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**Going Back to the Roots: The Relationship between the Fairy Tale and
Gothic in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002)**

*An extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a Master Degree
in Literature and Civilization*

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Dedications

To my family, friends, and professors alike, whom I will forever be thankful for their presence in my life.

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Just like Coraline, who had by her side her family, neighbours and friends in order to defeat the other mother, I, too had the chance and privilege to be well surrounded by people that lifted my spirit and helped me through my hardships.

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Abstract

Between mystery, magic and folklore, the fairy tale and the gothic seem to be like day and night at first glance, two genres seem like they radically differ from one another. While the fairy tales are seen as educational magical stories for children, the gothic is regarded to show the darkest side humanity has to offer. However, the fairy tale and gothic have more in common than it is expected of them. This is what the following research will try to investigate, while taking Neil Gaiman's novel released in 2002, *Coraline*, as a case study. The analysis will be about the story, characters, and themes, but most importantly, it will be about the fairy tale and gothic's respective tropes, because the novel indeed has characteristics of both genres, which results in a new and innovative story.

Key Words: Fairy tales, Folklore, Gothic, Innovative, Genre, Story.

Résumé

Entre mystère, magie et folklore, le conte de fée et le gothique semble à première vue comme jour et nuit, deux genres par lequel tout semble séparer. Alors que le conte de fée est vu comme un genre à but éducative, visant à inspirer ses jeunes lecteurs, le gothique, au contraire est vu comme ce que l'humanité offre de plus sombre. Cependant, ces deux genres narratifs partagent plus de points en commun qu'il n'en a l'air, et c'est ce que la recherche suivante va tenter d'investiguer. En étudiant leurs histoires respectives, mais aussi en analysant comme étude de cas le roman *Coraline* de Neil Gaiman, sortie en 2002. L'analyse se fera en termes d'histoire, de personnages, et de thèmes narratifs, mais surtout dans ses gimmicks propres au conte de fée et au gothique. Car en effet, le roman possède les caractéristiques des deux genre, proposant une histoire nouvelle et innovatrice.

Mots Clés : Conte de fée, Folklore, Gotique, Innovatif, Genre, Histoire.

ملخص

بين الغموض، الفانتازيا و الفلكلور، ان الحكاية الخرافية والأدب القوطي يبدوان انهما يختلفان اختلاف الليل والنهار من الوهلة الأولى. في حين تعتبر الحكايات الخرافية قصصا ذات طابع تربوي وترفيهي للأطفال، فان الكتابات القوطية تعتبر أحلك ما قدمته البشرية من ادب. رغم ذلك فانهما يتشاركان في العديد من الخصائص وهذا ما سيحاول البحث التالي دراسته. سوف يتم ذلك من خلال دراسة تاريخ كل منهما مع اخذ رواية (نيل غيمن) التي بعنوان كورالين، الصادرة عام 2002 كمتال حي. ان البحث التالي سيكون من خلال دراسة السرد، الشخصيات، المواضيع المطروحة، بالإضافة الى المجازات الموجودة عند كلي الحكاية الخرافية والادب القوطي. اذ ان الرواية تحتوي على خصائص كليهما، مقترحة اياه قصة جديدة وخارجة عن المؤلف

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحكاية الخرافية، الفلكلور، الأدب القوطي، الخارج عن المؤلف، مجاز سردي، قصة

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General Introduction

Whether they are told by the fireplace at bedtime, written and illustrated in book collections, or adapted in the big screen as multimillion dollar blockbusters, stories, specifically fairy tales have always been part of mankind; they modelled their imagination, influenced and reflected their deepest emotions. Starting from a need to understand the world surrounding them, it was also a way to educate the younger generations and warn them against the danger of the outside world. This is how figures such as the Big Bad Wolf, the Boogey man, or the Monster under the bed came to existence in the common imagination, with slight variations depending on the time, culture and region. Although they were initially not addressed only for children, the commercialization and mass production made them more accessible to everyone, their short length and distinct morals eventually redirected its target audience from adults to specifically children, especially after the rise of children's literature during the nineteenth century.

From the brother Grimm's fairytale collections, to works such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the sublime and the imagination is a strong motif commonly found there. Inside this same magical realm, the gap between the wonderful and the uncanny is sharply crossed, once the reader is aware of the mysteries laying behind the seemingly perfect fantastical world. This provides a shock for the characters and the readers upon the novelty before their eyes, who have previously lowered their defences, making them more vulnerable, and raising even more awareness to the bizarre and unusual nature of the fantasy world. When this happens, the sense of wonder and sublime slowly disappears, leaving its place to the feeling of uneasiness and confusion, what Freud described in his 1918 essay, *Das Unheimlich*.

From this same tradition of oral transmission, emerged a plethora of genres, which, similar to the fairytales and folk tales, expressed their fears and worries of the time. Between the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the literary world saw the birth of a new genre, dealing with horror and the exploration of the limits of human's morals and psyche. The Gothic, similar to its oral predecessor, was born out of a need to warn the current world of what might occur with the separation of the flesh and soul. It was a cautionary tale of its time, which, just like the fairy tale, criticized the contemporary society, empowered and gave a voice to the marginalized classes of people, with an interest in superstition and the supernatural. While they were seen as separate entities, the two genres share numerous similarities between them, and one might see fairy tales as one distant relative of the Gothic as a genre.

Although initially perceived as fundamentally different, they each drew inspiration and content from older forms literature, whether oral or written. They both made use of darker themes, archetypical characters and tropes, as well as symbols and motifs relating the human experience, even if each take its own direction in this regard. Those same similarities inspired the creation of a new genre, the Gothic Fairytale, which seems to go back to the older storytelling traditions, with darker themes, atmospheres and elements. It is not clear where this fusion started, but the blending between the two genres attracted more than one author, experimenting with style, narration and archetypes, this new wave of fairy tale horror is reminiscent of folkloric figures and tropes, from which both the gothic and fairytale share a common ground and origin. Examples of those authors included Angela Carter, E.T.A.Hoffman or Neil Gaiman.

Moreover, Neil Gaiman is observed to merge between these two genres, so distant yet so close to each other at the same time. In his famously acclaimed novella *Coraline* (2002), he goes back to the old traditional way of storytelling of the fairytales, away from the Disney-

like direction the took for the last few decades, while also merging it with gothic tropes. The novel incorporates themes of the horror and sublime into the story. Borrowing tropes from both literary traditions, it merges the fantastic with the historical, the past and the present, and hope with despair. The story follows Coraline, a young girl who moves into an old big house with her family, that house that has been converted into flats. This location alone is reminiscent of both fairy tale and gothic sites: an old dilapidated building, with a normally sealed passage that leads to an eerily identical world to the one where the main character lives. The characters and creatures inhabiting this place are scary, unnerving and bizarre, a feature found in both the gothic and fairytale, the thin veil separating fantasy from reality, and lies from truths. The boundary between the fantastic and the marvellous is also regularly crossed, making the reader stand between two realities. As the novel blends between the two genres, the aim of this research is to unravel the relationship between the two, tracing back their respective history and purpose, and speculate on the reason between these fusions. As a result, this leads to draw the following questions:

- What is the link between the fairy tale and the gothic?
- What is the purpose behind the combination between the fairy tale and gothic in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*?
- What is the symbolism behind the other world represented in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*?

In order to answer the previously formulated question, here are hypotheses that may solve them:

- Hypothesis n°1: While looking closely at each genre, one may hypothesise that certain older versions of several well-known tales may include elements what is considered as gothic horror, and vice versa. It can be noticed that several gothic stories may also be reminiscent of classical older fairytales. This can lead to the conclusion that they may

have had ties at some point in history, perhaps long-lost relatives, that most likely got separated with time.

- Hypothesis n°2: in his novel *Coraline* (2002), Neil Gaiman seems to make use of a mixture of gothic and fairytale elements, hypothetically making it fall under the banner of the “gothic fairytale”. While exploring the strengths and lacks of both genres, he seems to offer an alternative to what the fairytale has become. He exploits the imaginative and symbolic nature of the fairy tales, which may enrich them and make them more complex, this results in what seems to make the gothic more accessible to his younger audience.
- Hypothesis n°3: the Other World created by the Beldam looks like to be a mirrored version of the real world, made in order to lure children into realm to devour them later. It seems to provide a false sense of security, to both the reader and Coraline, presenting an uncanny alternative world that was specifically crafted for preying on vulnerable children, creating it exactly like the one they always wanted to live in. It is likely that Neil Gaiman is taking inspiration from several fairytale stories, such as Hansel and Gretel, as if the reality is not always as it seems to be at first glance.

Both fairy tales and gothic are significant genres in the literary field. The objectives behind the research were the following: The first one was to study the limits of what is the notion of a genre, as it is complex and often overlap with others, making clear defining limit between them are thus hazy and vague. Authors even before the postmodernist era had different inspirations for their writings, benefiting from different circles of related discipline in order to make their vision a reality, as nothing was set on stone. For the second goal, it is to investigate how close the two genres of the gothic and fairytale are. The third goal is to see

the impact of horror on young readers, as both gothic and fairy tale possess elements of fear in their narratives, because it can be beneficial for their development, teaching them to face their fears with a safe medium such as literature.

Several previous studies were done on Neil Gaiman's novel, all of them taking the story of *Coraline* through a specific angle. The genre in which *Coraline* might fit was taken through different directions in the research field. While some researchers such as Anna Patricia (2010), regarded it as a fantasy novel with a hint of a fairy tale spirit. Saeed Hosseinpour (2016), however, saw it as a story belonging to the magical realism genre. The gothic side of the novel was also tackled, such as by José Roberto Saravia Vargas in his 2014 article. While reading these papers and dissertations, however, none of them talked about the link between the fairy tale and the gothic. It was indeed tackled with Neil Gaiman's other stories, such as *The Graveyard Book* (2008), but that was not the case for *Coraline*. That was the gap for this research, in which a mixture of psychoanalytic and feminist theories shall be used. While the psychoanalytic is specifically used to explore the conflicting relationship between Coraline and the other mother, the feminist theory is used to investigate the very origins of the tropes behind the two characters.

As for the structure of the research, it will be divided into three chapters. Each chapter comprising two subsections, the first one will be dedicated to the fairy tale while the second one for the gothic. The first chapter is a historical background study, which will focus on the respective histories of both the fairy tales and the gothic. While doing so, the link between the two will be drawn and established. The second chapter is a practical analysis of the novel in which will focus on the elements of the fairy tale then the gothic. The third and final chapter is an aesthetic study of the beauty of the novel, seen through the fairy tale intertextuality as well as the gothic space of *Coraline*.

Chapter One

From Grimm to Walpole: The Historical Ties
between the Fairy Tale and Gothic

Outline

Introduction

A. Fairytale: An Ancestral art of Storytelling

1. Definition and key concepts
2. History and Evolution
3. The Gothic in Classic fairytales

B. The Gothic: The Spiritual Successor of Fairy Tales

- 1) Definition and Key Concepts
- 2) History and Evolution
- 3) The Gothic and the Fairy Tale

Conclusion

Introduction

From the dawn of human history, its greatest gift has always been imagination. Whether it is used to build shelter, crafting tools and vessels, and overall coming up with smarter ways to accommodate their everyday life, human beings have always used their creativity to overcome adversity. This benediction is also used to come up with stories, thus, myths, legends, folktales, and accessorially fairytales, are born, utilizing all sorts of creatures, environments and characters in their core. This is how fairies, goblins, dragons and mermaids have come into existence, as a way to find meaning in such a vast and complex world. Starting from a traditional gathering that is done at the end of a day of labour or during long cold days of winter in the countryside, those stories are then transmitted, collected and written in codex and book collections. The storytelling tradition has thus spread from there, it slowly separates to create different genres, different mediums. Eventually, more performant technologies are brought into the process, allowing to explore the plot's potential to the fullest. But, at their core, they all have in common this spirit of community and humanity, all seeking to talk about the human experience and condition, as a way to record one's presence among the thick annals of history. The following chapter will be dedicated for definitions of key terms and concepts, tracing back the history, codes and links between the two genres of the fairytale and gothic, in order then to investigate the link and discuss the rise of a merged genre between these two, so farfetched yet so close to each other. How both fairytales comport elements of gothic and vice versa, and how they influenced, and still continued to do so under the banner of the gothic fairytale. My aim for this chapter is to explore the thin layer separating the gothic from the fairytale, the relationship and similarities between them, as well as the reason behind this unusually well-found union.

A. The Fairytale: An Ancestral Form of Storytelling

The fairy tale as a storytelling tradition holds in its core a long and rich history, filled with fantasy, emotions and lessons for the next generations. The genre went through several stages, starting as an oral tradition, the tales are then collected and written down for the future to remember, before being rewritten and modified. They changed with the societies of their respective time, accompanying them and reflecting their cultural growth, re-interpreted and re-imagined through different lenses and mediums. As a genre that is as old as humanity itself, it reveals its complexities, as it showcases its greatest desires, fears and hopes for the future. The first part of this chapter will define the genre with all of its nuances, trace its evolution throughout human history, as well as relocate the gothic part of it, investigating on its use and function in fairy tales.

1) Definition and Key Concepts

The fairytale's origin is hard to track down, as one cannot only refer to its one specific version, several variants have always coexisted, before falling each at the hands of different folklorists of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the most known ones, one can cite the brothers Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), Charles Perrault (1697-1750), and Andrew Lang (1844-1912). Consequently, there is no official version of a specific tale, as it survives in different regions of the globe through different epochs. In other words, one same story has different versions depending on the place, epoch and storyteller. They are stories that evolved orally, before being written down eventually. They are also referred to as wonder tales, fairy stories,

or magic tales, and they are known to include wonderful elements as well as a moral at the end of each of them. The definition of a fairy tale is complex and is subject to countless debates. After a long history of being dismissed and ignored from antiquity, regarded as a cheap entertainment for children, it was never formally studied and analysed until the nineteenth century, with the collectors of tales themselves explaining their purpose behind their endeavour. The fairy tale is a rich genre that is as old as the existence of human beings themselves, witness of their evolution and change through their time on earth, they are the vessels for their imagination, collective memories, traumas, fears as well as dreams.

The term *fairytale* was first used as a translation from the French *conte de fée*, as it had been used to refer to stories brought to England by Marie Catherine *Le Jumel de Barneville, Comtesse d'Aulnoy*, through her two volumes story collection intituled *les Contes de Fées*, in 1697 and 1699 more precisely. From then, a set of her stories was then translated in English under the title *Tales of the Fairies*, in 1667, and then in 1707, further followed by *History of Tales of the Fairies* (1716). Although it was firstly used to refer to the sophisticated writings of *la Comtesse d'Aulnoy*, it was used to speak about any tale of similar description, including the translation of the brother Grimm's *Kinder und Hausemarchen* (1812), translated into fairy tales, despite the absence of fairies in it. That feature was pointed out by authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, who stated in his 1964 essay that the term fairytale was too narrow, since it did not only talk about fairies or elves, the little people, as they were stories where none of them when mentioned such as the red riding hood. While the original term of *marchen* was an umbrella term to describe any kind of folktales or fairytales, it originally only meant rumour in German (Teverson 30-1).

As it is a sub-division of the folk tale genre, in the same category as legends and myths, it is essential to define these terms as well. In this matter, the Australian folklorist Joseph Jacobs defines the folklore as the literature to which no author can be attributed to, thus, belonging to

the folks, meaning the people in German. In this matter, Jacobs states that: “We are simply giving a name to our ignorance, stating that we do not know to whom a proverb, a tale, a custom, a myth owes its origin so we are going to say ‘it originated among the folks’” (qtd Teverson 12). As a result, the common misconception is born that it exclusively originates from a single demographics, people of the countryside, who represent an ideal version of the German identity, untouched and still in cohesion with nature. Jacobs disagreed with this claim far from reality, as he states that folklore can come from anywhere, any given time of history, and not necessarily by a single people demographics, it can even be transmitted across countries and continents, making it “a transitive form of culture” (Teverson 11-2). The brothers Grimm themselves often collected their tales from educated members of the German middle class, knowledgeable of the literary trends of the time (Piatti-Farnell 284). Jacobs claims that the folktale is many headed and many minded, and that everyone can help further enrich it, transform it and then transmit. Its survival in time for the future generations therefore being guaranteed.

The main issue with defining the fairy tale, then, is because of the ambiguity its definition expresses. It can be deducted that defining the fairy-tale is a hard enough of a task to properly put into words, because of the multiple uses it has in the common language, its flexibility, its history as well as its tight roots with other old storytelling tradition, such as the folk tale, from which it is a sub branch of it. The term is also used interchangeably with other similar stories, carrying the same tropes, such as Christian Hans Anderson’s fairy tales, whom are known to be his creation, and not oral stories that he collected like the brothers Grimm did. Another example is the fairy tale novel, which exploits the magical elements of the fairy tales in order to make it into a monger more complex story, such as Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). As for the English Cambridge Dictionary, it defines it as “a traditional story written for children that usually involves imaginary creatures and magic”. Thus, the

involvement with children's literature, its didactic purpose as well as its use of magic are what sets them apart from the fairy tales' neighbouring genres. In addition to that, one may also add further tropes and recurrent elements that can set them apart from its relative genres, such far-away lands, a quest for the main character to accomplish (mainly riches and recognition), a villain that is after them threatening their life, along with the clear Manichean opposition between good and evil (Piatti-Fernell 284). J.R.R. Tolkien also adds the presence of fairies and the travel to fairy realms (Smith 2).

Even with the definition of the folktale nailed down, the fairytale's sole definition is still hard to come up with, because it is always assumed that it will be recognized just by the look of it (Cleto and Warman 81). With its history of transition between oral and writing, its close proximity with the folktales, from which most of them, despite not displaying all elements listed above, they are still described as fairy tales. Their close relationship with literature as well as oral heritage is not to be neglected, as writers and collectors of those tales closely kept in touch with the literary trends of the time. They did not only rely on the oral version of the tale as they heard it, they also adapted it, fitting the tastes and aesthetic preferences of their time. It was also an attempt to make it more accessible, popular, and less frowned upon, considering the unsophisticated reputation of the genre. Jacobs states in this matter that the fairy tale stands on the threshold between folk tales and literature, Marian Warner affirms his claims by saying that: "[It] acts as an airy suspension bridge, swinging lightly under different breezes of opinion and economy, between the earned, literary and print culture" (Piatti-Farnell 283).

Nonetheless, it is summed up from those previously mentioned definitions that the fairytales are a defined group of fantastical stories that follow a predetermined set of structures and elements, as it is not confined by a specific origin. Set in the middle between the literary and folkloric, they gained the reputation of appealing more to younger audiences

even back during Perrault and the brothers Grimm's time. Its magical elements permit the readers to travel to the realms of imagination where everything is possible, where they can be princes or princesses, defeat dragons, marry the person they love, and or outwit the evil creatures this earth ever knew. Inculcating morals this way is easier and allows for metaphoric allegories and thus better understanding of their own environment. The fairy tale's very nature as an unrealistic tale makes it its biggest strength, Bruno Bettelheim argues that: "The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device, because it makes the obvious that fairytale's concern is not useful information about the external world but the inner process taking place in an individual" (qtd. in Hubner 20), making the fairytales an important tool for the development of the children, allowing them to achieve emotional maturity, world discovery and self-individuation and realization, giving them the courage and resilience to face the obstacles of life.

2) History and Evolution

Even if their definition as a genre is tricky to properly classify, fairy tales were always present in human history, and can be regarded as a "shorthand for a type of fantasy that predates literary fantastic" (Smith 2). They were always separated from other parts of the folklore for their didactic and pedagogical aim, as they were seen as educational and important for children's education, teaching them good morals and values, and warning them against the dangers of evil and wrongdoing. The fairy tales are a way to monitor and educate children into becoming good members of the society, considering the oral nature of those tales, they changed as much as the societies that told them did. Then, as Europe went through a period of political and economic instability, such as wars and famines, they were recorded into book collections so they would not be lost. While they were kept as they were initially, the original oral version did not meet the need of the societies of the time anymore, regarded

as obsolete or immoral. They were modified, changed, and refined, and then recorded to meet the taste of the audiences of the time, even authors themselves changed several details from their stories from one edition to the other, such as the brothers Grimm. Such details included the addition of elements of Christian middle class values. Fairy tales as a medium went through several phases of retelling, retelling, from medium to the other. As they started as stories told at bedtime after a long day of labour, they gradually evolved in time and changed as much as society did, before eventually landing into the big screen and enjoyed into cinematic adaptations with the latest technologies and audio-visual experiences. The following subtitle will trace the history and evolution that the fairy tale went through from its oral to literary form, while passing through its rewriting, reinvention and theorization.

Being a tradition that was as old as humanity itself, the fairy tale was never been intended to be exclusively told to children. It was a chance for communal gathering; thus, they were told for everyone. Not only it was a social event, it was also form of entertainment that allowed the members of the community to bond over their condition, with stories featuring the people of the peasantry, hoping for better conditions, as most of those stories featured characters that were part of marginalized communities, such as orphans, youngest sibling, or women and children. They not only talked about their conditions, way of life, thus allowing them to be represented, they also gave the opportunity to dream of a better future. This was done by offering happy endings featuring the hero that triumphed in the face of adversity, oppression and evil, gathering riches and prestige, thus securing for them and their community to live a content life. Tales such as “Cinderella”, “Hansel and Gretel”, “Jack and the Beanstock”, or “Tom Thumb”, are all examples of heroes and heroines that reached the top of the social ladder. Using their wits, bravery and kindness alone, they are the outlets for underrepresented members of societies to feel seen, heard and represented.

On top of the previously mentioned usages and importance of fairy tales for society as a whole, its didactic value gained attention and importance among educators. Because they are short, simple and highly symbolic, allowing for a myriad of interpretations and readings, they are believed to be the perfect teaching method to inculcate children about the world, morality, religion as well as the correct behaviour in the social sphere. On top of that, the magic of these tales permits for the audience to be entertained and amused by them, giving them space to dream and to be ambitious in their lives, as everything can be possible. However, these tales of wonder are not well perceived by the intellectual elite since the antiquity, as the very unrealistic and fantastical nature of the fairytales in particular brought to the genre a pejorative connotation. This negative vision was specifically persisted by several authors, scientists and scholars of the Enlightenment era during eighteenth century Europe, as they regarded fairy tales to be the opposite of their values, which preached logic, order and adhering to strict, rigid and scientific rules of nature. The most notable ones were: Plato, Erasmus and John Locke. They claimed they were unsophisticated and delirious old wives' tales that only damages the mind, and that the youth ought to replace with more relevant types of literatures (Teverson 84). The fairy tales and other associated stories were thus seen as the natural enemy of progress and scientific discoveries. The reason behind this distaste was, as explained by Mary Ellen Lamb, because of the feminine association with fairy tales, as they were highlighted to be essentially told in infancy by women of limited education and background, this vision and association with childhood, as a time thus seen as less prestigious, embracing instead more classical forms of learning, which were seen as masculine and elite (Teverson 84).

Despite being written into books collections, the proper study of fairytales as legitimate pieces of literature only began until the late eighteenth century with the rise of written collection by the hands of folklorists, featured in their respective essays and prefaces.

Otherwise, attempts to defend fairy tales were quite shy. However, eighteenth-century romantic poets in the likes of William Coleridge and Wordsworth in Great Britain, or Frederick Schlegel and Ludwick Tieck in Germany, took interest in the growing rebirth of folk tales and fairy tales. As they highlighted on the importance of local literature of the common people and folklore, they successfully managed to change the popular opinion on the subject, going from the idea that it originated from a crazy old woman spreading lies, to an earthy, kind and nurturing set of wisdom that had been inherited for centuries (Teverson 86-7). The fairy tale was thus embraced by the romantics, since it conformed to their vision and values of imagination, love for nature and as well as the use of the fantastic, which allowed them to perpetuate their ideals. Another major contributor to the theorization and proper study of fairy tales, was the Russian folklorist and scholar Vladimir Propps (1895-1970), whose work on Russian fairytales in his “Morphology of the Folktales” (1928). By analysing one hundred Russian folktales, he conducted a structural analysis on the components and patterns, which he called functions, making the folktales and the fairy tales.

Outside of the field of literary and folkloric studies, psychology and most specifically, psychoanalysis, led by Sigmund Freud, Karl Gustav Jung and Marie-Louise Van Franz, took interest in the fairy tales as potential case studies. While Freud’s interest was mainly the folk and fairytales in relationships to dreams, Jung and Von Franz dedicated several publications on the study of Archetypes in popular fairy tales. Because of their short and straight forward nature, it made it perfect for them to investigate one’s deepest pits of the psyche, leading them to be the perfect material for their patients to properly connect with their conscious and unconscious minds. As a result, this allowed them to move forward in life past their traumas, fears and worries. The popularity and the reputation of the fairy tales as powerful tool of education and self-reflection thus returned. Marie-Louise Von Fronz, in particular, dedicated several books and lectures at the on the importance and values of fairy tales and their

psychological interpretation, as a continuation of Carl Jung's own teachings and concepts, such the animus and anima, the daemon, and the shadow.

Literature also took great inspiration from fairy tales, as novels such *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), which followed the genre's tropes and mechanics, they also took care in making their narratives and characters more complex, thus offering an emotional depth that the original tales lacked. Additionally, Cinema, and most specifically, the animation industry, was the main subject of several of their films. The first feature animation film in itself, was in fact the adaptation of a fairy tale; Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), is the cinematographic adaptation of the eponymous tale that was collected by both Charles Perrault and the brothers Grimm. This film was important to the history of animation, introducing several techniques and technologies to the field, several that are still used to this day in most studio productions. And for the Walt Disney Company, it was the movie that allowed it to grow and make even more films. Later, a plethora of several similar fairy tales adaptations flooded the field in later years, such as *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), or Richard Williams's *The Princess and the Cobbler* (1993), to cite as examples. These films in turn inspired their fair share of directors, authors and all kinds of creatives into keeping the fairy tale alive in their arts.

Therefore, the fairy tales hold in their own stories the rich history of the people, events, and epochs they were told in. Like a literary time capsule, they are representants of the time and circumstances they originated in and all the changes they went through, the single remaining witness of hundreds, if not thousands of years of human history. They are used as tools to not only entertain, but also educate, and inculcate moral values of the time as well as express their deepest wishes and fantasies, which tells a lot about their conditions, struggles, fears and anxieties. They are the product of their time, the reality of the conditions in which the story is told is directly reflected, the dragon, witches and other supernatural being are only

the manifestation of their own psyche. Several serious issues are tackled in them as well. This explains the dark origins of well-known tales told to children in the modern era. Heroes who try to overcome and reverse their initial condition, such as poverty or abuse are numerous. “The Little Riding Hood”, “Tom Thumb”, “Jack and the Beanstalk” or “Snow White”, all are examples of stories that kept their respective hearts of their stories, reflecting the harsh realities and struggles of the time where they were written. They were then adapted, changed and altered, in order to fit the current needs of the people. However, the initial context and meaning was still present, thus being carried in time, which only further enriched it.

3) The Gothic in Classic Fairy Tales

Numerous traditional fairy tales, specifically since their animated Disney adaptations, are known today to be happy stories, featuring magic, cute talking animals, fairy godmothers, and princesses in pretty dresses. However, several of those same tales are known to have dark origins, tackling grave and serious themes such as cannibalism, abuse, and infanticides. Those earlier versions, though shocking and unsettling for modern audiences, were the norm at the time when they were first told. It was a sad reality that the people had to face, so much that it showed in their fairy tales, thus changing them forever. In addition to that, horror was always a non negligible part of old traditional fairy tales, it was an important element that was incorporated into these stories, for it was used to teach their young audience and to dissuade them against the dangers and evils of the worlds, present in nature, people but also themselves. Because fear is just as important as any other emotion, something that every human being experienced at some point in life. It is an emotion that allowed mankind to survive and thrive, actively avoid unnecessary perils, and preserve life and the community. The German fairy tales, specifically those found in the brothers Grimm’s collections were

known for their darker tones, brutal stories, and horror associated with them. Their impact on the Anglo-Saxon world was not to be ignored, as any fairy tale became referred to as German (Piatti-Farnell 284).

The horrors expressed in fairy tales have a specific purpose, which is didactic and pedagogical, to teach children about the outside world, with every one of its aspects, whether it is good or bad. Those stories are a way to show them the duality of the human condition, the correct behaviour expected from them, how to navigate through the world, as well as morality and critical thinking. By presenting them with fictional settings and situations involving all kinds of fairies, dwarves, giants and witches, it is up to the child to make the link between fiction and reality, and follow the example of fairy tale heroes and heroines. Those stories showed a clear distinction between good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. While good deeds are rewarded with a happy ending, the evil ones are severely punished in the plot. As an example, Snow White's stepmother is forced to dance to death in hot ironed shoes. Another reason why horror was an integral part in several old folk tales and fairy tales despite being addressed for children, is the historical context they were written in. As they feature themes such as loss, murder, or abuse, these tales contained such themes because they were a reality of the time, a reality that the societies of the time went through quite often. In times of fragile political and economic state, the worst of the human nature comes out to the light of the day, which is the case for several of these stories. Through oral transmission, their stories of pain and suffering managed to travel through epochs and regions until they eventually reached folklorists who made sure to keep their memory alive by recording them for the generations to come.

In other words, they do not shy away from tackling grave and gruesome subjects, which are unfortunately common to the point where it becomes the norm. Older versions of the mentioned tales used to include frightening and bone chilling details in their core, such as

murder, physical, psychological and sexual violence, and even going as far as cannibalism. Despite the simple and childish image associated with the fairytales, it is a reputation that is falsely attributed to it, the result of years of rewriting. One may discern underlying features and characteristics that are most of the time familiar to the horror and gothic genres instead. Their main purpose was to present the reality in which the tale took place in, as a reminder for the future generations to come, as well as preserve the local folklore from falling into oblivion. This already started during the brothers Grimm's era, who suffered numerous complains at the time of the release of the first editions of their folktales and fairytales collection, *Kinder und Hausmarchen* (1857), translated in English as *Children and Household Tales*. As they were notorious all over Europe for their use of horror imagery in their tales, representing the struggles of the German families of the time (Zipes).

Tales such as "Hansel and Gretel", or "Cinderella", known in German as *Aschenputtel*, as well as Snow white (in German, *Sneewittchen*, -which later changed in spelling into *Schneewittchen*-) are examples tales where the horrors are used as a necessary tool to dissuade from doing evil deeds. That violence and terror is a necessary part for Justice to be served, and to make them comply into the social hierarchy and norms of the time. However, as time goes on, fairy tales have become progressively more softened and watered down, the brothers Grimm themselves in their later editions of their tales, have insufflated their conservative Christian ideals in them as well, changing elements that they deemed improper. For example, by removing the wickedness and the complicity of the father, and making him either absent, or dead, like in "Cinderella". Laura Hubner also mentions other additions, such as the children's pleas to God, and the removal of the mother, replacing her with the stepmother, because of their will to keep the sacredness of motherhood (34). The latter in particular has also exposed a social issue that has faced the families of the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, mothers dying because of childbirth and other diseases was quite common at the time,

leaving the children orphaned. The widowed fathers resorted to marrying much younger girls so they take care of their household, most of the time, these girls being at the same age, if not younger than the eldest daughter, created rivalry and conflict inside the family, which was reflected in return in the tales of the time (“Cannibalism & Witchcraft” 8:46-9:41).

Therefore, unlike its reputation of being simple happy stories for children, fairy tales included everyone. As old as this custom originated in history, it was common tradition to tell bedtime stories around the fire after long days of labour, to relax and ease the mind from its current worries and both physical and mental fatigues, but also to build the communal spirit around a common patrimony. Those stories thus include adults as well, because children themselves are not treated as such at the time. They are considered to be soon to be adults that are meant to take over and help around the household as soon as possible. Such elements that later have been categorised as “unfitting” are not seen to be the case at the time. Violence, horror and danger are recurrent themes in fairytales, particularly Grimm’s stories. While pain is taught to be the result of evil and wickedness, in order to dissuade young audiences from misbehaving, good behaviour, on the contrary, is rewarded. As Sarah Ghoshal described it: “fairytales were horror stories with happy endings” (1), the two genres then sharing more with each other than anticipated.

With the loss of the presence of the horror and psychological distress that is yet among the elements that made the heart of traditional fairytales, -already prevailing at the time of their collection-, another literary genre parallelly came into the light. Born out of the ashes of romance, Shakespearian classics as well as popular folklore, in a time where it was extremely frowned upon. It held components of supernatural and imagination dear to its heart, by comporting similar elements of medieval chivalry, distant and faraway settings. The gothic, though more recent and seen as more mature, even by its own detractors, is the perfect blend between realism and romances, past and present, and tradition and modernity. It includes

more similarities to the fairytales than it seems to at first glance, acting as a different side of the same coin. Even so, it can be seen as its spiritual successors, as the use of horror in fairy tales are changed and actively omitted, rightfully deemed to be harmful to children. The gothic took over, making fear the central emotion that is explored from numerous angles. Authors have kept pushing and trespassing over the limits of what is considered the natural order, acting as a voice for the anxieties resulting from the fast-growing world, just like fairytales used to be in its time.

B. Gothic: The Spiritual Successor of the Traditional Fairytale

Before going into further detail into drawing the link between the two, and in order to properly study and establish how the gothic and the fairytales are related, one may need to define what is meant by the term gothic in the first place, as well as its place in the literary field. The usage of the word gothic in itself is polyvalent and is used to refer to several artistic, literary, social and cultural movements. the word went through constant changes throughout the course of its history, as it is used to refer to, respectively, an ethnic Germanic tribe, a historical period from human history, an artistic and architectural style that grew into the heart of the British people, a literary genre, as well as a more modern usage, used to refer to a specific aesthetic and subculture that clashes with the dominant mainstream culture, which the gothic as a literary genre is all about, challenging the societal norms by going against the established rules, and breaking form what is seen as “aesthetically pleasing”. The gothic as a genre in itself is rich and can be divided into even more sub branches, all results of the changes that the British society went through throughout the course of the nineteenth century and even to the modern-day era. Similar to the fairy tale, it is an outlet for the fears, anxieties, and deepest wishes of the people, answering their questions to a changing reality,

bringing them hope for a better future concerning their condition as well as offer temporary escapism and entertainment.

1) Definition and Key Concepts

Starting from the term itself, the word *gothic* has had several uses throughout its history, as it is stated previously, the word as it is used goes from referring to an ethnic group of people, an architectural style, equating with an era of human history, to a literary and artistic genre. Originally, it is used to refer to the Goths, a group of Germanic tribes living in northern Europe, and that have played an important role in the collapse of the Roman empire, making Europe fall into the so-called Dark Ages. It is then used to refer to the fifteenth century architecture that has defined the second half of the medieval era, characterized by its pointy arcs and stained-glass windows. Gothic soon became equivalent to the Middle Ages where that type of architecture is prevalent. Although the building style is specifically designed for spaciousness and brightness, made possible with big windows that are specifically made to accommodate the growing populations of the time, they have become darker and gloomier by the time the interest in them is revived. The accumulation of the smoke from candles and oil lamps, which may explain the reason behind its signature mysterious atmosphere.

The gothic as a literary genre have started according to literary canons with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), introducing a new genre to a literary scene where imagination and fantasy are master, despite being despised by the elite of the time. Gothic as a literary genre is characterised by a gloomy atmosphere, horrific imagery, as well as anxious protagonists, meeting with unnerving fantastic creatures from the folklore: vampires, zombies or ghosts. It is a literary genre where nothing makes sense anymore, representing the time it appeared in, a time of confusion and great social changes. It contains elements of both

modernity and tradition. The architecture and setting also play a role in the story, taking place in an old castle in a far-away land during the middle-ages, they are reminiscent of older more archaic times. This choice is a direct result to the rising trend of history and archaeology, as well as a growing interest in mysticism and exotic foreign lands. This has given birth to a specific haunting yet charming and mesmerizing aesthetic, allowing for the readers' imagination to wander, test their morals and ethics, as well as question the societal norms they grew up with.

In order to frighten the readers and keep them on the edge for the duration of the book, gothic authors use a variety of technique to create the scary and dark atmosphere their stories are known for, on top of the already mentioned elements of the supernatural. One of them is called the uncanny, which is a concept coined by psychoanalysis precursor Sigmund Freud in his eponymous 1919 essay, in which he introduces the notion of *das unheimlich*. In addition to that, several other concepts are introduced and heavily exploited by the authors of the time, such as the sublime, the grotesque and the abject. These terms coming hand in hand, they explore physical limits, as well as the place of mankind through human flaws and weaknesses. In reference to the concept of the monstrous, illness, decay, and death are all concepts that are avoided at the time, gothic authors make sure to tackle them, as they are reminders of their inevitable demise and fate, inevitable returning to the earth.

Transgression is another important concept of the gothic, as its themes go beyond the boundaries of nature, society, and religion. It is the result of the growing industrialization and the lack of fate, giving way to anxiety and fear for the future of the world, a world that is changing too fast for the time. In a time where the body and the soul no longer belong with each other in the same vessel, authors have experimented and pushed the limits of the norms and values and what was acceptable in the conservative British society. Several taboos were actively broken, such as sex, abuse, religion, as well as authority. Those vices and fears thus

have taken the form of monstrous creatures, such as the vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The immortal Romanian aristocrat is the symbol for masculine and patriarchal values as well as the authority related to royalty. The same thing is deducted with prince Manfred from Walpole's novel, although a simple man, his authority as a patriarch, along with his status as an aristocrat, makes the main protagonists' goal to defeat him. Thus, the cases of *Dracula* and *Prince Manfred* are a transgression against gender and social political norms.

As a genre, it is quite diverse and varied, since several sub branches can be attached to it, all sharing the same aesthetic of the taste for the macabre and the bizarre, gloomy settings, as well as monstrous creatures lurking in the dark. Such examples include urban gothic, southern gothic, or the gothic romance. All of these sub genres took a specific and distinct direction, setting them apart from the rest, as the world around them is changing to a fascinating yet alarming pace, each thus focused its attention on a specific facet of the new society. The quick urbanization for example is the centre of attention for the urban gothic, while women's rights and marital conditions are the main interest of the female gothic. The latter is one of these sub-genres that specifically deal with women's issues. In the sea of male authors who are already well established in the literary field, women writers also have sought to express their thoughts and perspective on the world as well, represented by the likes of Anne Radcliff, the Bronte sisters, and Daphne Du Maurier. These writers have explored the condition of women through the domestic space. They heavily draw inspiration from fairy tales, as their stories feature persecuted female protagonist by the hands of violent and monstrous patriarchs. They have used the fairy tale characteristics as an outlet for the female readers' feelings, wants, needs and fears. The female gothic has become their voice, representing them and their issues, weaknesses and desires as individuals, for once at the centre of attention,

Not only in the female gothic, the setting is of capital importance to most of gothic stories, taking place in an ancient time in a far-away exotic land. The fascination with foreign lands is an important part for romanticism, gothic is the same. As examples one may cite the mountains of the Swiss Alps for Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, or the castle of *Dracula*, situated in the Romanian territory of Transylvania. This interest is part of the rediscovery of those parts of the world, due to the expansion of the British empire. Using foreign locations introduces the concept of the sublime and disorientation, not only the main character is an outsider, but the supernatural threat makes the sentiment of disorientation and confusion tenfold. The sublime happens thus with both the fascination and the terror expressed at the events unravelling. The still existing internalized racism is another reason behind the choice of the setting: wild, dangerous and unpredictable, non-British individuals are painted in a bad light. Thus, gothic authors showed the biases and vision of the people they portrayed in their writings, even unintentionally. It is the opposition between the civilized and rational Englishman, against the uncivilized and irrational eastern other. Furthermore, Orientalism and the translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* (1704) by Antoine Galland, are the source of great inspiration as well as the cause behind this new found interest for the Orient (Abdessamad).

The genre is thus a revolution of its kind, an alien of its time, and a revival of old tradition meeting halfway with newer ones, in a world where both coexist. As it is the reaction to a new world with changing values, authors have thought it is necessary to question and criticize it with all of its aspects, both old and new. The gothic came as the rejection of a rigid and an overly pragmatical society, by bringing back to the light the long-buried traditions that are no longer welcome, despite its presence in human history since its creation. As the interest for history, archaeology, mysticism and far-away lands at the other side of the world has blossomed, it is the genre that has made use of all that is considered fascinating, interesting,

and mysterious. The gothic is the outlet by which the people of the nineteenth century are reminded on how much the world is big, diverse and full of mysteries.

2) History and Evolution

The birth of the gothic has come in a specific historical and social context, even before the publication of the first ever gothic novel by Horace Walpole. Precursors of the genre, with stories, although not as terrifying as the gothic, that have used elements of supernatural in their writings. Those works include the writings of William Shakespeare, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) all included in their core similar plotlines of melodramatic tragicomedies with Ghosts, murder and featuring half historical half legendary characters. One of the direct inspirations for Walpole himself, is *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717) by Alexandre Pope. Another example is the graveyard poets, who are also early pre-romantic authors, known for their dark and gloomy aesthetics centred around the macabre, death and decay. The genre dealing with horror, darkness and supernatural creatures is not new, as it already has existed even before the romantic movement. However, the rise of the realism put an end to this trend. The taste for such macabre has been revived with the gothic. Taking inspiration from both its predecessors, it is the middle ground between realism and the supernatural, science and fantasy, and as well as past and present.

As for the evolution of the etymology of the term, the word goth is used to refer to a group of Germanic tribes that invaded Europe at the end of the antiquity, making the continent fall into the middle-ages. Since the Renaissance, the medieval era is a part of Europe's history that is deeply resented, in favour of an idolised vision of the antiquity. The word gothic has become synonymous with the middle-ages, including its architecture, instead of its original name it has gone by. What is known as gothic architecture is originally is

originally called as *opus francigenum*, meaning the French art, because it is where it has started in the first place before spreading to the rest of the continent. However, the word also has gained by extension with it a negative connotation, as the era was regarded as a time of barbarism, darkness, backwardness and obscurantism, it made the term the two meanings go hand in hand, as it was reserved to mainly describe the time it is affiliated to it. It has specifically started from the Renaissance period, where everything related and associated with the medieval times is automatically assumed to be of decadent and ugly nature. The Renaissance period being a time where European have wanted to start anew, it is important for them to reject their predecessors, and instead focus on a romanticized and idealized version of the antiquity.

Then, the rise of Empiricism has happened in eighteenth century Britain, dominating the society of the time. It celebrated science, logic, and the return to the values of the ancient Greeks, very similar to the renaissance era -as they were thought to be the forefathers of the European Civilization (also known as Neoclassism). It is brought to the light by philosophers such as Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, or John Locke, as a way to break away from the so-called universals and traditions with no concrete foundation. This spirit of scientific reasoning has resulted in the birth of the English novel, led by writers such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fieldings. Literally meaning ‘the new’, it lives up to its name, as it is the personification of this spirit of the Rationalism that dominated its time. It is synonymous with modernity, coming as a direct response to the “romance” era that dominated Britain before it came into existence, which, later on, became viewed as outdated unsophisticated senseless fantasies (Clery 22). However, a certain nascent spirit of reviving the imagination, celebrating the human emotions and its forgotten history has come back into the literary sphere, with a heavy new-found interest in archaeology and antiquary. Thus, Romanticism as a movement is born, as a direct response to the Rationalism. At the time, there has been a

need to relate and construct the British identity. Goths, as a fellow Germanic culture, unlike the romans or the Greeks who were respectively Latin and Hellenic people, have become the perfect choice for their quest for self-identification and representation. Therefore, the revival of the gothic architecture has happened, and the rigidity and polished angles of the Classical era was replaced by bolder more irregular and chaotic features of the gothic architecture (Majlingová 9).

Horace Walpole is among those enthusiasts. By writing *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), he has united fiction and architecture, bringing along a break to the long tradition of realist writings, and reviving the spirit of wonder and imagination that lacked in his time. He has brought a whole new genre into the light; thus, the gothic is born. Claiming his novel is a manuscript he found which went all the way back in Italy during the time of the Crusades. It follows the story of a tyrannical prince, lord Manfred, afraid to lose his noble status to an ancient prophesy, which is bound to inevitably happen, causing his demise and those of his whole bloodline and earthly possessions. It features ghosts, an old castle, a persecuted damsel in distress seeking safety in the dark underground tunnels of the palace, as well as a brave hero from the peasantry that turned out to be the rightful heir of the castle. Everything in this novel is a reminder of old romances of the past, reminiscent of times of chivalry and Arthurian legendary feats of power, among others.

However, Walpole's tale is not called by the name gothic before the second edition of the book, where he has revealed the fictitious nature of his novel. Before that, it is only known as *a story*, as the subtitle. This has resulted in breaking all former assumptions about the novel as it is expected to be realistic, making the gothic a sophisticated joke. It is regarded as pseudohistorical truth based on a mixture of several folk and cultural elements mixed and matched together. This has given the semblant of a realistic setting that is supposedly set at some point in history. Just like folktales and fairytales, it is meant to be an agreed upon lie, a

make-believe in which the veracity of its facts is overlooked for the duration of the story. The readers accepted and believed the events told by Walpole for the sake of entertainment and wonder alone.

With the publication and success of Walpole's story, the term gothic has gained a new definition. As it is previously mentioned, it originally has referred to medieval times, which is in return viewed negatively at the time. From then on, it also means supernatural with all the implications and feelings it brings with it, such as fear, the uncanny and the sublime, so dear to the movement. The gothic has referred to a new generation of authors making use of these rediscovered fantastical elements, such as ghosts, witches and blood sucking vampires, taking place in exotic faraway lands, in old dilapidated castles going back to dark mythical ages. Although not all authors have had these elements in their tool box, of all of those features together. They all have made the core of what Carina Hart has called the "gothic folklore" in her 2020 article. While the enlightenment scholars and writers have sought to shed the light on the darkness, with the ambition of leaving nothing in the obscurity, the gothic has sought to explore that very darkness, for them it was an important part of human nature. After all, the presence of light automatically meant casting shadows. This further emphasizes the contrast and the overlapping oppositions of the gothic and the enlightenment, completing one another (Majlingová 10-1).

3) The Gothic and the Fairy Tale

The fairy tale and the gothic seem not to be related at first glance, considering their respective aims and objectives, regarded as polar opposites. On one hand, horror is an inherent part of older versions of fairy tales, its purpose is strictly pedagogical. Gothic, on the other hand, is seen as the opposite, using the horror to psychological and artistic purposes,

since fear is thought to be the heart of what constitutes the human experience on this earth. In this matter, it can be expressed how they seemingly share opposite traits, purposes and aesthetics. However, the juxtaposition of their respective histories, elements as well as critical response from their literary critics of their time allows to focus on the traits uniting them rather than those that separate them. As discussed earlier in the previous part consecrated to fairy tales, older traditional tales have already contained elements of horror and darkness in their narratives. Additionally, both are not well regarded by literary critics of their time, because of their unrealistic nature and use of fantastical elements. Therefore, the two of them share more common features than it may seem. The influence of one another is noticeable when comparing several writings of the genre, as well as when considering the historical context and evolution both genres have gone through.

Ever since antiquity, the use of supernatural elements, from gods, ghosts, chimeras, were-creatures to fairies, is not uncommon. They have been believed in, worshipped and feared. Folktales, fairy tales, ballads, myths and legends, all have had in their core supernatural entities that either have assisted the heroes in their quests, or on the contrary, tested their courage, strength and resilience. Used as both a narration device as well as a vessel used to personify common unconscious fears, wishes and needs, these figures have become the way for people in past societies to cope with their world, explain it, as well as find a purpose in it. The gothic, despite originating in a time where these entities no longer exist in people's minds, authors still have clung to ancient beliefs and lore. Because they consider them to be a part of human history and identity, in a world that is forcing them to leave them behind. As those same mythical and dangerous creatures have gained more popularity, their use and perception have also changed. Not only they do not hold their sacred status anymore, but they have become outlets for authors in their stories, as they have used them to experiment with boundaries of the changing morality, beliefs and social norms.

In her article “Gothic Folklore and Fairytale: A Negative Nostalgia” (2020), Carina Hart has explored the three key influences behind the emergence of gothic fiction. She has mentioned the folktale, fairytales and ballad to be the principal contributors to the emergence of the gothic. As they were popular pieces of literature that were heavily written about, and thus developed along with the gothic around the same period of time. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has witnessed the birth of a plethora of hybrid works, at the crossroads between the two (Hart 3). Several well-known authors of gothic themselves such as Walpole or the Bronte sisters have had a strong bond and history with fairy tales, as Walpole wrote his *Hieroglyphic Tales* (1785), twenty-one years after his famous *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Furthermore, as Manuel Aguirre states, the gothic in return also has helped maintain the core aspects of the folktales and fairy tales, acting as a protector of those stories that has helped them survive through history against oblivion, as Europe has been ravaged by wars and conflicts (Hart 2). Clery adds the role of the romances of the centuries that preceded the proper appearance of the novel in the eighteenth century. The gothic writers have taken heavy influence from it and have given it a deeper and more complex dimension, following the scientific approach of its peers. They have allowed for the magic and the supernatural to re-enter their stories, the terror and the uncanny have made them closer to their readers. They experienced the events of the plot unfold through the eyes of the characters, while at the same time actively hypothesizing on the possible answers behind it, before it was revealed by the author at the end of the book.

The horror that inhabits several of the original forms of fairytales, specifically the ones written by the Grimm brothers, may cause one to think and conclude that they have participated in shaping the gothic fiction as a genre, which was the case. However, the latter also has helped inspire the German folklorists in their own rewriting of their famous tales. In this matter, Piatti-Farnell has stated that:

The scenarios of Grimm fairytales are distinctly Gothic, and pivot on human experiences of suffering, punishment and isolation. Not only did the Grimms introduce Gothic imagery of violence and brutality into their tales to place a more significant focus put on the terror felt by their characters, but, from the first to the seventh edition of their collection, they also ‘made a conscious decision to add elements that would enhance the gothic qualities of their tales’. The Grimms fairytales would thus be a literary product of their (Gothic) time. (qtd. in Tossi and Cabiati 23)

Thus, it can be noted that the juxtaposition of each genre with each other is undeniable. Several fairytales can be noticed to include gothic tropes in their heart and vice versa. The emergence of gothic and the collection of fairy tales at the time have coincided. Examples of fairy tales appropriating gothic elements include the story which was recorded by both Charles Perrault and brothers Grimm, “Blue Beard”. Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), a classical female gothic classic novel, reminds of the tale previously mentioned. This is what Sarah Ghoshal has deducted as well in her essay *The Gothic and the Fairy Tale: The Unified Genre*. She is among those who have drawn the link between the two, as she noticed the several differences between some gothic and fairytale stories, describing gothic stories as “fairytales for grownups” (1). She also added few other examples of similar tales to “Blue Beard”, including “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom”, which, similarly to “Blue Beard”, feature stories about secret forbidden chambers that turn out to have a terrible secret, threatening the life of its heroines. Through similar plotlines and characteristics, both “Blue Beard” and Emily Bronte’s novel have highlighted the abuse and

the overall conditions of women of the time. However, the heroines of those types of fairy stories often end up dying because of their transgression of their murderous husbands' wishes, as death is the cost of their curiosity. Later, authors such as Angela Carter in her *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), has shifted the traditional narratives. Instead of putting the blame on the wives, she has given them the power and ability to outwit their captors, thus escaping their tragic demise. However, the empowerment of heroines is nothing new, as several older versions of certain tales do indeed stand with the female lead. An example of this is the "Red Riding Hood". After the wolf has tied a rope to the girl's leg to prevent her from running away, she tricks her captor by asking him to go outside to urinate. The wolf complies and she ties the rope to a nearby tree, giving her enough the chance to flee.

Hart concludes that the gothic and the folktale hold the same narrative and intention, highlighting the strong bond they always maintained through their respective histories. Additionally, she introduces in her articles another notion on top of the already mentioned gothic folklore, which are different yet complete each other in the consolidation of a merged genre: the gothic fairy tale. The two notions are of key importance to understand the link between the two genres. Hart defines gothic folklore by stating that it is: "The adaptation and reappropriation of folkloric figures, such as the vampire, the vengeful ghost or later the werewolf. In such texts the folkloric figure is placed in a gothic narrative that may diverge significantly from that of its folk origins" (2). The gothic fairytale, on the contrary, refers to putting traditional fairytale narratives through gothic lenses, emphasizing and incorporating the violence, monstrosity and the transgression, and often altering its fairytale ending (3). The latter thus takes popular tales of the past for its tropes to be twisted and remodelled into a gothic mold, making them go through the mill of the tales of horror that constitutes the genre.

After being part of one another for so long, the fairy tale and the gothic have split, each taking a different path. While the fairy tale has gained a more children friendly

reputation, the gothic has developed and evolved on its own as well. However, with the turn of the twentieth century and the rise of post modernism, authors have started to experiment and explore the two genres. This was done by parodying its popular tropes, mixing it with others, as well as twisting it and taking it from a different perspective. A number of authors in particular, decided to make them merge once again, giving birth of the gothic fairy tale. Despite the genre not being extensively written about, it is a combination that has attracted authors, artists and filmmakers alike, inspiring them to join the initiative and participate in the nascent genre by enriching it. Creatives such as E. T. A. Hoffman, Neil Gaiman, Angela Carter, or Guillermo Del Torro, all have taken part in the revival of the horror in fairy tale, combining it with the gloomy aesthetics of the gothic, while also preserving the charm of the fairy tale. They have brought into the scene new kinds of stories, charming generations of fans of both genres regardless of age, gender and nationality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between the gothic and fairytales is more complex than it looks. They share several points of interest in old history and the use of supernatural and magical elements, serving the task to personalize complex human emotions. The bond between the gothic and the fairytale is more than just a continuation of one another. In other words, they are interlinked. Because they have emerged at the same time in history, they equally have influenced one another. As if they are two missing pieces of a puzzle, their compatibility is the reason that has made authors such as Angela Carter and Neil Gaiman to exploit both of them in their respective stories. As several authors offered familiar stories the majority of the population grew upon listening to, with a twisted narrative, playing around with its codes and tropes, while also incorporating this dark gothic aesthetic they are so fond

of. Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002) perfectly fits this description. By incorporating gothic elements and aesthetics to a fairytale-like plot and characters, it delivers an interesting story to its young readers. This makes the gothic also accessible to children and adults alike, just like the fairytale used to be back in the day. By re-introducing gothic elements to fairytale ones, the latter regains its original function: to educate while also entertaining and nurturing the power of the imagination of its reader, so it becomes a tool for them to grow and discover themselves.

Chapter Two

The Gothic and Fairytale in Neil Gaiman's
Coraline:

Outline

Introduction

A. The Fairy Tale Elements in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

- 1) The Beldam and the Monstrous Feminine
- 2) Magical Elements
- 3) Morals and didactics

B. The Gothic Elements of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

- 1) The Double and the Button Eyes
- 2) The Abject and Grotesque
- 3) The Spectral Apparitions

Conclusion

Introduction

Upon discussing and following the definitions and the concepts that are provided in chapter one, Neil Gaiman's novel *Coraline* (2002) falls under the banner of what is known as the Gothic fairy tale. According to Lucy Armitt, the expectations and fantastic nature of the fairytale make the reader overcome the feeling of the uncanny of the supernatural elements (Amitt 135). Just like Carina Hart states, it twists the traditional fairy stories tropes by implementing a gothic feel and aesthetic to it. By playing with its codes and tropes, it provides an entertaining scary story while also teaching morals to its reader by redefining the fairytale tropes and reintroducing the formerly erased gothic horrific ones. The original use of horror comes back in the form of rite of passage, and the usual fairy tale's happy ending is kept. The return to normality makes it feel even more deserved, allowing readers to recognize, explore, and eventually overcome their fears in a healthy manner. Coming to the term with a real-life struggle via an unrealistic media that gives them enough distance and reflection to properly face them.

This otherwise simple story has potential of incorporating great reflections and psychological depth, the archetypal nature of the fairy tale allowing for a myriad of possibilities, as the imagination is free to wander and explore the deepest pits of the human psyche, a speciality of the gothic genre. Wonder merging along with the uncanny in a blended watercolour gradient, dark and joyful colours existing along in the same canvas, the readers as well as Coraline, vacillate between magic and reality, past and present, and hope and despair. Considering that both the fairy tales and gothic found their way to children's literature, specifically during the nineteenth century (Jackson 5), the reunion of the two allows for beneficial enrichment, bringing both entertainment and education. This chapter will analyse the interplay of elements of both the fairy tale and gothic as they were portrayed in the novel,

in order to study the interconnectedness of each between one another in the story's core, exploring how does that mixture and blending impact Neil Gaiman's story.

A. The Fairytale Elements in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

The Fairy tale inspiration for *Coraline* is thus rather clear. As Neil Gaiman states himself: " *Coraline*'s a fairy tale in the same way that "Hansel and Gretel" is a fairy tale" (Gaiman 234). He thus follows the brothers Grimm's example and incorporates horrific imagery and aesthetic to an otherwise simple archetypal story. The novel follows the story of a little girl, named Coraline, that, upon moving in a new house with her family, discovers that a normally sealed door with red bricks opens at night on a dark tunnel. This tunnel leads to a flat nearly identical to her own, except it is inhabited by her other family: Nearly identical doubles of her own, with the exception that they have black buttons for eyes. While warm and welcoming at first, her other mother in particular, is revealed to be an evil fairy-like entity that is after Coraline's life. Whether it is seen in the archetype of the evil step mother turned into a witch, the use of magic and talking animals in an enchanted setting, or the morals displayed in the novel, the story of *Coraline* is deeply rooted with fairy tale elements. Elements which Neil Gaiman have shown through the structure of his plot, characters, environment, and themes. The following first section of this chapter will be dedicated to the major fairy tale tropes and elements that are tackled in the novel of *Coraline*.

1) The Beldam and the Monstrous Feminine

As early as the story started, the beldam, formerly referred to as the other mother, was the main antagonist of the novella. She is Coraline's opposite, foiling her in every aspect of

her personality. Her goal is to get her to trust her, thus trapping her in her world and claiming her soul forever. The other mother falls into a well-known archetype that is present in the collective imagination, whether it is consciously or unconsciously. The Monstrous Feminine, a term coined by Barbara Creed in her 1993 essay, is a recurrent element found since the dawn of humanity through their stories and art. Fairy tales are no exception, since it repeatedly appeared in most of their tales since they started to be told. Examples may include the evil witch or the evil step mother, and can be found in several folktales and fairytales, such as the wicked witch in “Hansel and Gretel”, the Baba Yaga in “Vasilisa the Beautiful”, or the evil stepmother in Cinderella.

When she is introduced, her voice is the first thing that readers and Coraline herself get to know, since “it sounded like her mother” (Gaiman 44). As she gets closer to her and as she enters her field of vision, the Beldam is seen giving her back to the little girl, an early sign of her dishonest intentions. Then, when Coraline gets to see her, she is described as looking “a little like Coraline’s mother. Only...Only her skin was white as paper. Only she was taller and thinner. Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp” (Gaiman 44), this description alone set multiple alarms in one’s mind despite the other mother being painted to be a better version of Coraline’s mother, kinder, and more attentive than her. In appearance and according to society’s standards of what is expected from a mother, she is perfect. However, several of these mentioned details on her physical appearance are off-putting. These features are vessels for dormant universal fears: the paper white skin is the symbol for sickness and death, and by extension revenant figures such as ghosts and vampires. The colour of the fingernails not only represent both wrath and blood, but coupled with their sharpness are a reminder of a fierce predator, lurking in the darkness, and looking to wrap its claws on its next meal.

As stated earlier, she is the textbook definition of the Monstrous feminine, or, when talking about motherhood, the monstrous mother, a concept coined by Barbara Creed coined in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993). This concept is a common and ancestral trope that dates back to the antiquity, and that portrays feminine qualities as to be feared and othered. This is present not only showed this way in the fairy tale, but also in the horror genre, and by extension, the gothic. According to Christa Jones and Claudia Schwabe, the usage of the word can differ from context to another, but monsters represent the personifications of fears. They stated that they are: “Projected outside of the self, so they can be safely contemplated from a distance. These fears can be linked to future events or developments, to dangerous or antisocial behaviours, physical disabilities or suffering, morally reprehensible urges, and ultimately, the inevitable spectre of human mortality” (289-0). The monstrous feminine is thus the fear of femininity and womanhood. In other words, it is the action of othering the female gender based on to its attributes and natural qualities, seen as different and in total opposition of male gender, which is regarded as the norm, and thus, the self.

This othering is specifically done in regards the physiological functions of women, such as menstruation and pregnancy. As a result, it projects fear onto motherhood, which is regarded as the greatest source of reassurance and safety figure since childhood and adulthood alike. Since it is regarded as sacred, so much that the mere thought of a mother that turns out to mean harm and evil to upon her own flesh and blood is terrifying. In addition to that, Maria Von Franz also mentions the traditional placement that femininity holds in most ancient mythologies, as it is seen as both a figure of justice, kindness and safety, but also blind anger and vengeance, the female rage is not only cruel but destructive, that has no regard for order and established rules, just like Mother nature (101). The feminine is thus not only strange and alien but also dangerous, as the same virtues they are praised for, can become the reason why

they are ostracized and feared.

The folktale as well as the fairytale tends to make use of this duality, utilizing both facets of femininity to tell their stories. The monstrous feminine is defined by being “of what it is about a woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (qtd. in Creed 01), as every civilization possesses this archetype in their collective imagination, one way or another, such as the figure of Teryel in Tamazight mythology, or Hera or Medusa in the Greek mythology. The particular negative portrayal of women was the result of the societal expectation that were put on women’s shoulders. They needed to be pure, kind and obedient, for they would be the cause of their own demise. This perception of the female gender naturally got transmitted from one generation to the other by the means of the folklore and mythology, emphasizing on the dangerous nature of femininity, for society as well as for women themselves. The idea was that a woman’s primary role was to be a wife and a mother, devoted to her community without fault, any woman that was not that is othered. This is how the birth mother was replaced by the evil step mother as the main antagonist in traditional tales. The image of wicked witches as well as other variations of evil women became the examples of models that young women and girls ought not follow. A woman is thus instantly othered once she followed a different path from the one society traced for her, outweighing the societal expectations that were imposed on her, and expecting her to stay inside the domestic sphere.

Concerning the beldam, another description that she fits is the archetype of the devouring mother that was mentioned in Psychoanalysis. According to Maria Von Franz, the devouring mother is the overbearing and controlling maternal figure, that does not want her children to leave her side and set out onto the world. She wants them to stay with her forever, not allowing them to grow up into proper adults, just like the other mother wants Coraline for herself, not for the girl’s own good, but for her own pleasure and personal gain. Her love for Coraline is not sincere, as it is strictly conditional. She loves her, indeed, but it is not

unconditional, it is because she wants something from her, even if the object of her desire is never. As Coraline states: “it was true, the other mother loved her. But she loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold. In the other mother’s button eyes, Coraline knew she was a possession, nothing more. A tolerated pet whose behaviour was no longer amusing” (Gaiman147). Not amused the other mother is indeed, as soon as Coraline has shown defiance to her, she lets her wrath take over her. It is enough for her to throw her into a tight and cold place behind the mirror, in the middle of the dark, where she cannot even lie down comfortably. She only has let her out in the morning, claiming it was to teach her a lesson, informing her that her love has a price, and that it is obedience and absolute compliance.

In the story, the other mother is often associated with the symbol of the spider, which is present throughout the novel, the other mother, through her appearance and tendencies, is a reminder of the hunting method of several species of spiders, which disguise themselves in order not to be seen and better catch their preys. Furthermore, knowing that Coraline heavily dislikes spiders, and that she is deeply scared of them, the other mother can be seen as the personification of her own fears. She represents Coraline’s deepest anxieties, a part of her that she does not want to face, yet that she will have to at some point. Not only her fear of spiders, but the beldam, as an adult woman, represents Coraline’s own femininity. As the girl is in the process of growing up and slowly approaching her teenage years, she is thus on the path to womanhood. As the other mother represents the feminine part that she did not want to accept yet. Facing her and defeating her, means coming to term with her future and her identity as a girl. It is an important step in order to accept herself as she was and grow up and mature in a healthy way, otherwise she may consume her, thus making her become just like her, or worse, like her previous victims, empty shells of their own selves that are trapped in childhood forever. The beldam is thus, for Coraline, the fear of novelty, adulthood, and the unknown

future that is the result of all of the changes that are happening in her life.

Following the tradition of fairy tales' antagonists, yet also contradicting them at the same time, her motivation is not out of jealousy, or hatred for the child. On the contrary, it is out of love, or rather what she perceives to be love. Her vision of love is based on fear and possession, not safety and genuine care and affection. She is in search of power and it is shown by her creations, manipulating Coraline's world and reality all for her to trust her, only for everything to turn out to be a lie, as her only goal is to take Coraline's life away. Similarly to the evil witch in "Hansel and Gretel", the other mother's aim is to "devour" Coraline, and to rob her from her soul, energy and identity. She is thus a mixture of several inspirations from the folklore and fairy tales that all fall into the monstrous feminine trope. Creator of whole worlds she reins over as the absolute mistress, she is ambitious and dangerous, quite similar to her predecessors in the genre. Most importantly, she is not invincible, as Coraline proves to be capable of twice as much wits and creativity as her.

1) Magical Elements

The key feature that differentiates the fairy tale from the folktales, and other similar sub genres belonging to it, is the use of magical elements and creatures in its core. In fairy tales, the presence of the supernatural is a common occurrence, inherited by a time where witches, ghosts, changelings and other creatures were all believed in. As the focus of the tale is solely for entertainment in addition to teaching good morals for children, the use of wonder and magic offers them hope, as well as being an outlet for fears and insecurities, representing their conditions no matter how different they are. In the fantasy genre, it is called the marvellous, which, according to the French and Bulgarian author, theorist and critic Tzvetan Todorov, is when the magic and the supernatural are accepted as being part of reality, part of

the natural order of the world, that can be explained by the short nature of the fairy tale, where it is not the main centre of focus, rather a tool that helps the story progress, whether it is from a thematic or narratological perspective.

In *Coraline*, this manifests with the various magical elements, objects and creatures that either help her in her quest or on the contrary, slows her down through it. The sole nature of the world and its magic are never explained, and like several fairy tale protagonists, aided by her status as a child, she just accepts it as it is, her main priority being to get out of it alive along with her loved ones. The same thing is applied to the other mother, as neither her motivation, her goal or the source of her powers are revealed, as the cat had states when mentioning the nature of the other world:” made it, found it, what’s the difference? Asked the cat. “Either way, she’s had it a long time” (107). This ambiguity is initially presented as a source of wonder and mystery, as Coraline initially viewed it as more interesting than her own realm. At first warm and welcoming, she quickly realises the danger she is in, as she learns the price of living in such a world. The beldam has complete power over the other realm and is able to mould it into whatever she wants it to be, her word was thus absolute in it. The magic of the world of *Coraline* is never explained, only understood through the pieces of information that are given throughout the novels. As Neil Gaiman prefers to give his readers the freedom to interpret his stories on their own, both the novel and the stop motion animated feature directed by Henry Selick (2009) has witnessed readers and viewers all around the world going over every detail of every version of the story, so the mysteries behind it can be unravelled.

Todorov mentioned in his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970) three concepts that are commonly used in several genres that make use of the supernatural in their plots, the fantastic, the marvellous and the uncanny, all defined and differentiated by the reaction to supernatural events in question. In the fairy tale, magic and

the supernatural is often seen as a natural part of the setting, and immediately believed in by the characters, that is known as the marvellous. However, in *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman vacillates between the two notions of the fantastic and the marvellous. While the fantastic refers to when it is unclear whether the events unfolding are real or not, the marvellous, on the contrary, means that the magic present is assumed to be real in the context of the story (“A Brief Overview of Tzvetan Todorov’s Theory of the Fantastic”). As the heroine regularly travels between the two realms of the natural and the supernatural one, no one other than her knows about the existence of the other world. This is shown when she calls the police to report about her parents’ kidnapping by her other mother, or when her parents at the end of the novella have no recollection on what has happened to them when they have been trapped by the beldam. The fantastic according to Todorov, occurs when the moment of hesitation on what is real or not in the story, for the reader as well as for the character. Coraline, being the creative child that she was, she was gifted with a broad and rich imagination, it would not be surprising if she invented this story as a way to cope with her new life. After all, this is the essence of the fairy tale itself, a made up lie that is momentarily believed it for the sake of entertainment.

Another feature part of the magic of the world of *Coraline*, is its animals, specifically talking animals. They are an important part of the story, as they served the story by being Coraline’s guide and source of knowledge about the world she just entered. The first ones she encounters are the mice in her room, who have sung her a creepy song, one that she has thought sounded strangely familiar. That is because she has seen it earlier in her dreams, an alarming foreshadowing on the nature of this new world. That is her first contact with the other world. Another example includes the talking dogs at the other misses Spink and Forcible’s flat. Not only they talk, but chocolate is not harmful for them, and as she asks them when will the show be over, they respond by saying that it never ends. The encounter with the

dogs of the other world provides additional information on the nature of the place she is exploring, a funny and interesting world with a hint of frightening undertones. The world she has just stumbled upon slowly revealing its secrets to her, the dogs are meant to provide a friendly presence for Coraline. Yet, they only indirectly revealed the dangers she is about to experience, with the other mother as the master puppeteer behind the show.

Additionally, another instance of talking creatures, although this time not under the beldam's orders, is the black cat. As it is introduced, it is a friendly yet avoiding presence that silently greeted Coraline when she has moved into her new home. The only time he speaks to her is when they are in the other world, making sarcastic comments and randomly walking off whenever it wants, even in the middle of a conversation. However, it is the one that has helped her and comforted her when she has been all alone, silently guiding her and keeping her company, and also offering her help whenever she needs it. Contrary to the mice or the dogs, the black cat refutes the claims of the other mother and her minions, establishing the truth and revealing the sinister plot unfolding in the background. It acts as a guide but also a friend, which Coraline learns to love and appreciate despite its avoidant nature. Contrary to the beldam, who hides behind a mask, the cat shows its real nature in front of the little girl. As a cat, it is secure in its identity as a feline, and it loves Coraline enough to tell her the truth, as ugly and unpleasant as it may sound. It never hid its intentions or convictions, when Coraline asked for its name, it simply replied that cats do not have names like humans do, because they do not need them to recognize one another.

The symbolism and the perception of cats, specifically black cats, have varied through time and place. Seen both as a good and a bad omen throughout civilizations, it was also believed to be intermediates between the world living and the world of the dead. Thus, it always has been associated with the supernatural, which comes back as a common symbol in gothic and horror genre in general. A direction that Gaiman has taken in the portrayal of the

feline companion for his young protagonist. The cat in *Coraline* is able to freely travel between the two worlds, knowing the secret exits that even the other mother is unaware of, so much that it bothered her and actively tried to stop it, with no success. Just like in mythology, it is the bridge between the two realms, and in the novel, the real world and the other world, as it offered guidance for Coraline in both realms. Additionally, it was both a sign of good and bad luck, as it was a benediction for Coraline for one hand, it was a curse for the other mother, whose own world that she has crafted herself is no secret for the feline.

Furthermore, it has been recently proven that cats, unlike their canine counterparts, has not changed their DNA when they have been domesticated by humans (Cameron-Beaumont et al 363). In the novel, the black cat is capable of seeing through the beldam's lies, just like it is capable to see through the darkness. While on one hand, the talking dogs have provided Coraline with initial details on the world she has entered, their claims are not only limited, but also far from reality and dangerously misleading, as their main mission is to appeal to Coraline so she is tempted to stay there forever. The cat, on the other hand, stays proper to itself and its identity as a cat, it gives Coraline enough space to think and make conclusions on her own, only offering her wisdom and help when she needs it. Unlike the other mother, who has tried to manipulate Coraline and shape her identity however she wishes, the cat, by its strong presence and attachment to its own identity, encourages her to be herself, stand her ground, and find her own path. It teaches her to not take the statements presented to her as the absolute truth, as there is always a possibility that they could have been changed and altered to fit a determined narrative.

Another way magic is manifested in Neil Gaiman's story are the magical artefact used by Coraline in order to defeat the monstrous other mother, most specifically the stone with a hole in it, given to her by misses Spink and Forcible. A common fairy tale and fantasy trope, it is an object with supernatural properties given to the hero or heroine of the story, which allow

them to successfully carry out their mission. The stone with a hole in it helps Coraline identify the location of the souls of the dead children as well as her parents, all taken away and hidden by the beldam. Acting like the lighthouse in a dark and stormy night at sea, Coraline heavily relies on it, given at first by miss Spink, in an attempt to protect her from whatever she saw in the cup. In the real world, specifically in European popular beliefs, it is known under several names: the hag stone, the witch's stone, or the serpent egg, among others. It is thought to protect against evil spirits, fairies and witches. In the novel, it reveals the truth and helps Coraline see in the dark. Just like Vasilisa got the magical *Motanka* doll that helped her in her quest to retrieve fire from the Baba Yaga, Coraline used that magic stone to win against the other mother at her exploration game. Furthermore, in British mythology, most specifically in the city of Hastings, it is said that one is cursed to never leave the city and always come back to it, the only way for a person to break free from the curse is to use a hag stone ("Crowley's Curse"). Just like how Coraline seeks to get out of the world of the beldam. Neil Gaiman thus used real folktales inspiration for his novel, further enriching his story's own lore, on top of already existing and heavy fairy tale tropes.

The use of magic and magical elements is an important part of the *Coraline* novella, as it is both a blessing and a curse, the magic the beldam uses to trap her preys in this uncanny nearly identical world, a world that she has complete power over. However, Coraline still manages to counter her, as throughout her story, she ran with several magical creatures and objects alike that helped her get her defeat the evil woman. The magic is a double-edged sword that is not to be feared, as it is only a tool. It may be used for evil, like it is the case for the other mother, but by it also has played in Coraline's favour, thus defeating the beldam at her own game. The use of magic in the fairy tale, and by extension, *Coraline*, is for a specific set of purposes. Not only it is exciting for the younger audience, but it also comforted them, assuring them that the scary events and elements depicted in the story are not real, and even if

it was the case, they have nothing to fear, as it can be defeated. Thus, it allows them to distance themselves from it and properly enjoy it and learn from it (Benediktsdottir 5). Like numerous fairy tales, the magical elements depicted in *Coraline* hold strong symbolic significance, and allows for endless possibilities and opportunities that transcends reality, as it was restricted only by one's imagination. The message is that the rules of the world are not bendable, no matter how fantastical it is, yet, wits, empathy and bravery are advantages that no amount of evil can defeat. These values are what defines real strength, enabling anyone to overcome the greatest hardships.

2) Morals and Didactics

Morals are one of fairy tales' key features. At first seen as senseless tales, they soon have gained more popularity as helpful tool for the children's development of their personalities and identities. Furthermore, the simple and symbolic nature of fairy tales often leaves place for imagination and a large field for interpretation, making it malleable and prone to modification, change and enrichment. However, as they are recorded in written form, the fairy tale lost an important part of its personality and function. Because while times have changed, most of those tales has not. In other words, they still include outdated values that may do more harm than good to their audience. The most important one of these lessons are the implementation of unhealthy gender stereotypes, specifically when targeted for young female readers and listeners. Because they emphasize on the importance of innocence and passiveness, instead of taking matters into their own hands and facing their own issues. They are instead told to wait for someone else to do it for them, preferably a handsome prince in shining armour that will come and save the day. These morals are not only unrealistic but also unhealthy message that encourages overdependence and passiveness.

As it is the tradition in most fairy tales, specifically those collected and written down starting from the nineteenth century, a restricted version of femininity is showcased. Being put into a limited set of portrayals, women and girls are either active and evil, or passive and virtuous, as the latter is seen as the ideal model for femininity. The heroine's natural good qualities are enough to keep her out of danger, and that everything will turn out alright if she strictly follows rules and conventions imposed to her by society. It is assured to her that someone will come to her rescue and that she will live happily ever after those unfortunate circumstances. These messages are harmful and dangerous, as it encourages young girls to tolerate abuse and never stand up for themselves which results in overdependence, low self-esteem and the inability to respond and correctly react to the changes that are happening around them. On top of that, the set of high expectations set to them only causes disappointment and unhappiness.

Coraline, as a heroine, is nowhere near the virtue of famous tales' female main characters. She is a flawed little girl; she is not the well behaved and patient Cinderella or Snow White. She is capricious, picky and stubborn and does not always listen to her parents, similar to a most little girls her age. However, she is also kind, curious and clever. Because Neil Gaiman has initially written it for both of his daughters when they were little (Gaiman 230), he has made sure to write a heroine that was relatable and realistic for his readers to identify with, to root for and learn from. Her journey of self-discovery and clash with the other mother help her grow and learn quite a lot about herself and the people around her; making her more empathetic and observant. Having learnt from her adventure in that bizarre and terrifying world, the defiant and fun little girl that the reader meets at the beginning of the story got out of it as more mature, understanding and more eager to try out new things. Contrary to other fairytales main characters, she does not get her 'happily ever after'. Although she gets a return to normality, her future is still unsure, as she has a new city and a

new school year to face and explore. However, she knows she is going to be alright, whatever may come, she would be brave enough to face it.

From even before the novel's beginning, Gaiman introduces a quote as an epigraph from the author, journalist and poet G. K. Chesterton that says: "Fairy tales are more than true, not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten" (10). That quote encapsulates the spirit of *Coraline* as a novel, as it shows and enhances the importance of the of fairy tales in children's literature. Making sure to include a happy ending despite all the horrors and the madness that are present in the book, hope always remains, which gives Coraline enough strength to face the beldam. The false nature of the fairytales is not to be taken literally, but it is meant to go beyond its literal meaning, allowing the readers to compare the events depicted with real life problems, in order to solve them adequately. As the beldam can be interpreted as anything and everything, depending on each individual, any fear or anxiety can be painted through the character. Gaiman shows through his story *Coraline* that any beldam can be defeated, no matter how big, powerful or scary she is. In order to defeat any fear, one must explore it, understand it, and face it directly, instead of ignoring it, or hiding it behind a door barricaded by a red bricked wall. On the contrary, that will only make it come out stronger than ever, in the most frightening of forms.

Bravery and facing one's fears is a recurring theme that is present throughout the novel. It is shown with Coraline's anecdote with her father, when they have gone on a hike before running across a nest of wasps. As her father is standing there being stung, giving his daughter additional time to run, it is only when he went back there to fetch his glasses, knowing the wasps would be there, that Coraline saw it as an act of bravery. As she has stated: "When you're scared but you still do it anyway, *that's* brave" (Gaiman 85). Her father acting despite his fear is an example that she follows throughout her adventure, as her love for her parents was bigger than her fear of the beldam, she knows they would have done the same

for her. This does not mean Coraline is not scared while facing the beldam. It is the contrary, she is not shown to be fearless, she was scared, extremely scared, terrified in fact. Each of her encounters with the beldam, she has made the greatest efforts for her terror to be concealed, as she kept repeating the phrases: “I will be brave, thought Coraline. No, I am brave” (Gaiman 88), like a mantra. And brave she is indeed, despite her loneliness and despair, and with the help of her new friends, she manages to overcome the obstacles and dangers of the other world, making her come out of it alive and triumphant. She shows bravery despite her fear, because the only way to defeat the dragon, is to face it, even scared.

Coraline is an independent heroine, as early as the story started, she is introduced as a curious and adventurous child, desiring individuality and identification from the masses. It is also important to mention that she does not defeat the beldam alone, as Gaiman stands in the middle of his discourse of the female representation of his heroine. *Coraline* does not encourage over independence, yet it also teaches that it is okay to ask for help from one’s loved ones. The black cat, misses Spink and Forcible, the ghosts of the dead children, her parents, and even creatures from the realm of the other world, all guided her through that new realm that her brain could not immediately understand. They regularly provide her with wisdom, moral support and practical help she needs when solving the mysteries imposed by the beldam, and she helps them in return. *Coraline* thus teaches that just like it is okay to be afraid, there is also nothing wrong with asking for help, as one’s loved ones will always be there. Because their support is the principle driving force when facing hardships, as human beings have always thrived by belonging in communities for a reason.

Her journey with the beldam permits her to reaffirm her identity, she is Coraline Jones, a little girl that is small for her age, she is curious and loves exploring, which turns out to be the reason of her survival. Her curiosity, despite it being the catalyst for her story, is also the very same reason that causes the rescue of three little kids’ souls, as well as her own. At the

same time, she has put an end to the terrible reign of an entity whose origin or motivations are both unknown. The reintroduction of gothic and horrific imagery only makes the message of the novella stronger, further emphasizing the message on confronting one's shadows. On top of the closely related fairy tale tropes, the mixture of both allows to vehiculate the message that evil exists and is everywhere even if it does not take the form of frightening witches or ogres with button eyes. Evil, however, is not invincible, as it only takes courage and wits to defeat it. Because wherever there is darkness, it means that there is also light. Fear is not the antonym of courage; it is an inherent part of it. Because, fear is a natural human emotion that should be faced instead of being avoided. *Coraline* is thus an important book, that teaches the youth what real strength is: to stand up and accept the fear, to look at it directly in its black button eyes, instead of running away from it.

The fairy tale elements in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002) allows a return to older traditional folk storytelling, utilising these millennial years old archetypes, to portray a familiar sentiment to his readers, regardless of age. It takes them back into infancy with all what it may bring with it in terms of feelings and memories. Fairy tales are everywhere, and introducing them in a story permits to make a bridge between the author and his or her readers and install an atmosphere of magic, wonder and imagination. However, by adding gothic traits into it as well, this familiarity was exploited to turn it into the uncanny, thus, the familiar and safe cocoon of the childhood home no longer was the case. It also allows for reintegrating the place of fear as an effective vector for themes and emotions back into the fairy tale. Just like Snow White has had to flee into the woods and face its dangers, Coraline has had to face her own challenge as a new classic fairy tale heroine. Her story takes her in a journey in which she, as well as the readers will learn more about the world surrounding them, gain more experience, as well as reaffirm their identities as individuals. *Coraline* is not only scary, as it

is also imaginative, enchanting and inspiring, just like what the Grimm brothers have written and collected in their 1820 *Children and Household Tales*.

B. The Gothic Elements of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

As stated previously, Gaiman also makes use of gothic tropes on top of fairy tales' ones. By doing that, he goes back to the roots of several traditional fairy tales as told in the nineteenth century, by incorporating traditional gothic folklore and aesthetic back into his story. Utilizing terror in its rawest form, and portraying ancestral and universal fears, he makes use of what Freud called *das unheimlich*. Translated in English as the uncanny, it is the fear of the familiar becoming unfamiliar, the once safe and regular ordered matters suddenly not making sense, becoming abject parodies of what they once were. This duality is the reason behind the discomfort. That is the essence of the Gothic genre, as the uncanny is the dominant emotion that drives the plot forwards, from its beginning to its end. Coraline as well the readers are faced with the most primitive of fears: the lurking danger of unseen predators, an uncanny nearly identical location that was both welcoming and hostile.

Additionally, a timeless and universal fear is incorporated by Neil Gaiman, as it is still relevant throughout place and time, no matter the progress that humanity is able to reach: the fear of the unknown, present and easily noticed throughout all the novel. While Gaiman's writing style is simple and concise, often incorporating humour in it, which is ideal for children and young adult literature, it is also a very gothic style of writing. As he minimizes the details, for the sake of simplicity of comprehension, he voluntarily keeps certain elements in the dark, so the readers, along with Coraline, will be in the obscurity, both literally and figuratively, until he reveals the nature of the danger when needed. As H. P. Lovecraft has stated: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind

of fear is the fear of the unknown”

1) The Double and Button Eyes

The first motif that struck in term of horrific aesthetic, as well as being what made the beldam iconically scary, is the presence of the button eyes on the uncanny nearly identical double of Coraline’s mother. This combination is among the reasons that causes that sentiment of uneasiness even before the real intentions of the other mother are revealed and brought into the light, the sentiment that something may be concealed from the little girl. Other than few other details that she notices differing from her reality, the other world is almost as similar as Coraline’s. It is more polished, more colourful and more interesting than the original, and yet, it is the difference between them that made it deeply unsettling. The big black button eyes as well as the double are the start of an uncomfortable feeling of dread for Coraline. The other mother initially comes across as gentle and welcoming, telling Coraline that everyone has another mother. The little girl is then reminded of her fears again, coming back to the surface, when she is offered to have the same buttons sewn to her eyes. It is the moment when her worries are confirmed. The black button eyes are not only present in the other mother’s appearance but it is a signature symbol that belongs to her other world, a world of death, fear and anxiety. They thus become the symbol of an imminent and looming threat that is looking for the slightest opening in order to exploit it and successfully trap her victims in her spiderweb.

Following the definition of the *unheimlich* as provided by Sigmund Freud, it can be defined under two levels of meaning. In German, the word *heimlich* means both familiar but also concealed, the *unheimlich* is thus the sentiment of fear resulting in something familiar becoming unfamiliar, and the hidden coming to the light (Jackson 38). It is thus, the

combination of both, that was behind fear and discomfort. The discovery of something concealed in a homely setting; a place that should normally be under complete control; yet it still holds several secrets, and thus suddenly it no longer belongs to the realm of the known. The absence of safety is what creates the sentiment of the fear in the first place, because it is the emotion responsible for human survival. Activated when confronted with danger, it is the natural reaction to an unknown situation, since it is not known whether it is dangerous or not, thus resulting in avoidance, rejection and othering, as a way to keep one's self from harm. Neil Gaiman makes use of this basic source of terror through different aspects of his novel, while keeping it at the most basic and primordial level.

Starting with the motif of the button eyes, it is closely related to the concept of the gaze. It is important to be considered in order to understand the significance of this symbol used by Neil Gaiman, as well as the reason why it is chosen by him as the centrepiece of his novel. It holds indeed a special position, as the eyes are known to be the windows of the soul, the gaze goes beyond the simple action to see. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, to gaze is "to fix the eyes in a steady intent look often with eagerness or studious attention". Wherever Coraline has gone in the other world, and even in her own, the cold stare of the other mother is always felt behind her, as if she has eyes everywhere. Later, it is revealed that she uses big black rats with crimson red eyes to watch Coraline's whereabouts. The absence of eyes in itself suggests ulterior motives, hidden behind those shiny black button eyes, similar to a mask that conceals one's true self and intentions. If coupled with the definition of the uncanny, the symbol of the button eyes takes a stronger meaning. Instead of Coraline's mother's usual warm hazel eyes, she is faced with cold black voids in the forms of buttons, whose emotions are hard to read and decipher. Whether she is happy or angry, those so-called eyes never change. Most of the time, they are described in the novel as cold and inexpressive, like a wall separating Coraline from the other mother's real self. The little girl never knows of

her true state of being, accentuating the threat of her presence, because she does not know what to expect from her. The other mother, as the monster that she is, is unpredictable, and often manipulates reality to fit her interests, that grey zone in knowledge is the source of the fear in the story. For the readers, they are in the dark as much as Coraline when confronting the other mother, making the danger of her presence -and absence- even greater.

Furthermore, the button eyes, in addition to being the central point of abnormality in the middle of what is initially perceived as normality, is reminiscent of early childhood memories. Buttons, especially used as eyes, are repeatedly found in dolls and stuffed animals. They serve as a double indicator of homely feelings turned unhomely, which explain the fear of several children, even adults, of their own toys, plushies, dolls, or anything remotely human-looking but deprived of life. Also known as *Pediophobia*, it is a fear that is closely related to the concept of the uncanny valley, in other words, the fear of human like objects, such as robots. The unsettling feeling related to them becomes more pronounced the more realistic and human they look. The fear can also be explained due to the certain beliefs saying that dolls, puppets and similar inanimate objects can be inhabited by demons and other evil entities. Additionally, Freud has mentioned the uncanny can be the result of one's deepest desires coming to the surface ("Understanding Psycho" 8:46-9:05), the fear of dolls can thus also be the result of the wish of numerous children to see their toys come to life and play with them. Similarly, Coraline initially has seen in the other mother the personification of her deepest wishes: for her parents to pay more attention to her, for their cooking to no longer be experimental recipes, and for the world to never be boring ever again. The other mother is thus her biggest dream that has turned into a nightmare. The initial awe she feels quickly fades away, she only then realizes how wrong the whole situation is, when she is confronted with the danger of that new reality.

This element combined with the concept of the evil double is there to reinforce it and increase it. Also known as the *doppelgänger*, it is the other recurring horrific element that makes *Coraline* feel so uncanny and uncomfortable. It is present not only in the character of the beldam, but also the world surrounding her, a nearly identical copy of her own realm. The concept of the double is a recurring motif in the folklore of several cultures across the world, later integrated into the gothic fiction. It has witnessed popularity and interest and has been used by several gothic authors such as Edgar Allan Poe. The concept of the evil double continues to fascinate writers, artists and readers alike. While the concept of the monstrous is to use the other as outlets for internal fears, projected into what is usually perceived as monstrous, the concept of the double comes up as a contradiction. Because the fear is not projected in the other, but in the self. It is the definition of the uncanny in its purest form, the fear of the unfamiliar in a familiar setting, since the self happens to be the most known. After all, what would be scarier for a child than to find out his or her own mother had been replaced by an evil twin that is pretending to be her. A similar phenomenon that is clinically observed is the Capgras Syndrome. It is a mental condition where patients are convinced that their relatives are imposters impersonating the identity of their loved ones for an unforeseen evil scheme. The human brain naturally labels known matters, and especially faces, -so much it can recognize them where there is none- storing them in the memory as either known, thus safe, or unknown, thus unsafe. The disturbance between the two, like when it is caused by an illness, creates cognitive dissonance, because it does not feel security anymore even in the dearest and most familiar faces. This shows the persistence of the motif of the uncanny, taking over even in the sight of the self, because the brain simply cannot accept this contradiction and thus labels it as dangerous.

After all, the whole origin of the fear itself, is the fear of the unknown, situations that are yet to be explored are naturally more challenging to the brain to process because it does

not have any prior experience with it. The fear of the uncanny on the other hand is the contrary, finding discomfort in the familiar is deeply unsettling, as it creates a contradiction that normally should not take place. This opposition in concepts and the contradiction in the established knowledge for the brain is the source behind the sentiment of the uncanny. As fear is the natural reaction to an unknown situation, the one related to a well-known situation makes the sentiment of anxiety even greater. When what is once considered as safe no longer is, it means that nowhere else is out of harm. In other words, danger is everywhere, and nothing is to be trusted, not even what is thought to be one's own home. This combination used by Gaiman allows for a constant state of worry, even when no one is around, the cold stare of the beldam can still be felt in the back of his main protagonist. As nothing makes sense anymore, Coraline is in total darkness, her only resort is to explore it to look for possible answers. That magical and uncanny place is not only her enemy but it also has the potential to become her ally if she gets to know it better. It allows her to shake off that feeling of dread, even momentarily, in order to look for practical ways to defeat the beldam and get out of it alive, regardless what her brain might or might not perceive as normal.

2) The Abject and Grotesque

The grotesque and abject are two concepts that are closely related to one another, and that are of paramount importance in what defined gothic and horror literature and media. While the grotesque is concerned with what is seen as ugly, bizarre, distorted and even comically looking, expressing the flawed human existence, inspired by artworks and sculptures of medieval times (Viljoen); the abject is the physical reaction of horror and terror that come with the sight of those modifications, mostly related to human fears related to their own body and decay in mortality (Creed,70). Similarly to how it is tackled in the first part about the monstrous mother, it is important to explore the concept of the monstrous through

gothic lenses as well, as it is an equally important part that of the novel that juxtaposes itself with the fairy tale part of the story. In gothic literature and fiction, the concepts of the grotesque and abject are related to the play on the disgust and aversion towards what is regarded as inhuman. It consists in personifying fears outside the realm of the human onto the world of the gothic, which leads to the othering of features, aspects and facets of the human body regarded as monstrous. This results in them being regarded as unnatural, and thus rejected, such as blood, injuries and other bodily fluids that invokes the sentiment of disgust and discomfort. The two concepts are close to the concept of the monstrous, as what defines a monster is based on how inhumane it is, while also keeping a part of humanity. The monster is thus the inhumane portrayal of parts of mankind that are rejected and actively avoided. As it is not only proper to gothic fiction, but it is used extensively in horrific related settings, they are used to reflect on things that humanity had chosen to ignore, such as diseases, physical disabilities, injuries, as well as death itself. Because being confronted with the monstrous, the grotesque and the abject, is to be confronted with one's own humanity, with its weaknesses and inevitable demise.

Starting with the abject, it is defined by Julia Kristeva in her 1980 book *Powers of Horror*, as: "That which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules...that which 'disturbs identity, system, rules and order'" (Creed 68). In other words, it is directly linked to the concept of transgression, seen through the horror inside one's own body, such as blood, saliva and vomit. The collapse of the order is seen as the transgression of what is regarded as a healthy body, the sight of injuries or any flaw is seen as the sign of danger or illness. It is an abnormal situation that requires medical attention or else, it becomes a threat to one's own life. Though major mutilation and graphic injuries are not shown in the novel, since it is targeted to a young audience, Neil Gaiman utilizes both concepts throughout his story in several ways. As little gruesome details that makes the skin crawl is the signature style of

several gothic novels and stories, *Coraline* is no exception, seen mostly through the other mother, who is the first vector of the abject. Her appearance and behaviour alone, as well as the world she has created is a reflection of her twisted nature. Instances of the use of the abject consists in her regularly swallowing and spitting the old black key of the drawing room door in front of Coraline: the abject seen through saliva and vomit. Throughout her adventure in the land of the bizarre and button eyes, this is an instance where she is forced to look at her own humane condition through looking at the abject right in its cold button eyes. The other mother swallowing and regurgitating the key at will, symbolizes Coraline's own anxieties of being trapped and eaten, as the literal only mean of her survival is at the other mother's hands, now deep in her stomach. The presence, and absence of it, reminds Coraline of the possibility, or impossibility, of her survival, making her aware of the fragile state of her condition: her inevitable mortality. The reminiscence becomes stronger when reminded of the corpse-like appearance of the beldam, symbolizing death itself.

Other uses of the concept of the abject consists in mutilations. Although blood and gore scenes are not shown in the novel, for it is still a children's book, it is seen through the other mother's button eyes which summons a deep sentiment of discomfort. It is not only seen in the inhabitants of the other world, but also since Coraline may have potentially received the same fate. Just by its description, the process of imagining the steps leading to someone having buttons sawn to their eyes is deeply unsettling. As specific images, sensations and emotions may come in mind, the reader put themselves in the shoes of whoever goes through it, which emphasizes that feeling of helplessness and uncanny tenfold. After all, imagination and empathy are humanity's greatest strengths. However, these same strengths may turn into its greatest weaknesses, like it is seen in this case.

Another instance of mutilation is the disembodied hand that has chased Coraline beyond the other world into her own, despite the fact that she has thought she has defeated the

beldam. Her hand, as formerly mentioned, holds strong symbolism in its appearance, its long pale clawlike fingers with crimson sharp nails, which were the embodiment and the ultimate symbol of a predatory entity. Her return makes Coraline's fears resurface, when she has thought everything was over. The fear of the disembodiment is related to the fear of disability, as it is normally perceived as a weakness, in this case however, it is shown as a sign that the danger is not gone yet, that what normally harms human beings and weakens them is not the case for the beldam. This absence of weakness is what makes it frightening, in addition to the pain felt while seeing a severed hand moving. Its case is similar to the fear related to walking corpses or zombies, as they are in the threshold between life and death, this sense of ambiguity is what creates the rejection, thus the othering. Because it is neither dead nor alive, but yet it is both at the same time ("Julia Kristeva's *Power of Horror*" 1:43-2:45).

Continuing with the aspect of the corpse, it is, according to Julia Kristeva, the ultimate form of the abject, since it reminds humanity of its own inevitable death and return to the earth. This grim reminder is seen through the presence of insects throughout the story, specifically spiders, that were everywhere, much to Coraline's distaste. It is also through the symbol of the beetles, as the other mother has a sealed plastic bag full of live ones, that she keeps in a shopping bag, regularly taking few bites from it. The beetles and insects in general, hold a special status in ancient civilizations, they represent death, decay as well as the continuous circle of suffering in life. In the case of the beetles in *Coraline*, they are seen constantly trying to escape the plastic bag, but with no success, forever trapped in the other mother's grip, an eternal suffering that might be ended in death, devoured by the beldam. In this sense, some cultures around the world believe that insects such as butterflies, dragonflies or beetles, are the souls of the deceased, coming back in another form to check on their loved ones. The beetles featured in the novel can be the captured souls of the other mother's previous victims, that she keeps sealed away in a plastic bag, feasting on them and their

despair to her own pleasure. Either way, the symbolism and the resonance with the theme of mortality and human decay is present, a reality that Coraline has to face, if she does not want to end up like those beetles. Another instance of showing and facing with death without mentioning it, is the dead spider the size of a small cat in the cast-iron bath. Equally a symbol of impending doom and mortality, the beldam uses these instances to destabilize Coraline, since it portrays another fear, that she shares with everyone else on earth in addition to her fear of spiders, which is the fear of death. As a child, it is not easy to accept one's own inevitable demise, as it is an age where children barely understand how life works, let alone what happens after it. The dead spider in the cast-iron bath represents Coraline's loss of innocence, as she comes to terms with her weaknesses and condition as a human being. The dead spider is a warning to Coraline, a symbol of the fate waiting for her if she lost the exploration game to the beldam, thus her rejection of it is a symbol of the rejection of the beldam.

The next concept complimentary to the abject is the grotesque, which is also equally as present, and closely connected to it. It is seen through the creatures that are after Coraline by order of the beldam. Gruesome physical abnormalities, comically disproportionate bodies as well as barely human-looking entities that are at her service, in order to bring the little girl to her at all cost. The beldam uses her puppets to put traps throughout the lie of a world she has fabricated, twisting and playing with Coraline's surrounding, in order to break her morals and spirits, and therefore exploit her weaknesses to deal the finishing blow, forcibly taking victory, and Coraline's life with it. She utilizes them to play with her emotions, to manipulate her into trusting her again. By trusting her own puppets, she preys on Coraline's empathy and kindness, to try to change her mind, manipulate her into accepting her poisoned apple, and finally break her with love. Additionally, her appearance becomes more and more grotesque as the story progresses, and by the end of it, she looked nothing like a human being anymore,

let alone Coraline's mother. By the time of the final confrontation with her happens, as described by Gaiman: "The other mother was huge-her head almost brushed the ceiling- and very pale, the colour of a spider's belly. Her hair writhed and twined about her head, and her teeth were sharp as knives..." (177). Her portrayal is not only that of a revenant figure, towering over the little girl, but she also becomes more beast-like, as imageries of snakes and spiders have become more pronounced.

The grotesque continues to be seen throughout the novel in other forms, which could be seen while she is going through the challenges of the other mother. The first instance is when inspecting the other misses Spink and Forcible's flat. While looking for clues to find the souls of the dead children, she stumbles upon the remains of what used to be the residence of the two women, as it is presented previously as a theatre where the shows go on forever, Coraline is now faced with a dark and cold memory of a once joyful place. It is dusty and mouldy, where she meets in the middle of what looked like a cocoon, a nameless miserable mass that barely looks like what used to be the Coraline's other neighbours and dogs. The confrontation she has with the half-formed creatures is not only visual, but also tactile, having to interact with it through touch, the disgust coming to further enhances fear. This is where the abject is also included in its core. They were described as follow:

They were things up there, hairless, jellyish. She thought they might once had faces, might even once have been dogs; but no dogs had wings like bats or could hang like spiders, like bats, upside down...It was grayish white, twice the size of Coraline herself, and it was stuck to the back wall like a slug...she saw that it was some kind of a sack, like a spider's egg case. It twitched in the light beam. Inside the sac was something that looked like a person, but a person with two heads, with

twice as many arms and legs it should have. The creature in the sack seemed horribly unformed and unfinished, as if two plasticine people had been warmed and rolled together, squashed and pressed into one thing. (Gaiman140-1)

Coupled with this description is the need to check with that thing, as this is how it was described. The visible discomfort further provided by Gaiman is also accentuated by the aftermath of this creepy encounter. Not only she has to physically interact with it, to retrieve the spirit of one of the children trapped in its grasp, it responds, by grabbing Coraline by the arm, “its fingernails scrapped her skin, but it was too slippery to grip and Coraline pulled away successfully. And then the eyes opened, four black button eyes glinting and staring down at her, and two voices that sounded like no voice that Coraline has ever heard began to speak to her” (143-4). This is only an early taste of the abominations that as she would meet, as the quests and challenges to defeat the evil double of her mother increases, and the deformities become more pronounced. With the description provided by Gaiman, the two concepts of the abject and grotesque merge with each other. The other misses Spink and Forcible are not only described as grey and white -the colour of death- they are also cold, like a corpse, a deformed entity that barely looks like anything human anymore. In fact, the entirety of the theatre, with its dark and damp atmosphere, just like its former inhabitants, can be seen as a living corpse. Though it no longer looks alive, it still keeps traces of a human presence, still moving despite the absence of life. These monstrous deformities are similar to the disembodied hand of the other mother. They are at the border of life and death. Despite being no longer there, they still exhibit life-like behaviours, fuelled by a desire to destroy and terrorize, following the orders of their master.

This sentiment continues on with the second encounter she has with the monstrous grotesque, it is when she is faced with what remains of her other father. While she experiences disgust and fear with the other misses Spink and Forcible, she experiences the same amount of it, but that time coupled with pity. As she discovers his remains in a dark sealed trap, hoping to find more clues for her quest, she soon finds out it was an ambush set by the other mother. Even if it is only an extension from the other mother, it develops a conscience of its own, leading it to often blurt out pieces of information that turns to be useful to Coraline, against the other mother's wishes. The little girl is thus confronted in that instance not only to the frightening presence of a living corpse that moves in an inhumane fashion, she is also faced with the powers of the beldam, as well as her cruelty, displayed by locking the other father in a dark basement, tossed away like a broken toy no longer useful to her. He is doomed to follow her orders and capture Coraline, even if it goes against his own will. It is this duality that causes fear, not only in its monstrous appearance, but also in its intention, as both benevolent and ill willed. That encounter also showcases Coraline's bravery and creative thinking, an early rite of passage that would fuel her with enough strength to face the brain behind this whole spiderweb: The beldam herself.

3) Ghosts and Spectral Apparitions

Ghosts are an undisguisable part of the gothic folklore, figuring among the principal creatures that are omnipresent in most stories belonging to the genre as early as the time of its creation, such Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Mathew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), or Anne Radcliff's *Mysteries of Adolpho* (1794). Even before that, they are present in various folklores around the globe, all believing in the remaining of the soul in the realm of the living after death, leading a life of aimless wandering, or fierce vengeance against those who wronged them. In fiction in general, they can symbolize a variety of concepts, each author

using the archetype of the ghost to serve their story and vehiculate a message through a figure that was shall no longer feared, as it is only an unseen part of society. Most of the time; they are representations of the past. Thus, incorporating the ghost is also incorporating the past into stories, to recognise it and accept it, in order to let go of it and move on with the present. Just like the ghost, who enables to make peace with it, allowing his soul to pass on and leave the realm of the living.

Known under several appellations throughout the world such as ghosts, phantoms, or spirits, the figure of semi-transparent revenant figures that is able to walk through walls and make objects move on their own, are legion throughout the globe, a belief that has been present since the earliest civilizations. From several of those beliefs, certain images of the venging spirits come to mind. Ghosts are common representation of spectres across cultures, with varying degrees depending on the regions but also the epochs. It is used in all genres alike, whether it is for comedy, tragedy mystery, adventures, or horror, the figure of the ghost is not only vector of horrific situations, it can also be seen as more positive and humane figure. Their role in the plot usually consists of warning the characters of an imminent danger, of a secret that ought to be revealed. However, the concept of the ghost in recent media was extensively explored through all of its aspects. In gothic literature, it is used in the forms that were mentioned before. The figure of the ghost is used for both literal and metaphorical use. The first one scares the reader due to the typical nature of the spectre and its place in the folklore. The second use for it, is when its portrayal represents issues that the author wants to point out and highlight. This becomes more relevant if it concerns matters that are not easy to tackle, such as the case of the female ghost in Victorian gothic literature, a vector that was used to talk about the oppression of women and the domestic abuse in the patriarchy society of nineteenth century England. The figure of the ghost thus becomes an outlet for silenced voices and marginalised casts of society. By addressing the problem through their characters,

it doubles its effect of fear and discomfort, forcing the audience to face problems that are overlooked, dismissed and denied by society.

That is the case with Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. The three ghosts are introduced when Coraline is punished by being thrown in the dim space inside the mirror by the other mother. In that cold and tight space, this is where she meets them, as they come to her in the form of voices, before she learns that they are the spectres of three children, two girls and one boy. The boy is not sure of what his gender is, as he has faint memories of him wearing dresses, which was a common practise in the pre early twentieth century Anglo-Saxon world. The other two girls were introduced as speaking different accents each, from these little details. It can be deducted that each one of them come from a different epoch in history, reinforcing the mystery around the beldam's real age and origin. They are described as barely visible, her first contact with them is tactile before being visual and auditory, as she "felt for all the world like somebody's cheek and lips, small and cold, and a voice whispering in her ear, 'Hush! And shush! Say nothing, for the beldam might be listening!'" (Gaiman 117), and as they are telling Coraline their stories, she manages to see their silhouettes, even if they are barely there, Gaiman describes them as: "Three shapes, each as faint and pale as the moon, in the daytime sky. They were the shapes of children about her own size" (Gaiman118).

Just like the black cat, they serve as companions for Coraline, as well as informers and sentinels, as it is common for the archetype of the ghost. As they are first introduced, they are the ones that established the truth about the beldam, her evil scheme, and the fate that is awaiting Coraline if she is ever to be fooled by her. They came to Coraline in a time when she is in complete darkness, it can be interpreted that there is nothing frightening in the darkness, and that on the contrary, friends can be met there as well. While the beldam is met in the light and warmth of the girl's own home (even if it was not her real one), the ghosts of the children, however, are met in the cold darkness behind the mirror, this is where the truth is revealed to

Coraline about the other mother. The spectral apparitions in that case, unlike the uncanny or the grotesque, are friendly figures. Far from the usual portrayal of ghosts, they are portrayed as lost souls, lost even during their life, even more in their death. They only need guidance and help, which Coraline helps to provide, by acknowledging them, listening to them, and being present for them. As she actively searches and succeeds to get their souls back, she offers them a way out of that fake mirrored world so their souls can be free.

The ghosts that appear to Coraline are the reflection of their own state as children, since they have been lured away into the beldam's realm in their lifetimes. They have been tricked by the evil woman, who made them into their current state. The once cheerful and energetic children, with all their life ahead of them, are now barely visible visions, empty shells of what they once have been, so much that Coraline can barely feel their presence. Only their voices and occasional touches are there, but other than that, they are fading memories on the verge of oblivion. If it was not for Coraline accidentally stumbling upon their souls behind the mirrors, they would have stayed trapped there for eternity. In this sense they represent the souls of all the children that are or have been victims of abuse. They are the example of what would happen if the devouring mother won, resulting in barely visible fragmented souls, whose identity, voice and presence is barely noticed. They are the perfect example of the "children should be seen, not heard" mentality. In *Coraline's* case, they do not only represent the past, they represent the issue on how persistent the issue of child abuse is, regardless of the time. As children, they immediately have taken the other mother's words as absolute. She is a grown up after all, she knows better, and they have paid the price of their naivety with their lives and beyond. Even as faint as they are to Coraline, she still makes sure for them to be seen and heard, even if this is the last thing they may do before they disappear forever. They do not want Coraline to meet the same demise as they did, and thus they actively seek to help her with the little power they hold.

At the end of the story, when Coraline successfully retrieves back the souls of the children, on the first night she comes back home, she sees them in her dreams, having a picnic together, playing and laughing with her until dusk, most likely the first time in years, perhaps centuries. It is also the instance where their real appearances are seen to be restored, a sign that their identities and voices are found again. Few details are to be noted, as one of the girls was described to have butterfly-like wings, and a circlet in her hair, reminiscent of an angelic figure. The symbolism of the wings can mean several things, as they are butterfly wings, it can be seen as a symbol of rebirth, from the form of a caterpillar, from being being hidden inside a cocoon, before turning into a butterfly. Wings are also a symbol for freedom, it symbolizes the so-waited liberation from the claws of the beldam, from which they were prisoners of, even beyond death. The picnic they have with Coraline in her dream is the celebration of the return to normalcy but also of a new beginning for them. It is common belief that the spirits of the deceased visit their living relatives one last time before death, especially in their dreams, or in the form of insects, such as butterflies. On top of that they are lastly seen by Coraline on a bridge over a small river, which is a common symbol of the separation between the land of the living and the land of the dead. It can be concluded that the children made sure to visit Coraline one last time, to thank her for all what she has done for them, and also to bid her farewell, as they are seen scared and fearful while doing so, not knowing what was ahead of them. This dream proves to Coraline that she has accomplished her task to save the children, even if it is not over yet, she is reassured that her new friends are free and happy, and more importantly alive and not forgotten of their identities even beyond the grave.

Conclusion

As it has been seen previously, the fairy tale and gothic elements in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* overlapped with each other, the uncanny sharing the same stage as the marvellous, while the Abject and Monstrous Grotesque are also present inside well-known archetypal fairy tale characters. The return of the terror in this tale is important to implement the principal theme of the novel: fears and how to overcome them, since it is a necessary part of the individual's development. It is done so the readers could safely and comfortably face them from a distance, creating an outlet for their deepest anxieties, while also offering an entertaining story that ends well for its protagonist. The use of magical elements allows them to distance themselves from the story, as well as link the events with their own daily life and thus enables them to better face and overcome hardships (Visikoknox and English 77). The merging of the fairy tale and gothic is beneficiary for readers of all ages in both genres. As fairy tales are a universal form of narration, familiarized with since infancy; short, and straightforward, this simplicity gives it a potential that is only limited by the author's imagination. Additionally, when coupled with the gothic horror, fairy tales offers a new range of possibilities, not only they are re-introduced into a new context, but it also reflects upon the place of each trope, giving each other a new dimension. Thus, both genres keep moving forward with innovation, despite being reminiscent of humanity's nostalgic past, as stated by Carina Hart.

Chapter 3

The Aesthetics and Beauty of Neil Gaiman's
Coraline:

Outline

Introduction

A. The Fairy Tale Intertextuality of *Coraline*

- 1) The Title
- 2) Allusions and Repetition
- 3) The Well

B. The Gothic Space of *Coraline*

- 1) The Drawing Room
- 2) The Mirrors
- 3) The Mist

Conclusion

Introduction

While the first two chapters focused on the in-depth analysis of the two genres and how they were portrayed in the novel, the third chapter will redirect its interest back on its surface level, the beauty and aesthetic part of *Coraline*. The place of beauty and aesthetics in literature is a subject that fascinates writers, critics and artists alike. While the mere definition of beauty varies and differ with time and place, since it lies within the eyes of its beholder, a proper definition of aesthetics is difficult to come up with, because it is associated with several equally indefinite terms: the sublime, the beautiful and the ugly. However, in literature, they are seen through the use of language, style, and figures of speech to deliver a visual experience to the readers, more than the characters or the story itself. It is the way that it is told, where and when it takes place and how words are used at the service of the author to create alternative realms. Here, the author is master, and it is for him or her to decide on what is beautiful and what is not, what is aesthetically pleasing and what is not, as he or she is not bound by the rules imposed by society. The aesthetics and setting, while not always the point of focus in most stories, also play an equally important role as the plot and characters. It is where the soul and identity of the novel is revealed, setting it apart from the rest of the world literature.

The beauty and aesthetic of both fairy tales and gothic stories may seem different at first glance, yet they happen to have similarities and common features, consisting of old castles, trapped princesses, and monstrous witches lurking in dark woods. Not only that, but the space in which most of the stories take place is significant in both mediums. The use of simple and minimal details in description, the liminality of the presence of two realms inside the story, that the main character hops from one to another, as well as the uncanny and sublime dichotomy interplay that is iconic to both of them contribute to the atmosphere and

strengthen the story's themes and motifs. Whether they take place in a castle, a cottage in the middle of an enchanted forest, or a small nameless village in a far-away mountain. Both genres' stories happen in a faraway location and epoch, which gives them an exotic and mystic dimension, taking the readers to a time where magic is believed to still have existed. As explained in the first chapter, the gothic and fairy tale share the same essence, and therefore the same aesthetic. The following chapter will discuss the aesthetics of *Coraline*, first through fairytale, then gothic lenses. While the fairy tale part will discuss the intertextual use of traditional tales, in terms of structure, motifs and symbols, the gothic part of this chapter will focus exclusively on the space and place in the story of *Coraline*, thus showcasing the duality and interconnectedness of both genres in Neil Gaiman's writings, exploring a world of dreams that turned out into a charming nightmare.

A. The Fairy Tale Intertextuality of *Coraline*

Neil Gaiman, as for the rest of his works, relies heavily on mythology and folklore to tell his stories, borrowing several elements, tropes and hidden references from popular tales of the past, fairy tales are therefore no exception. The most obvious example of its uses, as previously discussed in the second chapter, is the other mother, also known as the beldam. Not only it is the term used to refer to a witch, her behaviour and description is reminiscent of a shapeshifting fairy, taking the appearance of a loved one to take humans away into their realm. It is also the title of a John Keat's 1819 poem intitled *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, telling the encounter of a knight with a fair young lady, the young lady in question turns out to be a fairy, who takes advantage of young travellers to transport them into her world to then kill them. The poem itself is takes inspiration from an older ballad by the fifteenth century French poet Allain Chartier.

In addition to that, Neil Gaiman is also inspired from another folk tale, the story of two naughty children, who did so much mischief, their mother left them, leaving them for their other mother, with her eyes made out of glass. Inspiration is thus everywhere, and every author or artist use previously done work as an essence to produce their art from, whether it is explicitly or implicitly, this is what it is known as intertextuality. Intertextuality consists in making links and references to other texts. It is a common device used by modernists and post modernists writers, to add an additional layer of dept complexity and to build a bridge between writers, readers and texts. Fairy tales have been repeatedly been used by several writers in their stories through different stages and uses. Kevin Paul Smith (2007) lists eight level of fairy tale intertextuality, based on whether they are directly referenced or not. In *Coraline*, it is through the latter that the interplay of texts happened, as Neil Gaiman heavily takes inspiration and references much older popular tales, whether it is in the structure, tropes or style. The first part of this chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the fairy tale intertextuality of *Coraline* through the lenses of Paul Smith's level of intertextuality, in which the title, allusions and space, seen through the motif of the well, will be analysed.

1) The title

The title, *Coraline*, has nothing to do with any known fairy tales at first glance. Being the name of the main character, it is the French diminutive of the name Coral. It is a name Neil Gaiman thought he accidentally made up by mistyping the name of Caroline. He thought it sounded like somebody's name and wanted to find out what was her story, and so he followed the advice by Larry Niven that he should embrace his typing mistakes, thus, keeping it. It is only later that he discovered that it was an actual name, taken from the word Coral, and which is originally pronounced as *leen*, but Gaiman makes it so he pronounces *line* in

order for it to rhyme with the word *wine*. he also states that he likes the name because of its double meaning, something that is both beautiful and hidden. The name Coraline, in the modern-day society, specifically in English speaking countries, is little to unknown (Gaiman 234). This can be seen in the novel, where her name is practically never heard of and is most of the time confused with the name Caroline. It is regularly mispronounced by most of the characters outside of her family.

The usage of the main character's first name as the title is not a unique feature of the fairy tales. However, following the genre's reading of the novel, a link can be made when comparing it to the titles of other popular traditional tales of the past. An example of it is the tale of "Hansel and Gretel", from which Gaiman claims to have taken heavy inspiration from. In this matter, he states: "Coraline is a fairy tale in the same way that "Hansel and Gretel" is a fairy tale" (Gaiman 234). The two stories indeed share several common elements, mostly their horror, but also for the fact that both of them have children as protagonists, which their respective names are chosen as titles of their respective plots. In "Hansel and Gretel", the siblings' names are fairly common for the time, they are meant so that the readers easily identify with them, as they represent the everyman in society. That coupled with the fact that they are children, it makes them weaker and more vulnerable in comparison to the hardships and obstacles that they have to face, which duplicates the message regarding courage, kindness and resilience in the face of adversity in both stories. The of tale of "Hansel and Gretel" reflects on the wishes and fantasies of marginalized members of community against oppression of the powerful majority. Stories like that are a way to cope and for them to encourage themselves to think that anything is possible and that their dreams, as unrealistic as they can get, are realisable.

As stated earlier, most of the characters in the story never call her by her name, the times she is addressed correctly by her name are always significant to the story. The first time

this happens is by her crazy neighbour living in the flat upstairs of her own, stating that his rats mentioned she is in danger, but they keep saying her name the wrong way, according to him. It is followed then by him stating the mice have a message for Coraline, urging her not to go through the door, for she was great in danger. The following times this happens are with the other mother, and by the inhabitants of the other world. While her real neighbours always refer to her as Caroline, the ones in the other world never do, calling her by her proper name. When normally she should be content for her name to be pronounced correctly, she does not feel relief by that. Because she knows it is only a lie to keep her there for good, with no way out. The other crazy neighbour even explicitly states it, asking her why does she want to go back home where they cannot even pronounce her name correctly. Despite his claims, Coraline is not impressed and her ambition to come back home even grows stronger when she hears these statements.

However, at the end of the novel, her name is correctly pronounced in the real world, by her real crazy neighbour upstairs. It is when she herself called him by his proper name, learning it from misses Spink and Forcible. She learns that his name is Mr Bobo and that he has come from Eastern Europe. When she properly addresses him while trying to correct her own name, he repeats it slowly, so he can remember it next time they meet. It is then that Coraline realises she has never attempted to understand her neighbours to begin with, yet she has expected them to do the same for her. Her name and the way she is addressed are symbols for Coraline's own growth as a person, as she learns to accept others and respect them for who they are, she becomes more willing to understand them and listen their stories, no matter how true they are. Because at the end, the veracity of their claims does not matter as much as the bond she is willing to have with them. After all, that is the principal strength of a fairy tale, to unite over a shared interest for stories.

In this sense, the catalyst of Coraline's story is her dissatisfaction with her current life. Her name is the perfect embodiment of this spirit of independence and individuality contrasting with the dull and bland environment she lives in. Her name is the reflection of her individuality, as it is a rare name, even close to oblivion. The name of Coraline represents the still existing magic and bewildering fascination for the unknown in a modernized world where everything seems to have a scientific explanation. Coraline's journey through the other world only reaffirms her ambition and allows her to accept and reclaim the individuality she is seeking, her femininity, as well as her fears, and by extension, her own name. Neil Gaiman, similarly to "Hansel and Gretel", delivers a story where children are the centre of the story's focus, giving them voice and power. As they save the day using their wits, kindness and imagination, they highlight values that should not be abandoned in adulthood. The author also warns his readers against the dangers of appearances, to be careful of what to wish for, and to face one's fears for they are humanity's greatest enemy, but also its greatest strength. The name Coraline is thus the vessel for all the values, themes and messages that Neil Gaiman wants to convey in his novel

Because she is the sole reason why the story has started in the first place, the usage of Coraline's first name is to put the focus on her as character, as a child of her time, representing what living in the twenty first century is like, with its qualities as well as drawbacks. As it is a personal story for Neil Gaiman, he specifically has started it so he can tell an inspiring yet thrilling story to his daughters. Him writing *Coraline* is not only to give a fun story to his little girls, but also to every child in the world who happens to have come across with his writings, giving them a heroine that represents them and their struggles and passions. *Coraline* is thus a modern fairy tale, the natural successor to "Hansel and Gretel". It is a story where horror and magic are blended together into a single charming yet unnerving canvas, inviting the readers into that wicked yet colourful world, where they will still be

taught good morals.

2) Allusions and Repetition

Just like discussed in the second chapters, Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* holds in its core several elements common to most classical fairy tales, such as the infamous trope of the monstrous mother, the use of magic as well as the moral that the reader learns at the end of the story. In addition to the previously tackled title of the novel, *Coraline* is reminiscent of several classic fairy tales, as numerous other implicit allusions are to be found in the story. While they are in the form of subtle references or symbols, they may not directly refer to a specific tale, yet they target a specific area in the readers' common imagination. Because they may have read a similar tale in their childhood, it can differ from individual to another, yet the sentiment of familiarity, homeliness and paradoxically, discomfort, are there, as the author plays with several tropes and archetypes of the collective consciousness and imagination of the public. Those are references that speak volumes about the story, both on the conscious and unconscious levels, invoking tales and elements present in popular tales for hundreds or thousands of years. This process of integration creates a bridge between author and readers, as well as the past storytellers behind those very tales he references.

Allusions are, according to Kevin Paul Smith (2007), implicit references to famous tales, they can be made through specific levels (10). But whatever level they are, they have the power to take the reader back to more than one tale, because several of them hold specific aspects, whether it is in terms of names, symbols, or structure. An example of that is through the expression *once upon a time*. Although the book does not start by this iconic utterance, or any similar sentences, yet it participates in giving it its core fairy tale-like feel to it, on top of the other allusions present in the book. The time where the expression is indeed used, is not to

start the story, and it does not include Coraline's point of view. It is seen when talking about her neighbours, who were once actresses. Here, it is used to a comedic effect, a signature style of Neil Gaiman. Since the readers follows the point of view of Coraline, her neighbour's statement is not taken to heart, thinking they are probably joking with her, or that it has taken place ages ago, maybe they do not remember they have done it in the first place. Hence the choice of the expression, as it is never clear whether they are telling the truth or not, yet, it does not matter. Because Coraline herself is prone to telling crazy stories as well, her neighbours are the same way, strengthening the signature fantastic feeling to the novel.

Another example of subtle hints towards popular fairy tales and the way they are told, is when Coraline goes up to her father's study, writing a short story on his computer. She then types the following words: "CORALINE'S STORY. THERE WAS A GIRL HER NAME WAS APPLE. SHE USED TO DANCE A LOT. SHE DANCED AND DANCED UNTIL HER FEET TURNED INTO SOSSAJES THE END" (Gaiman 75). The story of Apple is a clear reminiscence of several older folk tales and fairy tales, especially those with a tragic ending. One specific tale that could come to the mind is the fate Snow White's step mother had suffered in the Grimm's version of the tale. Additionally, Neil Gaiman does not only use this as an allegory, but also to mirror and foreshadow what is about to happen later in the novel. The tale reflects Coraline's story itself, whose own pleasures and desires, have driven her to almost meet her own demise, but she does not know it yet at the time when she has written it. As she just has got back from the other world, she thinks she is now safe, and that her parents will come back home any minute. Except that they never have, she later discovers that they have been kidnapped by the other mother, and that the only way to get them back is to get rid of her.

Another use of allusions, which is of crucial importance in the novel, is the use of numbers and repetition. In traditional fairy tales and several similar sub genres of the folk

tales, numbers are used to create a specific recognizable rhythm, as they allow for easier memorization for storytellers and listeners alike, which as a result help them keep the tale alive through time. Additionally, they allow to create a rhythm that then be broken when a significant point of the story is reached, it is usually where the pace of the story will be broken, allowing for a new order. The number three most specifically, is a common number found and used as a repetition. Examples may include the tale of “The Three Little Pigs”, the three challenges in the story of “Rumpelstiltskin”, or the three attempts by which the evil stepmother manages to get Snow White killed (“The Power of Three”). The number three is indeed present in the novel, as it is in the Joneses family, composed of three members, they also have three neighbours, as well as there are three souls of the children that Coraline has to free from the other mother.

In *Coraline*, the numbers as well as the repetition of specific sentences are of major significance in the story and so is the presence of numbers and enumeration, which are an introduction to Coraline’s personality and love for exploration. It is mentioned that she spent the first two weeks since they moved into their new home to explore it, as she is shown to be determined to unravel all of its secrets. When she is bored on a rainy day and asked to count a specific number of things by her father, it is also a transition to the door of the drawing room, initially mentioned at the beginning of the novella. As she is required to count every blue item present in the house, as well as the number of windows and doors, she respectively found them to be by the number of one hundred and fifty-three, twenty-one and fourteen. Out of the fourteen doors, all of them open to somewhere in the house, except the door of the drawing room, which reduces them to the number thirteen. Except for the number of blues things, which is the multiplication of the number three, the total number of doors and windows are both repetitions of the number seven, which is a symbol for perfection. However, when omitting the door of the drawing room, the number of doors becomes thirteen, which is the

symbol of bad luck in several European cultures. It is an early sign that the house has a grim past, haunted by an ominous evil entity, waiting for the slightest mistakes to reveal herself to the light of the day.

Other than numbers, there are instances of repetition seen in the novel. When phrases or sentences are repeated, used for different purposes. The first time it happens is with the mice' song, which Coraline initially has seen in a dream. The second time she hears it gives her a sentiment of *déjà vu*, despite no longer remembering it. That occurrence leaves her confused and uncomfortable. It sets an early sentiment of dread and danger in the story, which gives the readers a warning on what is to come. The second time the song is heard, the sentiment of fear and danger is confirmed, and the threat looming over Coraline's head is now greater and realer than ever. The mice's song is thus a foreshadowing for Coraline's future events. Another example of repetition is seen when she is constantly repeating specific sentences, such as: "I will be brave", "I'm an explorer", and "I'm not afraid" before each encounter with the other mother or one of her underlings. Repeated like a mantra, this is an attempt to reassure and give herself the courage she needs despite her fear. She repeatedly mumbles those sentences to herself, as a protection against the evil woman, but also enough so that she can believe her own claims, thus giving her the reassurance and confidence she needs, as well as reinforce her identity and what makes her the heroine that she is.

The final repetition which will seal the fate of both Coraline and her family, along with the other mother, is the description of the other drawing room in comparison to its real equivalent in Coraline's world. While everything in the other world is described as nearly identical to the real world, with the difference being that it is more colourful and interesting than the world she is familiar with, the drawing room remains the same in both realms. This difference, as slight and insignificant as it may seem, is enough to alert Coraline and set ringing bells into her mind, allowing her to deduct the location her parents, held prisoners by

the other mother. That decisive moment is the key to the triumph over her, because Coraline is able to notice the slight difference between the two drawing rooms that she is able to solve the last of the beldam's challenges. The single contrast is the snow globe on the mantelpiece, that detail is what has allowed Coraline to know where her parents are hidden, as well as think of a way out of the other world for good. The girl's taste for exploration and sharp senses are the very reason for hers and her family's survival against a fairy-like supernatural entity.

Allusions, therefore, are more than easter eggs left by the author for folklore and fairy tales' enthusiasts to enjoy finding and enumerating. Rather, it is a plot device used to set the tone of his story, leave hints to possible future scenarios, as well as duplicate the story's impact, giving it new levels of reading. Thus, he allows for a multidimensional experience, reminiscent of orally transmitted tales of the past. As seen with numbers and repetition, Neil Gaiman sets a tone of homely mystery, fear and magic into his story, reminding his readers of moments of childhood, while also painting an interpersonal image in the mind of his readers, an image that neither them or even himself have experienced, making the act of reading his novel a collective experience that transcends generations. The combination of allusions, whether they are to existing tales such as "Snow White", or only vaguely, by referring to common themes and structure, like with the story of Apple, Gaiman plays with the readers' imagination, own references, and expectations, as they are unaware whether he is going to follow traditional plot structure, or on the contrary, take and twist them in order to go on the opposite way.

3) The Well

Time and place in fairy tales are of capital importance, even if their role in the story is often overlooked. They are regarded as only the theatre where the action takes place, barely

putting the story into context. While in reality, these locations are vessels of thousands of years old stories, even when neither the location nor the time where the story supposedly takes place is known, leaving place for interpretation. They allow to locate the tale in a space, painting a mental in the listeners' minds, they also redirect the attention to the events and characters. The opening lines of fairy tales, such "once upon a time" in English, *il etait une fois* in French, or *there was once in a far way time and place* in Arabic, all reference old forgotten epochs, back when magic, fairies and witches are believed to have existed, times long gone. Although it is to highlight the fact that the story about to be told is false, the magic remains. As the what-ifs revive and transport the listeners and readers to a time and place that never exist in the first place. The setting is never the focus of the tale, it keeps it as vague as possible, leaving the audience to imagine the rest for themselves, never giving full details. It is a silent contract between both them and the storyteller, agreeing to set sail into their own imagination, and contributing to their own experience.

Neil Gaiman, with his story, *Coraline*, does not name the place where it takes place, and the same is done with the date in which it supposedly happens. A few details are left here and there, but the rest is left to the readers to interpret. Only two named places are mentioned in the novella. There is London, where Coraline's father is going, for he had business there, and Royal Tunbridge Wells, where miss Spink's niece lives. Therefore, it can be concluded that the story takes place in England. Yet it is still not its main focus, as it can be seen with Henry Selick's stop motion animated adaptation of the novel in 2009, where he has decided to make the story happen in Michigan in the United States of America instead. Despite that, it does not impact the narrative of the novel the least. The story's main focus is on the house and its surroundings where the main action occurs. That allows not only for a freedom of adaptation, but it is also reminiscent of both fairy tales and gothic stories, because the lack of details found in both is the key for an effective magical and horrific experience. That also

makes the story feel like a hazy childhood memory, since only specific details are kept, not because they are not important, but because the storyteller himself does not exactly recall it. He thus refrains from leading the audience by the hand, and prefers to let them wander in the story he created, allowing them to explore it on their own. He thus leaves them with fragments of memories that they need to assemble and combine with their own imagination to obtain the full picture. Therefore, they help the author to provide for their own experience of the novel.

The places seen through Coraline are few but recognizable, the house and its surroundings are described in a way where the readers have a clear mental image of the place, creating a mental bubble that allows them to separate themselves from reality. This permits them to accept the story as it is, with its magic and horror, while also putting themselves in Coraline's shoes. The absence of further details concerning the exact location of the story makes it closer to the readers. As they can imagine it happen in their own vicinity, they further identify with Coraline and can easily follow her story while learning valuable lessons from her. Because no matter how much the architecture styles and trends change, places like schools, houses, wells and cities, are not specific to one single society in history, since they can be found everywhere. This is even more relevant in times of globalization and the westernization of societies, since the model upon which those edifices are built is to fit a specific mold that can be replicated and mass-produced, making them identical with one another anywhere in the world.

As early as the story starts, the readers are introduced to an industrialized world where the magic of childhood and imagination is almost absent. However, the little place of magic and reminiscent of times of fairies and otherworldly creatures is still left, shown in the garden outside Coraline's home. In the middle of grey concrete cities, shopping centres, or train stations, there is a garden with roses and an overgrown meadow, a little sign of nature left in

the limited space introduced in the story. The tennis court, while a clear sign of human civilization, has grown abandoned since no one in the house is playing in it, nature thus slowly claiming over its right back. A fairy ring is also mentioned, described as smelling dreadful when stepped on it. In the English folklore, they are the entrance of the fairy realm, stepping into one will therefore take away whoever had the unfortune to come across it. Yet, the most significant place in term of fairy tale intertextuality and symbolism in the novel is the well at the other side of the garden. Seen as a significant and recurring motif in several tales across the world, the well is a symbol for life, hope and hidden blessings. It has different significations depending on the story, and it has been used as a powerful symbol repeatedly for hundreds of years, a tradition that Neil Gaiman decides to perpetrate as well in *Coraline*.

In the novella, the well is the place far off from the garden where Coraline lived, the first time it is mentioned is by Coraline's neighbours misses Spink and Forcible, warning her from venturing near it, in fear of falling in it. Coraline, curious yet cautious, decides to check it out anyway, just to be sure where it is, and in order to avoid it accordingly. This is the introduction to the readers of Coraline's curiosity and spirit of adventure, willing to explore the new place her family just moved into, so no secrets will be kept from her. It is described to be as follow:

In an overgrown meadow besides the tennis court, behind a clump of trees -a low brick circle almost hidden in the high grass. The well had been covered up by wooden boards, to stop anyone from falling in. There was a small knothole in one of the boards, and Coraline spent an afternoon dropping pebbles and acorns through the hole and waiting, and counting, until she heard the plop as they hit the water far below. (Gaiman14)

The well as a motif is present throughout numerous tales, myths and legends. Seen as a symbol for Mother Earth, it is also the entrance to the unconscious as well as secondary worlds. Since it is where rain water is kept, it goes hand in hand with the symbol of hidden blessings, as the water is the source of life. In *Coraline*, the well, is hidden away from sight and closed so no one would fall in it, it is the symbol of a bygone era, the last witness to the changes that the house underwent from its first construction. Additionally, it signs the end of the reign of the beldam, falling into Coraline's trap and onto the depths of the water. The well is regarded to the end of chaos and the return to normality. A normality that is finally fulfilled after the door has not been enough to keep the world safe from the other mother. The well is present throughout several fairy tales, the most obvious one being "The Little Red Cap" in the brothers Grimm's *Children and Household Tales* (1812), also known under the name of "The Little Riding Hood" in Perrault's version. It is specifically the Grimm brothers' version where the well is present, contrary to the French version, the little girl and her grandmother have survived the encounter with the wolf, saved by the lumberjack. Both women then are seen sewing rocks inside the unconscious wolf's belly, as it ends up falling deep into the well when it has wanted to quench its thirst after waking up from its slumber.

A similar fate is met by the beldam's severed right hand that followed Coraline even into the real world, as a trap is set for it by the little girl. Pretending to have a picnic in the meadow near the well with her dolls, she lures the hand using the black key that it is after as a bait. Her plan works as the hand successfully falls into the darkness of the well, she then makes sure to permanently seal it, so it cannot climb back up ever again. The well symbolises the denouement of the story, the return to normality and the victory of good over evil, beating the other mother at her own game. The well is thus her personal hell, trapped in it for eternity in darkness, coldness and humidity with no way out or back. Despite being warned from it at

first, it is ironically what helped Coraline get rid of the beldam's hand. From then on, not only people should keep away from it for safety reasons, they will also make sure not to accidentally release a trapped and evil fairy-like entity into the light again. While the hand's faith is left to be unknown, Coraline has won and is now released from the threat of the beldam. Even if she appeared again, she is no longer frightened by her, and she will face her for a second time, just like she did for the first time.

A. The Gothic Space of *Coraline*

Whether it is in centuries old castles with hidden passages, or hidden cottages in old dark woods, the place always holds an important role in gothic stories since the first publication of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The place is a strong vector of emotions and symbols, which varies from one author to another, as each one utilizes the setting to his or her advantage, exploring and experimenting with the story's architecture. *Coraline* taking place in a nameless city, in an unmarked period of time, other than the fact that it is over the course of the summer, is reminiscent of several traditional fairy tales. However, when looking at it from a gothic point of view, the absence of details is a recurring aspect that is a signature of the genre. Since little information is delivered, it leaves more place for the imagination to wander. Because less details mean less information, it leads to the realm of the unknown, which is the origin of any type of fear. The lack of knowledge is synonymous with darkness, and vulnerability in the face of danger. As the readers become at the mercy of the author, they are in constant ignorance of what is coming, wondering from where the threat will strike. Another feature of the novel, which is an aspect shared with several other fantastical genres is the division of spaces. Taking place in a world separated in two realms: the normal world and the supernatural world, Coraline regularly travels between

the two in order to find a way to defeat the supernatural entity behind it, which is threatening her life and her loved ones’.

The space where the story of *Coraline* takes place is as much important as the rest of the story itself, as if it is a character of its own, playing an active role and contributing to the evolution of the plot. It occurs in the domestic space, going back and forth from the real world, a world of safety, rationality, logic and order, to a much “interesting” world, following Coraline’s definition, a world of danger, irrationality and chaos. It is where her dearest dreams slowly turn into nightmares. This is also a similar aspect shared with the fairy tale protagonists, as they leave the safe haven of the home, facing danger and persecution, they go through a quest of self-discovery and inner change. They venture in a world of uncertainty and the unknown, before they returning not only to a new life, but reborn as a new person. The transgression of the line between the two realms results in significant changes both for the protagonist and the antagonist alike. In *Coraline*, the transgression starts even before the other world and the other mother are introduced, as the little girl is already warned by her neighbour not to trespass beyond the door. However, as she is told that statement, the other mother has already entered her world when her real mother left the door unlocked. The complexity and the symbolism of the gothic space in *Coraline* is diverse and can be interpreted through different angles. The following sub section of this chapter will discuss and analyse the meaning of the place in *Coraline* by looking at it through gothic lenses.

1) The Drawing Room

The whole world of *Coraline*, as found in several other gothic stories, heavily relies on the concept of liminality. In anthropology, liminality refers to the state of in-betweenness and transition, it initially has been coined to refer to the stage of disorientation and loss during the

middle stage of a rite of passage. Since the participant is standing on a threshold, it is where the term has taken its name, from the Latin *līmen*. It has also been then borrowed and used in several fields, such as in religion, as to refer to the purgatory for example; or in psychology, with teenage years. In the psychology, liminality shares a strong bond with the concept of individuation, as it is believed that it occurs during the phase of liminality, because it is where transition and transformation happens (Ocampo). In the internet culture, it refers to the unsettling sentiment that is felt at the sight of normally crowded places that have turned abandoned, specifically at night, making them eerie and out of place, specifically when edited to a specific angle. Thus, it can be regarded as a textbook case of the uncanny, the familiarity of a place suddenly becoming unsettling, scary, and alienated. An example of it can be the sight of an empty supermarket at night, or a school hallway after study sessions. In gothic literature, the concept of liminality is omnipresent, the concept of transgression itself can be seen as a continuation of liminality. In *Coraline*, despite the tunnel being the embodiment of this concept, the drawing room and the door leading to the tunnel are equally important, and thus shall be discussed in this section, because they are tightly linked with one another.

Starting with the drawing room, it is the place where the darkness and mystery begun for Coraline, it was the catalyst of the novel's plot. It is where furniture that once has belonged to her grandmother is kept. It is described as nothing lively or welcoming, since it is only used to keep expensive and unnecessary furniture away from the Jones family's sight. It is a part of the house and their own family history that they have isolated in a room they rarely ever come to. In the novel, it described as: "[W]here 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 the best" (Gaiman 18). It is thus clearly a place that causes them discomfort and pain, a part of their family history they do not want to look into or remember. For Coraline, it is also the place where she has seen the

outline of the other mother for the first time. It is also inside that room that the door leading to the other world is found, normally barricaded with red bricks. Neil Gaiman describes how he used to live in a house with a similar layout, which explains the importance behind it, as he has put elements of his own life in the novel, the deeper meaning and symbolism behind it thus become stronger. The drawing room represents Coraline's door to her unconscious. Beyond the door of that room lays the deepest parts of her psyche, a place where all her fears, wishes and desires coexist in a single chaotic yet homogenous space. It is a space that she needs to conquer if she wants to live healthily and further advance in life.

Secondly, and tightly linked with the symbol of the drawing room, is the door leading to the infamous passage to the other world. It is described as: “[T]he big, carved, brown wooden door at the far corner of the drawing room” (18). Doors are recurring motifs in gothic stories, they possess dual symbolism, meaning both safety and danger. The door is a non negligible aspect of the drawing room, as it symbolises both in the novel. As it is the separation between the real world and the other world created by the beldam. In other words, it fits the definition of a liminal space, a space of transgression but also transition, as Coraline goes through it to access the mirrored world. The first time she goes through it is by sheer curiosity, transgressing the wishes of her mother while she is away, assuming nothing is behind the door anyway. Additionally, when she goes through it for the last time, it is this time an explicit transgression to the will of the beldam, as she demands her to stay with her in the other world. Coraline, defeating her in her game of exploration, manages to trick her into letting her escape from her grip, beating her for the second time.

According to Veronika Majlingová, a door left unlocked is a symbol of danger and unsafety. Closing a door is, on the contrary, a symbol of safety. Yet, that same action can also be synonymous with danger, if the threat is locked inside as well (16-7). While Coraline's mother left the door of the drawing room without locking with the key, thinking nothing will

get through the red bricked wall anyway, she accidentally commits the grave mistake of letting the beldam into her home. Similarly, the reverse situation happens inside the other world, when the other mother swallows the key in front of Coraline. As a result, she is now imprisoned with her. It is as if she is saying: “You have no way of getting out of here, you are bound to stay here forever with me”. The source of fear of doors is the possibility of being locked with the monster with no way out, doors are thus ambivalent symbols, both a symbol of safety and danger. A close scenario is repeated at the near end of the novel, even when Coraline shut the door of the drawing room after escaping from the other world back to her own, Coraline is only temporarily safe, as the other mother still found a way to track her down, despite not being whole this time, her disembodied hand takes over her in the original world where Coraline and her family lives.

The drawing room, and the door present in it, are seen as not only the entrance to the other world, but to Coraline’s unconscious as well, since it is the reminder of her family’s past. What lied beyond it is the embodiment of her id, her most primordial needs, deepest wishes, dreams and fears as well, all repressed by her and her family, by not allowing her to fully express herself. As her expression of her desires and childish needs are often overlooked by her family, as seen when it is stated that she is not allowed into the drawing room, or when her parents refuse to play or spend time with her. In psychoanalysis, the unconscious is the place where one’s deepest fears, needs and memories are kept, hidden away from the conscious mind, resurfacing without one’s control. Most of the time, and in stories specifically, the unconscious re-emerges during specific instances, specifically during dreams, which is the case for Coraline, as she has instances throughout the novel where she dreams about the other world and the people inhabiting it. Whether it is with the mice’ song, or the picnic with the ghosts of the three children, her unconscious often comes back to the surface to warn her on upcoming events.

The unconscious is an important concept because it comes out at the most unexpected moments, amplified and stronger the more it is ignored. The only way to deal with it is to fully embrace it, just like Coraline has done it by accepting the fact that she is afraid of the other mother, yet facing her regardless. While the dark passage leading to the other world has witnessed Coraline's growth throughout the numerous times she has gone through it, the drawing room is the place where Coraline committed the ultimate transgression of defeating the beldam and going back to her primary world, achieving individuation. It is where she has realized where her parents are hidden, she has tricked the beldam into believing otherwise, then has taken the key from her. This has allowed her to safely go back home with everyone, leaving the other world, and the other mother, in shambles. The drawing room is where she reaches self-realization, as she finally accepts her unconscious, manifested as her fears, wishes and core identity, as Coraline Jones the explorer. By fully embracing it, it permits her to find the key to defeat the evil woman and find a successful strategy of getting past her claws to the door leading to her world. This symbolizes Coraline's first victory over the beldam. Although still not defeated yet, Coraline comes out of the tunnel reborn into her new self, facing the new threat of the other mother's severed right hand with courage, wisdom and patience. Just like she defeats her for the first time, she manages to do it a second time, beating the other mother at her own game not once, but twice. Coraline shows that her adventures not only changed her as a person, they also helped her accept parts of herself she has been ashamed of, such as her child like creativity and imagination, her dissatisfaction with her current life, and her loneliness. She embraces her new self, and from then on, she accepts things as they come to face them bravely. She is willing to try out new things in life, but most importantly, she finds peace in what she already has, as she almost lost it all.

2) Mirrors

A prevalent motif since the old times in various kinds of literature around the world, whether it is in mythology, folklore, or fiction, the mirror and what it represents inside the collective imagination is as diverse and polyvalent as the multiple uses it has had throughout human history. It is a symbol of self-reflection, lies, truth, identity, and even the portal to other worlds. The looking glass always has fascinated, since it is linked with several myths and beliefs. Its usage is almost as old as humanity. While reflective surfaces such as clear water, are initially used, they are replaced later in time, as societies crafted mirrors out of material with reflective properties such as obsidian, copper, and bronze (Lowder). There are countless superstitions around the mirrors, altering between being seen as the sign of good or bad luck. The romans used to believe the human soul, that is renewed every seven years resides in mirrors, so naturally, it is thought that breaking one will bring seven years of misfortune on whoever has had the misfortune of doing so. It is also believed that when someone dies, mirrors must be hidden or covered, for the soul of the deceased may wonder and get trapped in it forever. The bad reputation of mirrors continues on with the years, specifically with the horror genre and urban legends. They are not only portals to other worlds, but also receptacles of evil doubles and demonic possessions, and the in general the source of the manifestation of the supernatural. Paranormal occurrences are said to be manifested on its surface at night, a famous example of such include the legend of the Bloody Mary.

The psychology behind the phenomenon of brain recognition of the self in the mirror has been studied extensively by psychologist and theorist Jacques Lacan. According to him, the mirror stage, is the stage of infancy when the child discovers and recognizes their reflection on the mirror. It is the first contact between the physical body and the image of the self, which used to be one, they now become separate entities. Children expressing interest in

discovering the dichotomy between the two notions, it is an important step for their development and sense of identity. Also known as the self-alienation stage, it is where they acknowledge the self, their id, and their physical body, therefore building their ego (“Jacques Lacan” 1:00-1:40). Recognizing oneself in the mirror is thus synonymous with self-awareness, body image and reflection upon one’s inner self. Those are all themes that are present in *Coraline* through several instances, as well as the previously mentioned superstitions. As mirrors always have had a polyvalent use and symbolism throughout the story, it is regarded in a different manner depending on the character and its motivation.

The first time a mirror is encountered is when Coraline is shown the state of her parents, imprisoned inside the looking glass in the family’s house corridor. As her real mother manages to write into the glass a last message to ask her daughter to help them, before the fog takes them away. It is when Coraline fully realises the gravity of the situation, that she, along with her parents are in grave danger. The mirror is used to show her the truth and cause her for action. Similarly, when she is trapped by the other mother in the space behind the mirror, while she is in complete darkness and isolation, she meets with the ghosts of the children whose souls have been previously stolen away by the evil shapeshifting entity. In moments of confusion, fear and despair, mirrors are a way for Coraline to find comfort in the dark, along with answers to her questions. This is also how she found out the correct way of using the stone with the hole in it. While looking at the mirror at the end of the hall of the other world, initially self-reflecting upon herself, “She glanced at the mirror at the end of the hall. For a moment it clouded over... and there was nothing in the mirror but a girl who was small for her age holding something that glowed gently like a green coal” (Gaiman 133-4). In this passage, it is shown that her mindset is changed for the better, as she stares at it while she reflecting on her own weaknesses, being smaller even for ordinary kids her age, yet, almost immediately, she realises that she had the key to her dilemma in her own hands all along.

Looking at the mirror in the corridor makes her aware that she may not be as big as strong as the other mother. She has, however, in her possession something her opponent does not. In this instance, the mirror allows her to find a way out of her confusion as she looked withing herself.

The other use the mirror is used for, is to lie, and this was exclusively done by the other mother. When asked why she does not appear in the mirror behind Coraline, she simply replies that: "Mirrors, she said, are never to be trusted" (Gaiman 110). It was the case indeed for her. That is because that is the way she uses them is to manipulate her victims, she thus projects her own beliefs into mirrors and acts into them. In the hands of the other mother, they are a symbol of illusion and deception. They are among the objects at her disposal to harvest more souls she could feast off; the beldam uses mirrors as a way to alter her potential victims' reality as well as drain their energy. In the case where Coraline is held captive in the space behind the glass, the beldam does feed from her energy, as she appears healthier the next day when she comes to get Coraline out of it, it can also be noted that the ghosts of the children are kept behind the mirror, further strengthening this observation. The other mother uses mirrors to lie to Coraline, showing her only what she wants her to see, and thus manipulating her into fully trusting her into obedience.

Similarly to distortion mirrors found at fairs and carnivals, mirrors in *Coraline* alter reality, cloud judgements, and plant the seeds of doubt in the fiercest and most determined hearts like the one Coraline possesses. By showing her a vision where her parents are content and happy without her, expressing their happiness and gratitude for the other mother to be taking care of her now, the evil woman attempts to trick her into staying with her. Coraline, not believing her at first, still feel a prick of doubt creeping over her, yet it does not stop her from showing a brave face in front of her captor. If it was not for her companions that gave her strength, and reassured her in her ordeal, Coraline might have not escaped the mirror's lies

so easily. As no one is there to approve or refute the other mother's claims, the fact that she is well surrounded makes her decisive and confident in her confrontation with the beldam. The fact that she has her new friends help her decipher lies from truths is what save her life and allows her not to fall for the other mother's trap, which may have been fatal for her.

Mirrors are seen through two contradicting directions in the novel, similar to real life, where they are believed to bring both good and bad luck. Mirrors in *Coraline* are symbols associated with dual meanings, as they show both lies truths. Because of her nature as a manipulator, the other mother uses them to twist Coraline's reality in an attempt for her to believe her lies. Yet, ironically, while they are used as tools to fool Coraline, the key for her quest in defeating the beldam lies in mirrors, the very weapons used against her. Since she learns the truth about the real intentions of the other mother while being trapped inside one. Then, she finds out the way to use the stone with the hole in it while looking to a mirror. Far from being misleading, mirrors show the way to the little girl in her quest, guiding her, and helping her in her hardships.

3) The Mist

The mist is a natural phenomenon that occurs specifically in autumn and winter, when warm air makes contact with a cooler surface, making droplets of water turn into a gas-like state. In popular folklore and mythology, the mist is associated with a myriad of otherworldly creatures and realms, and this is the case all around the world. In European mythology in particular, specifically in Great Britain, and just like the previously discussed symbol of the mirror, it is a symbol of both good and bad luck. Present throughout the whole novel, both in the real and mirrored world, the mist is omnipresent and a powerful symbol in the tale of *Coraline*. It is adjacent since the beginning of the novella, already setting the mood for the

rest of the story, a mood of mystery, danger, as well as confusion. Since it is thick and opaque, it is easy to get lost in it, where, as stated by miss Spink: “You’d have to be an explorer to find your way around this fog” (Gaiman 27). The presence of a cold unusual mist despite the fact that the story takes place during summer adds an additional layer of unnaturalness and gloominess to the novel, an important aspect of gothic stories. Rain, thunder, mist and darkness are all used to add dramatic effect and paint a specific image in the readers’ minds. It is used by storytellers to keep them in the dark, evoke fear and stress, and then take them by surprise by revealing the source of danger to the light.

In *Coraline*, it is used to install a sentiment of coldness, as opposed to the normally happy and joyous warm days of summer. As if a volcanic cataclysm took place somewhere in the world, causing a year without summer, similar to the one in 1816 that inspired Mary Shelly to write her famously acclaimed classic *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818). This sentiment of coldness and confusion perdures when Coraline goes to the other world, where she discovers that the mist is controlled by none other than the other mother. Thick, ominous and dangerous, it is used to remind Coraline she is constantly watched, always close to the beldam’s reach, as she can take her anywhere she is. Despite the world beyond the door looking nearly identical to her own, she knows she is in unknown grounds and that everything is against her, ready to collapse and change shape. The mist is a trap used by the other mother, a way to disorient her and make her feel lost, thus making her lose hope. The mist is a part of the beldam, that is used to her advantage to hopefully capture Coraline.

It is a character on its own, not only it is an extension of the beldam herself, she is the mist, and vice versa. The first time the mist is encountered was the day after the rain stops, the night that Coraline saw the shadow of the other mother in the drawing room. It is described to be: “[Hanging] like blindness around the house” (36). The mist appears the same day the beldam did, while the sun only shone once she is defeated. This is seen throughout the story,

as Coraline is trying to complete her set of challenges in hopes of going home and saving her family and friends. The mist thickens the more she advances into her quests, draping the world with its presence and preventing her from going further, making her go around in circles. There is also an instance where the other mother addresses Coraline with her mouth closed, and yet her voice did not come from her: "It came from the mist, from the fog, from the house" (Gaiman 147). It is a further proof of them being one single entity, like an additional limb that she utilizes it for her own gain, manipulating and frightening the little girl with it. It is a powerful tool, her most powerful one along with the mirror, as it confers to her the power to change and manipulate her victims' perception of reality however she wants it. Similarly, when Coraline is shown her parents trapped in the mirror, they are taken away by the fog, making them disappear from Coraline's field of vision. Since the fog is an inseparable part of the other mother, Coraline quickly understood she is behind their abduction.

Not only that, but when she tries to go explore outside her other home, in hopes of finding clues to retrieving her trapped parents, she is met with a chilling discovery. The more she walks into the forest away from her house, the thicker and whiter the mist gets. The environment becomes less defined, losing more details and presence in the process, until nothing remains, as Coraline is faced with complete blankness. Neil Gaiman describes the situation as if one is walking inside a charcoal drawing, with little to no details left the further Coraline goes. While she kept walking in the empty white space, hoping to see what lies beyond it, the little girl only manages to return to the other house. Coraline is thus literally and metaphorically walking in circles, as the fog is no longer a what would be seen as a normal fog, the more she walks inside it, and whatever direction she takes, she always ends up coming back to her starting point. Considering the other world is her canvas, the mist is the other mother's brush, a completely empty space, one that she is able to manipulate and shape however she wants.

The mist is thus a trap, a way to deceive and manipulate Coraline's reality and get her by her side, only to kill her after that. However, it is also a way to hide the imperfections and flaws inside the world she has created, concealing the faults within her own scheme, and therefore revealing where the beldam's weakness lies. Even if Coraline is indeed walking around in circles because of the fog, it is by exploring it that she has understood the situation. She learns from the cat who has told her that the fog is only a way to hide how small and flawed the other world is. The beldam is, after all, no godly figure, she cannot create from scratch, she can only play and built with what she has, mixing it to fit her victim's idea of a perfect world. The mist goes from an ominous presence to a flawed version of a reality, that only turns out to be an illusion at the end. It is a façade that keeps Coraline from knowing the truth, and it is by going through it that she acquires that knowledge, enough for her to defeat the not-so-powerful artist behind it. The fog in Coraline turns out to be just an elaborate trick, a mere veil covering the fact that the other mother, as mysterious and powerful, is nothing without it, acting as a mask to cover her weaknesses. The mist shows that she is in fact not invincible. Just like the rest of the other world, it was nothing but a well-built stage, a façade hiding the truth behind a veil of pure whiteness.

In conclusion, the mist is not only an aesthetic devise, to put the readers in a gloomy and mysterious mood the same way classic gothic and horror put them, it is also an active character of the story, that is present and actively participates in the story. For the better and the worst, the fog, as used by Neil Gaiman, is a tool in the beldam's arsenal. More than a weapon, it is an extension of her own self which allows her to be nowhere and everywhere, thus duplicating her ability and broadening her area of dangerousness. The mist blinds, disorients, abducts, and confuses. Following this description, it is the personification of the beldam and everything that she represents as an ominous and sinister threat. However, it is not invincible, as it is also used to hide her weaknesses and flaws, the mist used by the other

mother turns out to be only a lie, just like the several ones she has said in the course of the novel.

In conclusion, the space of *Coraline* is diverse and rich. Both interesting and creepy, charming and repulsing, it is the representation of the duality of the uncanny. Not only that, it blends with it several other concepts of psychology, folklore and even psychoanalysis. It is an active character of the novel. As scary and frightening as the other mother, it is constantly changing and evolving as Coraline travels between the different places making the two realms of this bizarre universe. Their transition goes from familiar and safe, to slightly different than reality before turning into a complete distortion of what they used to look like. The reason that makes the story of *Coraline* so uncanny, is because the people and the places in her environment are no longer the ones she used to know back in the real world, thus completely erasing her points of reference, which are fundamental to Coraline's identity as an explorer. These very places, despite their instability, are witness to her growth and evolution as a character, as it is where she achieves her individuation, fully recognizing and embracing herself. They make her accept her new home, her fears, while also reconsidering her dreams and priorities. The journey through the other world teaches her a variety of lessons, among them being that appearances are deceiving, and that it is important to accept her life as it is in order to find beauty in it wherever she is.

Conclusion

In light of all that has been discussed in the chapter, the charming beauty of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* is a blend of elements of both fairy tale and gothic aesthetics. Similar yet set apart from one another, they participate to the enrichment of an already unique and

innovating story. By participating and adding their own touch to the novel, the gothic and fairy tale study of space and intertextuality also permits to highlight the similarities between the two of them in terms of style, storytelling and structure. The lack of details found in both genres allows to make the readers wander freely into the fictional world made out of buttons and spiderwebs. Yet, it also traps them and renders them helpless in the face of danger. This duality and ambiguity are what create the unique tone set into the story of *Coraline*. By combining the two aesthetics, the novella brings a wind of change to the two mediums, since they not only help deliver a multidimensional tale, they also play with the readers' imagination and expectation, trapping them when they expect it the least. The combination of fairy tale and gothic aesthetics recontextualises the space in both genres, while also making it shine and play an active role in the story. More than a simple motif or symbol, it becomes an equally important element as much as the plot or the characters.

General Conclusion

As a conclusion of all that has been tackled in the three chapters making this research, the first hypothesis seems to be right, as the fairy tale and gothic do indeed share common roots and historical ties between them. While the fairy tale influences several gothic authors in the genesis of their stories, the gothic helps in return re-shape the fairy tale, specifically in the nineteenth century with the brothers Grimm. Their relationship goes both ways, influencing and changing one another, as the two of them share a deep link in terms of themes, aesthetics, structures and overall essence. Being different sides of the same coin, they eventually have separated, each taking a distinct path. Yet, they meet again in modern times. The postmodern movement has allowed them to be reintroduced back to one another, combined and experimented with, therefore reviving the old bond that has been lost over the years. Not only does the gothic and fairy tale find each other again, they are combined in new ways, renewed, and reborn into new forms. As a whole new potential for them arises, each author brings his or her own touch to the new unified genre, giving meaning to both of them, while also being something of its own at the same time.

Neil Gaiman with *Coraline* is one of these authors of the new wave, who has attempted to mix the two to deliver a new entertaining and scary experience to his readers. The second hypothesis on the aim behind Coraline's story in term of both fairy tale and gothic seems confirmed. By combining elements of traditional fairy tales with those of the gothic genre, he not only reintroduces the horror that went missing from the fairy tales, he also makes the gothic more accessible for children. Just like fairy tales used to be back in the old days, the story of *Coraline* is an example of how horror can be shown to younger audiences, frightening them but not to the degree of causing trauma. Because fear and terror are necessary emotions that every human being must eventually go through, it is a natural

reaction that is activated when confronted to unknown situations, which has permitted for mankind to survive, protect itself and prosper. It has allowed humanity to avoid danger for thousands of years, and what better way to warning from those dangers than through stories. This is the reason why myths, folk tales fairy tales, exist in the first place, they are a way to express joy, sadness, fear and hope. Whether the story ends well or not does not matter, because it shows the dichotomy and duality of the world and human beings themselves: scary but beautiful, dangerous, yet fascinating, weak, yet strong at the same time.

For the third hypothesis, on the signification of the other world in *Coraline*, the answer for it seems to be split between two explanations: an in-universe interpretation, and a psychological explanation. For the in-universe explanation, it is indeed inspired by the fairy realm, where one's deepest desires are shown to the victim in order for them to get trapped in it, spirited away from their loved ones forever. In *Coraline*, the other world is indeed reminiscent of old folk tales and fairy tales. More than that, the other world may be a fairy realm. For the psychological symbolism behind the other world, it is interpreted to be a reflection of Coraline's unconscious, since it represents all of her most personal desires, but also her deepest fears and anxieties. The other mother being aware of them, she uses the space to her advantage to try to lure her to her side. The more Coraline defeats the other mother, the less control the latter had on the world, becoming more abstract. Therefore, it shows the psychological phase Coraline is going through: growing up, and accepting her new life and responsibilities. The other world is thus the representation of Coraline's state of mind and the changes she goes through at the moment; her fears, confusion, loss of innocence, as well as dreams and wishes all are reflected in the space of the other world. It is a space that forces her to reveal her true self, and to set her priorities straight as she realises the things she truly yearned for. Those revelations unravel her true identity, and allows her to grow up into accepting who she is, as well as be tolerant of change, in order to properly face it and adapt

herself to it.

The combination of the gothic and fairytale brings out the best of the two genres, as if they are missing pieces of one another. Because horror is an inherent part of the human experience, fear is only a normal emotion, just like the rest of the set that human beings possess. Regulating and properly managing that emotion in a healthy manner is the key to a healthy development. When the scary aspects of fairy tales have been taken away, it has resulted in overly bright stories, leaving no place for any nuance or diversity in themes. Because light cannot exist without darkness, when one of them is omitted, the message becomes incomplete. As light without darkness is blinding, darkness alone is consuming. Just like a black hole, it destroys everything in its way until nothing remains. Similarly, a tale with too much optimism teaches blatant toxic positivity and delusion, while overly dark and gloomy stories result in a pessimistic and cynical approach to life. The restitution of horror in modern fairy tales brings balance to stories in which the initial message has been removed. A healthy amount of both is necessary to the correct and healthy development of young readers. Not only that, they can also accompany older audiences, just like fairy tales have been doing. They show that the world was frightening, dangerous, and full of evil and mischief, however, it is also beautiful, kind and fascinating, and that after the storm, the sun will eventually reappear and shine.

This is why stories like *Coraline* are important. Because despite being a mere child that is smaller even than children her own age, Coraline still finds the necessary courage to face a supernatural threat, despite being terrified by it. Coraline as both a fairy tale and gothic protagonist stands perfectly in the middle ground. By being both, she becomes something of her own, inspiring hope and courage, curiosity and resilience. She is a heroine that everyone can relate to. Despite being considerably weaker than her adversaries, she proves that everything is possible. Even in the darkest pits of despair, when everything seems lost, a ray

of hope still shines, as there will always be people willing to help and lend a hand, family and strangers alike. To help and to be helped, that is the essence of the human identity.

The horror in *Coraline* is only a tool for Neil Gaiman to convey his message. Through an entertaining and inspiring story, he incites his readers to be brave in the face of adversity. There may be no children eating beldams who sew button into the eyes of her victims, but even if they did exist, they are not invincible creatures. With enough courage, intelligence and patience, they can be defeated, just like the other mother was beaten by Coraline. In fact, Beldams are everywhere and can be everything and anything, as they embody one's deepest fears and worries. Fear should not be considered to be an enemy to overcome, it is a friend, sent by the body to bring aid in times of crisis. Coraline is there to remind the readers that they are stronger than they think, and they are capable of doing wonderful things if they put their hearts to it. Anything that comes in their way in life, just like Coraline was able to overcome it, they will be able to do the same as well, because fear is an important part when facing a crisis or when one is about to reach a milestone in his or her life.

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