world (Agnell 11). This almost literally occurs when Coraline strikes a deal with the other mother – if she fails to find the dead children's souls, the other mother may keep her forever and sew buttons into her eyes (89) – and when she blinds the other father (111) in order to get away from him (Gooding 394). As Agnell points out, the story can be read "with this male-oriented complex in mind" because Coraline refuses to conform to "binary oppositions" (11) and thus the female role of passivity assigned to her: "She could only think of two things to do. Either she could scream and try to run away, and be chased around a badly lit cellar by the huge grub thing, be chased until it caught her. Or she could do something else. So she did something else" (110). However, the female version of the castration complex – "the dissolution of the complex … not due to a fear of castration, but an acceptance of an already accomplished castration and a fear of a loss of love" (Agnell 11) – applies to Coraline in a different ways. The moment she seems slightly aware of her parents' sexual activities, she represses the thought immediately:

> She crept back into the silent house, past the closed bedroom door inside which the other mother and the other father … what? she wondered. Slept? Waited? And then it came to her that, should she open the bedroom door she would find it empty, or more precisely, that it was an empty room and it would remain empty until the exact moment that she opened the door. (64)

Coraline considers the possibilities of her other parents' activities, but ends this thought process immediately to return to the infantile belief that if the child cannot see something, it is not there (Gooding 401). Coraline is still in pre-Oedipal spheres, not allowing her mother to have another object of love apart from her.

Another element of the uncanny and a disguise of the castration complex is the notion of "severed limbs" (150). Freud argues: "a hand detached from the arm … [has] something highly uncanny about [it], especially when … credited … with independent activity" (150). When Coraline has beaten the other mother by finding her parents, she returns home, but the other mother's hand went with her and "scuttled off Coraline's shoulder like a frightened spider" (44). The hand is constantly referred to as being spider-like as "[both] hands and spiders are traditionally linked to mothers in a child's psycho-symbolic world" (Coats 89). The reason for this is unclear but Coats argues that children think their mothers take care of every single task in their lives, and therefore have more "appendages" (89) and a breastfed child might perceive the mother as only a "breast with arms" (89). Whatever the reason, spiders "ma[k]e Coraline intensely uncomfortable" (8). Indeed her journey into the other world; her battle with the other mother, is anything but comfortable.

The immediate granting of wishes, another marker of the uncanny, is also present in the other house. Everybody pronounces Coraline's name right, her other mother cooks "the best chicken she has ever eaten" (27), unlike the bad recipes her real father makes, Miss Forcible and Miss Spink return to their beloved profession as actresses, the dogs only eat the chocolate that would kill them in the real world (41), and Coraline's bedroom is filled with "all sorts of remarkable things" (28), including toys that have come to life[14] (64,93-94). Because Coraline does not understand where her anger is coming from, it is projected onto the other house, just like the forces of repression distort reality. As Gooding argues, "the other house is a place where all wishes are fulfilled" because it is "in answer to an anger that is implied but never articulated" (396). This is the anger she feels toward her parents for not paying attention to her.

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[14] Inanimate objects coming to life is another marker of the uncanny. Apart from her toys, Coraline has a "feeling that the [drawing room] door was looking at her, which she knew was silly, and knew on a deeper level was somehow true" (54) and that the other house is "staring down at her, as if it were not really a house but only the idea of a house" (103).

Another factor of the uncanny in fiction is the loss of distinction between imagination and reality (150). Most children's narratives with fantastical elements have distinct borders between the real and the imaginary and the uncanny effects are "thereby contain[ed] … within the fantasy realm" (Gooding 393). Gaiman, however, constantly blurs this distinction. Every time Coraline goes to the other world, it is mentioned right before that she goes to sleep. However, she keeps returning home elements of the other world with her. When she awakes near the end of the book, for instance, she sees "the other mother's right hand" (145) in her bedroom, she has the marbles that contained the ghost children's souls in her pocket (138), and the black cat is still with her. This is not just her imagination playing tricks on her, as evidenced when her mother asks: "[a]nd wherever did the cat come from?" (137). Gaiman, again, implies that the process of identity formation is not achieved overnight but is rather an ongoing process throughout one's life.

The desire to return to the womb, is according to Freud, often disguised by the uncanny notion of live burial. Gaiman explores this in various ways. When Coraline asks the other mother if her mother has a grave, the latter replies: "[o]h yes … I put her in there myself. And when I found her trying to crawl out, I put her back" (91). When Coraline has beaten the other mother and returns home, the passageway resembles an entrance into the female genitals: "the wall she was touching felt warm and yielding now, and she realized, it felt as if it were covered in a fine downy fur" (133). It felt "hot and wet, as if she had put her hand in somebody's mouth" (133). However, Coraline "snatche[s] her hand away from it" (133) because she has developed her own desires by this time. This is Coraline's first step toward maturation.

Gaiman has portrayed the child's insensitivity to the uncanny by having Coraline be mostly indifferent to it as well. Instead of using a narrative form that allows the reader to read Coraline's thoughts, Gaiman uses a third-person omniscient narrator and places emphasis on

"visual and auditory stimuli", representing Coraline's emotions by their "physical manifestations" such as a pounding heart (Gooding 395). By doing so, it is implied that Coraline is still inside the period of repression, as she can only feel but not rationalize what is happening to her. If Gaiman had described Coraline's thoughts, he would have given her a cognitive understanding which she lacks. Eventually, when Coraline has faced her fears, her emotions become clearer too, because she no longer needs to repress them. Her statement, "it isn't over, is it?" (144), provides evidence for a new sense of understanding that allows her a small view into the uncanny world.

Gaiman also shows the danger of what happens when children are unable to leave the pre-oedipal spheres. When the other mother traps Coraline in a closet behind a mirror, she finds the ghosts of children who have been trapped there for centuries. Recalling Freud, the figure of the double is the "uncanny harbinger of death" (142) and this is the role the other mother fulfills. She has "fed on [them]" (83) until they became mere "snakeskins and spider husks" (83). The figure of the other mother is also highly uncanny because her identity remains unclear. Even the cat cannot tell Coraline about this and walks away instead. The other mother brings to mind the mythological figure of Medusa with her hair described as "snake-like" (87) and "drift[ing] around her head, like the tentacles of a creature in the deep ocean" (80). Freud argues that "the terror of Medusa is … the terror of castration" ("Medusa's" 161) because decapitation is the same as castration, as Medusa's head with the phallic imagery of her hair is removed. Indeed, Freud adds that in fiction, the phallic symbol of snakes often symbolizes Medusa's hair, again reminding the reader of the castration complex and the power she has (161). Furthermore, the narrator describes the other mother as a "wax statue" (128) – directly taken from Freud's essay (135) – and she does not have a mirror image. She is thus a ghost-like, powerful and ancient force of evil.

When Coraline realizes the other mother cannot create (116,122), but only distort, the house "continu[es] to change" (119) and flatten. Coraline's growing awareness of the other world not being real but only a distorted image of her fears, alters her perception of it from something real to an abstract image: from a "photograph" (119) to a "crude, charcoal scribble of a house" (122). Coraline realizes that she has to face the other mother because her flat is the only part of the house which has not flattened. She has stripped down her subconscious to the core of her trauma, symbolized by the painting of a fruit bowl in the drawing room of which now only remained "the browning core of an apple, several plum and peach stones, and the stem of what had formerly been a bunch of grapes" (126). She throws the black cat in the other mother's face to distract and trap her. The cat represents Coraline's moral compass – his voice "sound[ing] like the voice at the back of [her] head" (33) – and she thus symbolically throws her newly formed superego in the demon's face.

This trick of trapping the other mother, and Coraline's subsequent trick of burying her in the well, is an example of "protective coloration" (5,151), a term Coraline hears when watching a "natural history program" (5): "[s]he watched animals … which disguised themselves … to escape from things that could hurt them" (5). Coraline first disguises herself as being clueless about her parents' whereabouts, allowing her to fool the other mother, and later she falsely regresses into a state of early childhood in which she plays with dolls and, again, tricks the other mother. I will argue that it is exactly this protective coloration that children learn from reading scary stories. Gooding's definition – "the acquisition of a false identity designed to protect the self against hostile forces" (398) – has slightly negative connotations. In a more positive light, it could be perceived as a willingness to believe that one is braver than he or she actually is – just like Coraline – and that the child will eventually adopt this bravery as his or her own because he or she identifies with the protagonist of the story.

Gaiman combines the frightful elements of Coraline's journey with a dose of humor, which serves, as indicated in the previous chapter, as a means to overcome the child's fears. An example of this is when Coraline realizes her parents have gone "missing" (48) and she reasons that she has "probably become a single child family" (48). This humor contributes to creating that safe space that children need in order to read frightful stories.

Moreover, also mentioned in the previous chapter, some uncanny children's stories provide the child protagonist with an aid to help them fight evil. Coraline receives a "stone with a hole in it" (19) through which she sees objects "that glo[w] or glin[t]" (98), pointing out the dead children's lost souls she needs to beat the other mother. The difference between *Coraline* and other stories with an aid of such kind, such as *Matilda*, is that the evil Coraline is fighting comes from within. Therefore it is not directly clear to Coraline what the purpose of the stone is. When she asks Miss Spink and Miss Forcible what it is for, they only tell her that it's "good for bad things, sometimes" (19) and when the cat tells Coraline that it is "sensible of [her] to bring protection" (36), Coraline has no clue what he is talking about. This symbolizes the fact that the stone will only work when Coraline's superego has grown and she cannot just use it whenever something bad happens to her.

Gaiman might have overestimated his child readers when arguing that they do not find *Coraline* terrifying and only read it as an adventure story, as evidenced by child reviewers between seven and 11 years old, calling the story "creepy", "disturbing", and "scar[ing]" them "half 2 death" ("Kid Reviews"). However, my argument that this scariness will eventually help them create a strong and brave identity is also evidenced in these reviews, because despite of the creepiness, the same reviewers describe the stories as "amazing", "awesome", and containing "the right amount of depth" to teach them about "being brave and such" ("Kid Reviews"). If children can read a story while simultaneously feeling scared and empowered, it

teaches them that darkness is unavoidable, but can be overcome and worked with to improve

their lives.

Conclusion

Being brave didn't mean you weren't scared.
Being brave meant you were scared, really scared, badly scared,
and you did the right thing anyway.

–Neil Gaiman, Foreword to *Coraline*

While my attempt in this paper was to illuminate the ways in which the uncanny in children's literature can be a positive force in the child's process of growing up – unlike the common-held Enlightenment beliefs of the preservation of innocence that have somehow always persisted – I must concede that there are limitations to my research. It is difficult to write about the positive influence of a concept that children are – by definition – less susceptible to. This is complicated more by the fact that any attempt to write about the uncanny, always results in more unanswered questions, more signifiers in an already overwhelming chain of strangeness and eeriness. The child still living within the realms of repression only exacerbates this confusion.

The very concept I have chosen to explore also exists inside the process of repression, and remains an underexplored topic in academic debate. Although there is a growing number of studies addressing the phenomenon in young adolescent fiction, it almost remains a taboo topic in children's literature. Over the last five years, critics have addressed the uncanny in *Coraline*, however, the debate that would logically follow – on the moral changes in the literature for the young – still undergoes repression and hangs like an uncanny ghost over most research. While I have argued that children need these uncanny stories, I am aware that this is a problematic statement and a problem concerning academic research about children's literature in general: it will always be written from an adult perspective, making it difficult to value what children actually need.

Given the lack of previous research in the field, I took on the role of explorer, just like the protagonist of Gaiman's story, and I can only hope that future academics will feel

motivated to contribute to the discussion and hopefully provide more cohesive answers that can solve this child/adult dilemma. I set out to provide an explanation of Freud's theory on the uncanny, and immediately realized this was an impossible task. The uncanny is indefinable, its vagueness reinforcing the concept, and Freud's essay confuses rather than enlightens. However, I have used practical theories about the concept, such as Todorov's Fantastic and Royle's study of the uncanny in literature, to, at least, explain the concept as clearly as I could.

I have explored how childhood and children's literature came into existence, limiting myself to the theories of the greatest contributors in this field: Locke, Rousseau and Wordsworth. However, the change in the development of children's literature is not limited to these people. Other thinkers who have influenced the changing view of the child and his or her literature include William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Children cannot be fooled by a view of innocence when they are confronted with violence on television on a regular basis and are on the innocent or mischievous side of the bullying spectrum. These children do not roam in nature as Rousseau and Wordsworth imagined, nor do they receive education at home from a governess. They realize they are capable of more darkness than society has ever let on. Moreover, the mere fact that children have continued to read ghost stories, even in those Enlightenment times when it was so frowned upon, implies that children choose these stories themselves and receive a positive message from them.

By creating a safe environment to read uncanny stories in, the children can release unconscious psychic tensions in a healthy way. Perhaps it does not matter if they are unaware of the depth of what they are releasing into the world, as long as they believe Coraline is a "good role model" ("Kid Reviews") teaching them that bravery is something that every child can achieve. Just as Coraline made bravery her own by "protective coloration", so can

children learn to face their fears in a healthy and safe environment. A decent uncanny story

for children combines humor with eeriness, allowing the child to cast their fears away.

Moreover, reading an uncanny story will make the child realize that his or her fears are

universal and can be overcome. From the few child reviews I could find of Coraline, they all

found the figure of the other mother and her severed hand the creepiest ("Kid Reviews"),

suggesting that, although they do not realize what this fear represents, children nevertheless

all share it. It is the fear of being an independent person, of having desires which are no

longer aligned with their parents'. As far as I am concerned, this is only a positive

development that should be encouraged and hopefully, in time, the uncanny in children's

fiction can be treated as a common topic in academic debate, rather than a symptom of a

repressed subject.

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