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Two Sides of Fear – Gothic Terror in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

Abstract: This article is an analysis of Neil Gaiman's children's novel entitled *Coraline*, which rests on the premise that it enacts two different types of Gothic terror. This book has gained two types of audiences, who have experienced it in very distinct ways. The first group (children) perceive the story as an adventurous tale of bravery and courage, whereas the second one (adults) read it as a terrifying tale, riddled with disturbing details.

The source of fear for the first group is the cautionary Gothic terror, the aim of which was to teach children important life lessons, as well as to keep them safe from the dangers of the outside world; the second is classic Gothic terror, aimed at adult audiences and realised in the form of the Freudian concept of the uncanny. The purpose of this article is to analyse the structural elements responsible for both

perceptions and to demonstrate how each of them realises different types of Gothic terror. The analysis also covers the literary context of the fairy tale genre which *Coraline* belongs to, as well as the ways in which Gaiman's novel transcends its generic boundaries, being partially a horror story for adults.

Key words: Gaiman, Gothic, terror, children's fiction

Introduction

Given Neil Gaiman's knowledge of literary conventions and his experience in writing, it is no surprise that his works have reached audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Equally enjoyed by both children and adult readers, Gaiman's works, crafted with a plethora of stylistic devices and literary allusions, keep serving and entertaining readers all over the world. And even though there is no novelty in seeing his texts being read by readers from different backgrounds, it is rare for them to be perceived in markedly different ways, as was the case with one of his best known works, *Coraline*.

Published in 2002, the novel quickly gained worldwide recognition and received some of the most prestigious awards for the genre, such as Bram Stoker Award for Best Work for Young Readers, Hugo Award for Best Novella and Publishers Weekly Best Book, to name a few (*Neil's Work: Books: Coraline*). Soon afterwards, however, apart from its generic mastery, another feature came into focus: a strange dissonance between the perception of Gaiman's work by its readers. As described by Wagner et al.:

> Although [*Coraline*] sounds a little like *The Lion, the Witch*, and the Wardrobe, or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, […] Gaiman's novella is far darker, far stranger, and far more threatening than those books; it is in fact, a work that many adults find too scary to read. As Gaiman states on the Harper-Collins

Web site, "It was a story, I learned when people began to read it, that children experienced as an adventure, but which gave adults nightmares. It's the strangest book that I've written […]" (Wagner et al., 2008, p. 350)

The difference in perception depended solely on the maturity of the readers: while children experienced the novel as an entertaining piece of fiction, adults found it a thoroughly terrifying tale.

Nevertheless, no matter how different the impressions of the book may have been, what remained constant in both of these receptions was the presence of Gothic terror. While *Coraline* is full of literary allusions and motifs, Gothic terror seems to be the most conspicuous trope among all of them. The way it was woven into the text as an omnipresent principle, yet simultaneously perceived by its audiences in entirely different ways, speaks highly of the author's mastery and craftsmanship. The whole structure of the novel, its narration, characters and plot create a certain sense of ambiguity – that way *Coraline* can be read as a piece of children's fiction and a horror story at the same time.

The purpose of this article is not only to place *Coraline* in the general context of children's fiction but to track and analyse the reasons for duality of its perception. The analysis will focus on a theme present throughout the whole novel i.e. the concept of Gothic terror, either cautionary or classic one. The structure of the novel, as well as certain artistic devices used by the author, will be analysed in terms of its affinity with these different kinds of Gothic terror and their role in establishing the dualistic perception of the text.[1]

This article is by no means an alternative interpretation of Gaiman's novel, nor does it seek to uncover a second, more disturbing

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1. This article is a modified version of the author's BA thesis entitled Gothic Terror in Neil Gaiman's Coraline, written in the Department of British Literature and Culture of the University of Łódź (2019)

meaning of the work which underlies the original text. Its focus is placed solely on the reader's different perceptions of the book and on providing possible explanations for these occurrences, on the basis of different literary contexts.

Gaiman's novel tells a story about a little girl named Coraline, who moves with her parents into one of the flats of an old house. Soon afterwards she discovers that one of the doors leads to the other world which is a mirror image of her own home. There she encounters her other mother and the other father, who look just like her real parents with only one exception: they have buttons instead of eyes. The other parents pamper her with delicious food and amazing toys, which to Coraline, who is used to her parents ignoring her, is a dream come true. In order for this dream to last, Coraline must let the other mother sew buttons into her eyes. Terrified, the girl declines the offer and goes back to her own world, only to discover that the other mother has kidnapped her real parents. In an attempt to rescue them, Coraline goes back to the other world and "challenges and defeats the Other Mother [sic] at an exploring game […] rescuing her parents and the souls of other children who have been trapped in the other world for centuries" (Wagner et al., 2008, p. 351).

Gothic in children's fiction and the rise of cautionary Gothic terror

What distinguishes *Coraline* from other pieces of modern children's fiction is the extent to which it follows the characteristics of the classic fairy tales (e.g. the works of Brothers Grimm) not only in terms of structure but also in terms of the Gothic mode – especially the cautionary Gothic terror.

Contrary to popular belief that children's fiction has always looked as gentle and peaceful as its modern adaptations, one may be surprised

to find out that it was actually the Gothic trope – its aesthetics and terror – that has always been a crucial part of children's fiction. The vastness of the context in which Gaiman's *Coraline* is placed as a modern fairy tale is perfectly summarised in Jadwiga Węgrodzka's analysis of children's literature and the presence of the Gothic terror in this particular genre.

As described by Węgrodzka, the Gothic in children's literature of the eighteenth century often took the form of "mysterious sounds and touches" and the motif of fear and death, as well as strange and eerie settings like the cemetery at night-time (Węgrodzka, 2014, pp. 172–173). Still, even though the Gothic was present in children's literature, it was never used simply as an aesthetic device. Since the Age of Reason had quite specific views on the existence of the supernatural, Gothic elements in children's literature (i.e. magic, witchcraft etc.) were either omitted or had to acquire a cautionary feature, since they were "definitely out of place in texts for children within the rationalist paradigm." (Węgrodzka, 2014, p. 173). The general approach at that time to realise the cautionary feature, was to scare the children senseless in order to teach them a lesson. Given the popularity and the effectiveness of this method, this rule can be considered characteristic for the whole genre. It is also the reason why the original Brothers Grimm fairy tales were so full of gruesome details. The most effective way to prevent children from misbehaving (or to teach them certain worldviews as is the case with stories discussed by Węgrodzka) was to familiarise their imagination with possible consequences of their actions by conveying them in a story.

This helps explain how cautionary terror was born – a set of literary devices, aimed at teaching young audiences how to keep safe from the dangers of the outside world. Its defining characteristic is the use of fear as a means of achieving the educational effect – after all, it was terror that kept children at bay after hearing gruesome details of

most fairy tales. With the popularity of Gothic fiction Gothic tropes – the supernatural, darkness, gloomy atmosphere and terror – began to seep onto fairy tales. Because of their frequent appearances, as well as the extent to which they were used, the term "cautionary terror" may be appropriately replaced with "cautionary Gothic terror".

Coraline as a modern fairy tale

As a modern re-writing of a classic fairy tale, *Coraline* can be placed in a very specific literary context. Not only does it mean that its structure resembles one of the classic fairy tales but also that the same structure and generic characteristics have been adapted to fit the modern literary standards.

The structural characteristics of a classic fairy tale, as can be seen in the example of the works by Brothers Grimm, can be divided into the ones of narration, commentary, child protagonist(s) and villain(s), with each of them contributing in their own way to the overall realisation of the cautionary Gothic terror. All these elements serve the purpose of realising the cautionary Gothic terror's intentional aim: to keep the children safe from any danger. Gaiman fully realised these features firmly anchored in the genre of a classic fairy tale in his novel *Coraline* roughly 200 years later.

Narration

Classic fairy tales are characterised by a narration that is simplistic and usually delivered in the third person. It avoids the usage of complex grammatical structures and details considered unnecessary from the point of view of a young reader, while simultaneously it aims to provide children with a plot that is both clear and easy to follow, even for the youngest of audience.

In terms of narration, Gaiman's novel possesses all the characteristics of a classic fairy tale's narration. It also omits difficult grammatical structures by using direct repetitions of phrases for the sake of style, as for the example "said Coraline," instead of "she said" in a sentence "'It's Coraline. Not Caroline. Coraline,' said Coraline" (Gaiman, 2003, p. 12). The narration also mimics a child-like perception, both by dialogues between the main character and adults, and by other devices, such as using food as means of measuring time (Gaiman, 2003, pp. 62–63).

Because narration resembles a child-like perspective and is adequate to the children's level of comprehension, cautionary Gothic terror can effectively influence even the youngest of readers.

Commentary

Commentary, i.e. the moralistic elements of the story, is the only thing that *Coraline* lacks in terms of cautionary Gothic terror on the structural level. That is not to say, however, that the story does not have any moral – instead, it simply lacks the pompous moralistic tone of a classic fairy tale in delivering it. In a classic fairy tale, the moralistic elements are either addressed to the reader in a direct manner or by repeated elaborations on the moral throughout the story. However, the way of delivering the moral in *Coraline*, is very different indeed. Instead of directness, Gaiman actually lets the main character find and describe it herself, as can be seen in her confrontation with one of the other mother's creation, who tries to convince the girl to stay in the other world forever:

> '[...] The world will be built new for you every morning. If you stay here, you can have whatever you want.'
>
> Coraline sighed. 'You really don't understand, do you? she said. 'I don't *want* whatever I want. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted? Just like that,

and it didn't *mean* anything?

'I don't understand,' said the whispery voice. (Gaiman, 2003, p. 139)

This is an example of how Gaiman modifies classic fairy tales: the way that the moral of the story is delivered has nothing to do with how classic fairy tales used to do it. Gaiman adapted this particular literary device to fit modern standards, while simultaneously managing to preserve the educational value of the story.

Child protagonist(s)

Looking at the main characters of the classic fairy tales, it is no surprise to find nearly all of them to be children. This strategy ensured the relatability of the character, which helped the young audience perceive the hero's struggles as their own. Because of that, the moralistic message of the whole story was easily imprinted in the readers' minds.

However, in Gaiman's novel, age is not the only relatable feature that the character possesses. The way that Coraline communicates (or rather tries to communicate) with grown-ups has the same effect. Because of her experience with being ignored, talked-over and not taken seriously, young readers – many of whom share the same experience in real life – can relate to her on a personal level.

Another factor is Coraline's change in terms of character: from being a constantly bored, selfish girl at the beginning of the story, she eventually transforms into a courageous, resourceful and strong heroine, full of empathy and selflessness – a perfect role model for young readers. The change of character that she experiences is most noticeable in the concluding parts of the novel, where she comes home, having saved both her parents as well as the children the other mother had captured before.

> The sky was a robin's-egg blue, and Coraline could see trees and, beyond trees, green hills, which faded on the horizon into purples and greys. The sky had never seemed so *sky*; the world had never seemed so *world*. […] Nothing, she thought, have ever been so interesting. (Gaiman, 2003, p. 158)

Instead of complaining about never having enough, she learns to appreciate what she already has. Because Coraline sees the world in a new, different way, her surroundings seem to her to be more alive; it is emphasised linguistically by repetition of words, i.e. nouns functioning as verbs. And because young readers relate to the main character, they absorb the moral of the story as if it was the result of their own experience.

Villain(s)

In the genre of a classic fairy tale, the villain is as fundamental to the story as the protagonists themselves. No matter if or how the main character will defeat them, the villains always play a crucial role, acting as the embodiment of the dangers of the outside world (e.g. stranger danger in *Little Red Riding Hood*).

In *Coraline*, the antagonist of the story (the other mother) is a re-writing of the classic fairy tale character of the witch (HarperCollins Publishers, 2011). Nevertheless, only after analysing Gaiman's novel along with one of the most famous fairy tale witches of all times (i.e. the witch from *Hansel and Gretel* by Brothers Grimm), the resemblance is truly striking:

Table 1. Comparison of the character of a witch in works by The Brothers Grimm and Gaiman

Hansel and Gretel (Grimm, & Grimm, 2008)	*Coraline* (Gaiman, 2003)
She took them both by the hand, and led them into her little house. Then good food was set before them, milk and pancakes, with sugar, apples, and nuts.	They sat at the kitchen table and Coraline's other mother brought them lunch. A huge, golden-brown roasted chicken, fried potatoes, tiny green peas. Coraline shovelled the food into her mouth. It tasted wonderful. (p. 39)
Afterwards two pretty little beds were covered with clean linen, and Hansel and Gretel lay down in them, and thought they were in heaven.	[the bedroom's] colour scheme was an awful lot more interesting than the one in her own bedroom. There were all sorts of remarkable things in there [...]. A whole toybox filled with wonderful toys. (p. 41)
She was in reality a wicked witch, who lay in wait for the children, and had only built the house of bread to entice them there.	This is all she made: the house, the grounds, and the people in the house. She made it and she waited. (p. 85)
When a child fell into her power, she killed it, cooked and ate it [...]	[said by one of the children the other mother has captured before:] She kept us, and she fed on us, until now we're nothing left of ourselves [...] (p. 101)
Witches have red eyes, and cannot see far, but they have a keen scent like the beasts, and are aware when human beings draw near.	The other mother was huge – her head almost brushed the ceiling of the room – 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... (pp. 148-149)

Note: own elaboration. Data for *Hansel and Gretel* from The Brothers Grimm (Grimm, & Grimm, 2008) and for *Coraline* from Gaiman (2003).

Similarities between these characters focus around two themes: their ways of luring children to stay with them and their supernatural appearances, the aim of which is to terrify the young audience. By giving them certain physical characteristics that distinguish them from humans both characters fall into the Gothic category of the supernatural, therefore contributing to the cautionary Gothic terror.

Modern audience

Having discussed the presence of cautionary Gothic terror in Gaiman's work, it is clear that *Coraline* is indeed a modern re-writing of a classic fairy tale. Making use of narration, commentary and stock characters, each to its own extent, perfectly adjusted to suit modern literary standards, *Coraline* has proven to be a part of the fairy tale genre. However, it is not only the structure of the story that differs from the original texts – the same thing happens with the audience it is intended to reach.

As might be expected, the experience of today's young readers is different from that of an eighteenth and nineteenth-century audience. Back in the day children would be scared senseless by stories of ghosts, witches and monsters, most probably due to the fact that folklore beliefs like these were considered real by their respective communities. Their modern peers, however, come from quite a different background. Having been exposed to both fictional as well as real-life gruesome stories from a very young age, the children nowadays do not experience fear in the same way their predecessors did. Moreover, being already familiar with the literary conventions of the genre i.e. the supernatural as the antagonist, good triumphing over evil etc. they do not experience the same level of anxiety regarding the plot of the story. Because of that fact, the fear that contemporary young readers may experience while reading does not last long after the book ends. Rather than focusing on the scary parts, children simply follow the story of a relatable character without treating the supernatural themes of the story as a source of fear – instead, they recognise these features as a regular canon of the genre they are already familiar with.

What is even more significant, is the fact that the idea of being in danger is perceived by modern children as something absolutely exhilarating. To quote Coraline herself: "In danger? […] It sounded exciting. It didn't sound like a bad thing. Not really." (Gaiman, 2003, p. 31)

Despite the fact that nowadays young readers do not experience fear in the same way that their counterparts did in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, it does not mean that the cautionary Gothic terror in *Coraline* is not realised. The aim of cautionary Gothic fear is to teach children important lessons by means of a story – and *Coraline* does it in a subtle yet effective way, with young readers remembering the moral of the story rather than internalising the fear.

Having met all the structural criteria, the novel is still a fairy tale – the only difference being the extent to which young audience nowadays may experience fear.

Classic terror in *Coraline*

As has been mentioned before, despite being a piece of children's fiction, *Coraline* has struck a chord with adult readers as well – their perception of the story was, however, entirely different. Being already familiar with different genres and having experienced many literary concepts themselves, it is no surprise that adults do not experience the effects of cautionary Gothic terror nearly as much as young readers do. So instead of focusing only on the adventurous or moralistic parts of the plot, adult readers additionally notice the elements of the story that remain elusive to children readers i.e. themes that are never fully realised in the novel – an eerie and disturbing undertone that lingered on the adults' imagination long after they put the book down.

Since terror experienced by adult readers derives from the supernatural (just as cautionary Gothic terror does) it also falls into the category of Gothic terror. However, unlike the cautionary one, this type can be classified as the classic Gothic terror on the basis of David Punter's definition in which terror: "[...] has more to do with trembling, the liminal, [...]; [it] consorts with a certain withholding of the occasion

of fear" (Punter 2009, p. 245). This type of terror is what keeps the adult readers on the edge of their seats at all times, in an anxious anticipation of something horrifying about to happen.

The terrifying elements of the story responsible for this can be ascribed to different realisations of Freud's concept of the uncanny, in the *heimlich-unheimlich* juxtaposition, the revelation of something hidden, the automaton and the fear of castration. Whereas Gothic terror is a trope that the novel is based on, the uncanny acts as a means of realising it in the adult readers' minds.

That is not to say that Gaiman has used these concepts deliberately in order to give the adult readers a good old fright. *Coraline* has appeared the strangest book he has ever written even to the author himself (Wagner et al., 2008, p. 350), but it is hard to say to what extent he actually planned it to happen. It can be assumed that the sole act of triggering the classic Gothic terror in the adult readers' minds can be ascribed to the Freudian uncanny because of the psychological nature of the terror itself, rather than to say that Gaiman planted it there intentionally, using it as direct guidelines for the story.

Freud described the idea of the uncanny as "a particular area of aesthetics" that "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (Freud, 2003, p. 123). In other words, the uncanny is a set of elements (be it real-life or fictional ones) that trigger a haunting and disturbing emotional response. The theme centres around the idea of disturbing familiarity, unnatural animation of things and many other motifs, the common feature of which is that it always triggers in the audience the sense of fear.

And *Coraline* once again met all of the above.

Heimlich-unheimlich juxtaposition and the revelation of something hidden

The first occurrence of the uncanny in *Coraline* is the juxtaposition of the *heimlich-unheimlich* (German for "homely-unhomely") – the disturbing familiarity of something alien. It is shown literally, in the form of an unfamiliar mirror-imaged flat inside Coraline's own home. When the girl first enters the other world, she immediately notices "There was something very familiar about it" (Gaiman, 2003, p. 37). The strangeness of this occurrence is what triggered the sense of the uncanny in the very first pages of the novel – and while the main character was able to shake it off quite quickly, adult readers could not do the same. The uneasiness connected with the discovery of the other world, so close to one's home would be enough to put any adult reader on edge. Yet Coraline, being just a little girl, failed to see the possible dangers of her venturing inside.

Together with the *heimlich-unheimlich* juxtaposition, the revelation of something hidden is another uncanny motif connected with the idea of the other world. As Freud stated, "[…] the term "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open" (Freud, 2003, p. 132). That is why the discovery of the mirror world would be perceived as an uncanny situation – the instance of finding another dimension, mirroring one's own in reality would immediately trigger an inner sense of agitation and unsettlement. It would also hint on the fact that the safety of the one place we should feel secure and peaceful in has been compromised. The closeness of the other world, as well as the fact that it is located in one's own house also suggests that danger is omnipresent and therefore even more threatening.

Both of these themes (the *heimlich-unheimlich* juxtaposition and the revelation of something hidden) complement one another. Because

of the discovery of another dimension mirroring one's own world and its closeness which compromises the sense of security of a home, the classic Gothic terror is fully realised. The uneasiness connected with these two motifs tricks the adult reader's mind into thinking about the possible danger at all times throughout the story.

The automaton

According to Freud, the uncanny effect of the automaton can be described as "[…] automatic – mechanical – processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person" (Freud, 2003, p. 135). Nowadays, the most common interpretations of the automaton motif are all kinds of humanoid lookalikes, including dolls, androids, mannequins etc. However, it is important to mention that unlike adults, children fail to be bothered by this particular theme. As Freud noticed: if the children's toys suddenly came to life, they would greet this occurrence with nothing but delight (Freud, 2003, p. 141). Children's desire to see their inanimate playmates come to life impair their ability to comprehend the actual eeriness of experiencing the same thing in real life.

Even though the automaton was not explored in the novel as extensively as in its 2009 movie adaptation, it still played an important role in the story. Nonetheless, taking into consideration Gaiman collaboration with the film's director, Henry Selick, on the making of the movie, the adaptation itself should be considered as equally important as the original text. The author also approved of the method of shooting which was stop-motion animation. As he later explained:

> There is a very, very different nature to reality in stop motion. […] because these are not human, because these are dolls, there is something intrinsically distancing. […] and I am so pleased that it didn't happen in live action, […] (Empire Magazine, 2009)

The stop-motion animation proved to be a perfect way of realising the uncanny effect on the audience, since moving dolls are the very essence of this uncanny motif. And even though the movie adaptation elaborates on the automaton to a much further extent than the novel, it does not mean that the original text is completely deprived of it:

> Coraline hesitated. She turned back. Her other mother and other father were walking towards her, holding hands. they were looking at her with black-button eyes. Or at least she thought they were looking at her. She couldn't be sure. (Gaiman, 2003, pp. 58–59)

The artificial appearance and behaviour of the other parents is what would cause the adult audiences to experience a sense of uncanny. With their familiar, human-like exterior and alien animation the other parents fully realised the motif of automaton, unsettling the adults' imagination with the classic Gothic terror.

Fear of castration

No matter how disturbing the adults found all of the uncanny instances mentioned above, it goes without saying that the most visible, most disturbing and most haunting uncanny element of all is the buttons for the other parents' eyes.

It is worth noting that this particular theme can be considered a representative of bodily horror. Unlike terror, which only hints on the presence of something dangerous and creates an aura of fearful anticipation, horror takes a tangible form, which shocks the reader with its realism. Because of that *Coraline*'s theme of sewing buttons into eyes strikes adult audiences as something horrifying. However, since it is never fully realised in the novel, it simultaneously acts as an example of classic Gothic terror, only enhancing an eerie and unnerving atmosphere.

According to Freud "the fear of damaging the eyes can be traced back to the fear of castration; one finds it understandable that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a commensurate anxiety" (Freud, 2003, pp. 139–140). And no matter how relevant the problem of castration itself may appear to the reader, the problem of damaging the eyes (which is a realisation of that theme) is present throughout the story.

It may seem bizarre that the same element that haunted the adults' imagination and was strictly connected to the possibility of bodily harm, was mostly indifferent to young readers. How could such a horrible and terrifying thing not bother them at all? The answer to that has been already discussed with the motif of the automaton and the kids' secret desire for their toys to come alive. Since most of the toys, especially dolls, have buttons or beads for eyes, the idea of a person that would look like that does not appear strange to children readers. Coraline herself is a perfect example of the children's perspective: when she first met the other parents, despite noticing their different appearance, she would still treat them as regular adults. The adult readers, however, when met with the same description, would imagine it in an anatomically correct way – with buttons sewn on top of the actual eyes.

Even though throughout the story Coraline's perspective resembles that of a child, there is one instance of the adult-like perception on her side. When she is asked to let the other mother sew buttons in her eyes, unlike all the previous children, the girl declines the offer (Gaiman, 2003, p. 57). And even though it is not explicitly stated in the book, the reader gets the impression that she must have done it out of fear. In this moment, she responds to the danger like an adult would; Coraline is terrified of the pain that button-sewing may bring and is frightened of the sole idea of it; that is because she, just like any adult reader, is able to visualise this process. In this way the main character shows her affiliation to both sides of the readers' spectrum – children's and adults'.

Nevertheless, the very idea of having buttons for eyes is what terrified the adult readers the most. In one of Screen Rant's Pitch Meeting videos on YouTube, Ryan George satirically reconstructs *Coraline's* meeting, impersonating both a person wanting to sell the movie adaptation and a CEO of Focus Features LLC, discussing the details of the film:

> 'Anyway, Coraline's other parents have buttons sewn into their skulls where their eyes should be.'
>
> '[...] What was that about the buttons?'
>
> 'Oh, they all have buttons sewn into their eyeballs and Coraline's other mother has a history of stealing children's eyeballs and sewing buttons in their places.'
>
> 'Oh my god.'
>
> 'With needles so sharp you can barely feel them.'
>
> 'Oh, I thought I heard you say it was a kids' movie.'
>
> 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, kids are gonna *love* it.' (Screen Rant, 2018)

The video was jokingly confirmed to resemble the real one by one of Gaiman's tweets (Gaiman, 2019), therefore admitting not only the fact that the button theme of the story is disturbing to adult audiences but also the duality of the novel's perception.

Conclusions

To conclude, Gaiman's novel has been perceived by both children and adult readers in very distinct ways. By making use of two different kinds of Gothic terror, *Coraline* could be read in two different ways – either as an example of children's fiction or as a deeply disturbing story for adults. Young audiences are subjected to the cautionary Gothic terror (a characteristic feature of the classic fairy tales), the aim of which is to teach them to be safe from the dangers of the outside world. By providing

the story with the same structural characteristics as the original fairy tales and adapting them to fit modern literary standards and audiences' expectations, *Coraline* realised cautionary Gothic terror to the full extent in terms of narration, commentary and stock characters. And despite the fact that contemporary children audiences experience fear in a different way than their counterparts in the eighteenth century, the effect of cautionary Gothic terror remains the same.

Adult readers, on the other hand, were faced with classic Gothic terror realised in the form of the Freudian concept of the uncanny, namely the *heimlich-unheimlich* juxtaposition, the revelation of something hidden, the automaton and the fear of castration realised in the form of damaging the eyes. These motifs haunted the adults' imagination while simultaneously they managed to escape the children readers' notice. By making use of these themes, adult audiences were subjected to the perfect realisation of the classic Gothic terror by experiencing the uncanny elements in the story.

These two types of Gothic terror are responsible for the dissonance between both children's and adults' reception of the novel. By appealing to different groups of readers, *Coraline* has proven itself to be a true masterpiece, surpassing the characteristics of the genre of children's literature, as well as showing its plasticity in terms of the audiences' experience.

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