

Cinderella and Coraline:
A Journey of Maturity and Self Discovery.

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (programme name). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Abstract

Fairy tales are the first stories we hear about as children. They form and impact our lives as we grow older. Fairy tales are used as analogies, as a story that teaches us about something and a big part of that is it teaches us about growing up. Growing up is hard, especially for girls. This thesis will try to discover how utilizing these ancient forms of storytelling teaches young children (in particular girls) about maturity and growing up. *Cinderella* (1950) and *Coraline* (2009) both demonstrate the two coming of age type scenarios where a protagonist must pass through threshold and learn a lesson of maturity and self reliance.

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INTRODUCTION

“Life itself is the most wonderful fairy tale”

-Hans Christian Anderson.

‘Life is a fairy tale’ is a quote you often hear people use to describe a happy life or one with a great outcome. But what is living in a fairy tale really like? Zipes sees fairy tales as narratives that always have the potential to be liberating because they ‘have tended to project other and better worlds’, he also recognizes that the liberating potential of these other worlds is not actualized in all situations, and in some cases is actively obscured or misdirected¹ meaning that not all fairy tales have a happy ending. A lot of the time fairy tales carry morals and lessons that are adapted to the time period the story is created in. The Grimm stories in particular carry dark themes of violence and death. In more recent times these tales have become less common as readers of fairy tales have come to favor the comforting and romantic over the cautionary.

Examine the following two stories: in the first, a nobleman who, after the death of his first wife remarried an odious woman who already had two daughters from her first marriage. The nobleman also had a daughter from his first marriage, but unlike her new stepsisters she was beautiful and kind. Right after the wedding the evil stepmother began to show her true colours, forcing the girl to do all hard work around the house. Despite all the hardship the girl didn’t want to say anything to her father because after some time he was also afraid of his new wife. All she could do is oblige. She sat by the fireplace every night covered in cinder. The stepsisters nicknamed her Cinderella. One day the King organized a ball for his son inviting all the nobility. Cinderella desperately wanted to go to the ball but because she had no fine clothes, she just had to selflessly help her two sisters get ready. Fortunately, Cinderella had a fairy godmother who decided to help her with the touch of her magic wand. But the magic only worked until midnight. When she arrived at the ball the prince

¹ Zipes Jack, *Breaking the magic spell: Radical theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, University Press of Kentucky, 5 Jul 2002. Print. PP. 3.

spotted her instantly and fell in love. On the second night of the ball Cinderella completely forgot about the time and had to rush off before the magic wore off, only leaving behind a glass shoe. The prince announced that he will marry the owner of the shoe and so the quest for the girl began. When it was Cinderella's turn to try on the shoe her stepsisters mocked her only to be surprised when she took out a second shoe. Realizing how mean they were they begged for her forgiveness. She forgave them everything and settled her stepsisters in the castle and helped them get married to noblemen that lived there².

The next story is similar: The wife of a nobleman is sick; she calls her only child to her bed and tells her to always be a good girl and she will watch over her then she closes her eyes and dies. He remarries to an awful woman with two daughters. Life soon becomes a nightmare for Cinderella when she is forced to cook and clean for her new stepfamily. Just like the previous story the king proclaims a ball, inviting all the single young women in the kingdom so that his son may find himself a bride. Cinderella and her two stepsisters are excited to go. The evil stepmother gives Cinderella an order that if she completes all her chores, she may attend the ball. Cinderella calls upon birds to help her complete her chores and get ready for the ball. The festivities last three nights and Cinderella manages to escape the prince each night to only on the third leave behind a gold slipper. The prince once again orders that he will marry the girl whose foot fits the slipper. The ending of this story is different, when the stepsisters try to win back Cinderella's favour, doves fly down and gouge both stepsisters' eyes out as punishment³.

If these stories sound familiar, it's because it is the story of *Cinderella*, 'the best-known story in the world' according to Iona and Peter Opie, a married English couple of Folklorists.⁴ Perrault's version, the first story (though fairy tales do not have one stable origin that historians and folklorist can depend upon as the source text, they continue to grow as narratives and it is unclear which version

² Perrault, Charles. *Cinderella*. Harper Collins. August 2014. Print.

³ Grimm, Brothers. *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Collins Classics. Harper press London, 2013. Print. PP. 164-171.

⁴ Opie, Iona and Peter. *The Classic Fairy Tales*. London ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1974. Print. PP. 117.

is the original), is considered to be the first telling of the story of Cinderella where she is gifted with glass slippers by her fairy godmother.⁵ Perrault's story (1696) is designed to appeal to the tastes of the courtly society of late seventeenth century France. Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* (in English it translates to History of the Tales of the Past), appeared at a time when there was a major shift in social norms and manners. The demographic conditions did not change greatly between the thirteenth and seventeenth century, the child morality surfaced to the forefront and people were questioning the importance of childhood. 'Perrault and the women writers of the 1690s created their fairy tales for the most part to express their views about young people and to prepare them for roles that they believed they should play in society'.⁶ The Brothers Grimm version (1812) has been adapted to suit the likes of the early nineteenth century middle class households. According to Zipes, there is a 'multitude of Cinderella types and thousands of oral and literary versions and retellings of the story of Cinderella'⁷ making it hard to pinpoint its origin and makes it difficult to explore her tale of abuse and hardship to marriage and riches. Fairy Tales change over time and their story telling elements are adapted into modern retellings and stories.

Potentially the most known retelling of *Cinderella* in this modern day, and the one this thesis' chapter 1 will be focusing on, is the one created by Walter Disney. With WWII breaking out just before the release of *Pinocchio* Disney saw a major loss at the box office. Disney risked all that he had on making the next princess feature film titled *Cinderella* Owing the bank a great sum of money Walter Disney reverted to fairy tales⁸. With a few magical Disney tweakments *Cinderella* was released by Disney to the public in 1950 as a family musical film. It became one of the most popular films released by Disney in the 1900s and remains a beloved family film, so much so that Disney created *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* and *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time*. It practically saved

⁵ Zipes, Jack. *The enchanted screen: The unknown history of fairy-tale films*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2010. Print. PP. 172.

⁶ Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. Print. PP. 30.

⁷ Zipes, Jack. *The enchanted screen: The unknown history of fairy-tale films*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2010. Print. PP. 172.

⁸ Los Angeles Times, *The Financial Magic of 'Cinderella': Cartoon Rescued Postwar Disney Studios from Ruin* by Charles Solomon, NOV. 24, 1987 12 AM PT.

Disney and is the reason that the castle seen in the movie became the logo for the company. The movie was met with great success, grossing more than 4 million dollars with over 13 million tickets sold.⁹ 'Cinderella liltily informed girls across the United States and Canada that their dreams would come true—if they kept on believing.'¹⁰ Another more modern example of a fairy tale that explores themes of parenting, feelings of abandonment, passing through threshold and overcoming darkness is *Coraline*.

Chapter 2 will be focusing on *Coraline*. *Coraline* is a dark fantasy children's novella by British author Neil Gaiman, published in 2002 by Bloomsbury and Harper Collins and has seen many awards in previous years. In 2009, Laika studios created a stop motion animated film, directed by Henry Selick, based on the novel. In the movie, Coraline moves into a new home, she has no friends, and her parents are too busy working to pay attention to her so Coraline must rely on herself to have a good time. She counts windows, doors, explores her new surroundings to escape boredom. It is important to note that Coraline is eleven years old. A limbo stage between childhood and teenage hood. Coraline is quite mature for her age and her parents let her off on her own despite just having moved into the neighborhood. While exploring her house Coraline discovers a small door, one that leads her into a mirrored universe where her wish of loving and caring parents forms into existence. Soon Coraline realizes that the price for her to stay is her soul. She must use her wits to escape the beldam, (a shape shifting creature that lures children to feed on their souls) and return home. *Coraline* explores themes of maturity, identity and temptation. The plot of *Coraline* revolves around a difficult parent child relationship. Though the novel and the movie are very different from each other they mostly carry the same theme of passing through threshold and overcoming evil. The movie borrows its structure and familiar story telling elements from classic fairy tales, such as *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Snow White*. Where there is a strong mother presence that secretly plots to ruin the protagonist's life. Both *Cinderella*

⁹ Los Angeles Times, *The Financial Magic of 'Cinderella': Cartoon Rescued Postwar Disney Studios from Ruin* by Charles Solomon, NOV. 24, 1987 12 AM PT

¹⁰ .K. Allen, Amanda. *The Cinderella-Makers: Postwar Adolescent Girl Fiction as Commodity Tales*. The Lion and the Unicorn 33. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Journal. PP.282.

and *Coraline* explore similar themes and have strong female leads who undergo a shift from being a child to having to fend for themselves while dealing with the general idea of growing up.

Chapter 1:
Cinderella: Life's a fairy tale.

1.1 DREAM BIG, STAY POSITIVE

Disney's *Cinderella* is a story about a girl who lost both of her parents and had to endure a life of hard work to please her stepmother and her stepsisters. She stayed positive and dreamt of a better life. Getting help from her fairy godmother and her rodent friends she made it to a ball where the prince fell in love with her. When the clock struck midnight Cinderella had to return home before the magic wore off, she left behind a glass slipper. The Prince searched for the one who the glass shoe belonged to and finally found Cinderella, they got married and lived happily ever after. 'Fairy tales are powerful stories, and as tools and productive technologies of control, they can shape the discourses of childhoods.'¹¹ Therefore, in more recent years the film was criticized for being anti-feminist and is often assumed to be about a weak, young woman in trouble who needs a prince to save her, much like other princess tales such as *Snow White* and *Rapunzel* and becomes rich thanks to pure luck and a pretty face. This phenomenon creates false stereotypes and sets unrealistic standards for young girls and create a romanticized idea of what growing up is like, it in a way creates an illusion that life is a Disney movie.

To quote Zipes 'The best fairy tales are supposedly universal. It does not matter when or why they were written. 'What matters is their enchantment as though their bedtime manner can always be put to use to soothe the anxieties of children or help them therapeutically to realize who they are'.¹² This proves to be more than true for Cinderella. As a beloved tale to many young girls, it teaches them to choose optimism. The purpose of a fairy tale is to show children that though there is evil, it can be beaten. Critics and scholars have been studying the development of fairy tales as a genre for many years concluding that these tales may have been 'the most important cultural and social event in most children's lives'¹³. It creates a safe space for the young

¹¹ Tesar M, Kupferman DW, Rodriguez S, Arndt S. *Forever young: Childhoods, fairy tales and philosophy*. Global Studies of Childhood. 2016. Journal. PP. 223.

¹² Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. Print. PP. 1.

¹³ Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. Print. PP. 1.

mind to wonder and explore life without the fear of judgment. Though it may seem like *Cinderella* is always in need of help from others to get by with closer inspection of the film it seems to be proven otherwise. Portraying *Cinderella* simply as a damsel in distress ignores the context of her life and victim blames her for the physical and emotional abuse that she experiences as she is unable to escape her situation. Though both sides have strong supporting evidence looking at the 1950's film, this deflates what is actually a positive message at the center of the story, a message of perseverance through pain. 'Traditional fairy tales often juxtaposed a sweet, melodic element with messages that were sharp, blunt and dangerous'¹⁴ this quote from Zipes demonstrates how *Cinderella* fits into the fairytale category, though at first glance it may not seem like that is the case. This is not simply a story about a handsome prince saving a girl, it's about a young woman who faces adversity head on and who is a prisoner in her own home. It's in theory about a child who couldn't be protected by the adults that raised her and had to learn to live life relying on herself only. It's about someone who chooses kindness and optimism even when times are difficult, who uses her creativity and inner strength to save herself. On her journey of self-discovery and in saving herself she is not afraid to take help from others. This plot bears both similarities and differences to *Coraline*. *Coraline*'s parents both are alive, but they are too busy with their work to pay full attention to their child leaving her more bitter and defensive. Fairy tales are social documents, as Jack Zipes has argued in numerous studies on the genre, they apply to the time period created but also can be related to a general lesson that every human goes through, the lesson of growing up.

'For some time, feminist critics have been concerned with the way fairy tales define women and analyze gender, particularly in the classic fairy tales by Perrault and the brothers Grimm'¹⁵. The story of *Cinderella* became so familiar to us that watching the film passively we think we already know everything there is to know. We have been introduced to many different adaptations of this story

¹⁴ Tesar, Marek, et al. "Forever Young: Childhoods, Fairy Tales and Philosophy." *Global Studies of Childhood*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 2016. Journal. PP. 224.

¹⁵ Crowley, K., & Pennington, J. 2010. *Feminist Frauds on the Fairies? Didacticism and Liberation in Recent Retellings of "Cinderella."* *Marvels & Tales*, 24. Journal. PP.297-313.

that play into the fallacy with the 2021 *Cinderella* film being the most recent adaptation of this classic tale. In this adaptation Cinderella chooses her career in dressmaking over marriage, which was supposed to represent her character as independent and career driven, hence playing into the fact that happy relationship and handsome prince equals to a damsel in need of saving. Dr. Silima Nanda said - 'Cinderella who strictly fulfills the female duties around the house, even though she is abused by her stepmother and sisters. She does not choose to stand against them; instead, she endures her situation until a prince rescues her'¹⁶. Most of the criticism comes from a shared understanding of the story not looking at how the character acts. The tendency to dismiss *Cinderella* for another 'saved by a man' story is not only victim blaming but slightly sexist. Cinderella's main personality traits are Kindhearted, caring and optimistic. These are traits we tend to admire in real life people. Though these are generally seen as feminine traits, in *Cinderella*, people assume it's a sign of her weakness. It is important to keep in mind that Cinderella is still a child, or a young adult who needs protection and care. Cinderella doesn't stand up to her abusers physically, she doesn't try an elaborate escape plan or hold back crying. Expecting her to get physical, or not cry in upsetting situations buys into the masculine idea of what defines strength and weakness. At the end of the day, she is only a child who is searching for her place in the world, relying on her dreams and hopes that there is a better reality for her. Saying her traits of kindness and perseverance aren't good enough and hence her suffering, presumes that the victim of abuse should always fight back.

¹⁶ Dr.Silima Nanda, *The Portrayal of women in Fairy Tales*, International Division Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2014.Journal. PP. 248.

1.2 THE WICKED THREE

In the Brothers Grimm version, we do see the use violence and punishment for all the hardship that the stepfamily put Cinderella through, and we get a different look into the character of the stepmother. Stepmothers are usually painted as evil witch-like characters, deceiving, harmful and horrible. Women in fairy tales are either portrayed as innocent young girls or older, bitter, status obsessed women. Looking at the time frame of when fairy tales were created, the 18th century, it explains women's want to marry rich. As a woman you had no rights and most likely worked long hours in intense labor, so marrying rich was a way to live a comfortable life. In the Brother's Grimm story, Lady Tremaine has no objective in the story other than to marry off her daughters to someone of high social standing and make Cinderella's life hell. She is brutal, she has no feelings for anyone but herself. She gives her daughters the knife to physically harm themselves by chopping off their toes and heel, just so that she could fit into the shoe to marry the prince and gain social status. In the Brothers Grimm version, the evil stepmothers and stepsisters' eyes get pecked out by birds and they have no other options but to live life as beggars. Not to say that revenge is sweet but considering that fairy tales usually had lessons to teach it might just mean that what goes around comes around.

Cinderella's father is also present in the Grimm's story, something that Disney changed in their film for a more dramatic effect and for us to feel more pity for Cinderella's character. In the Grimm story the father too looks down on Cinderella so much so that when the prince orders to see her he says, "There is only a little dirty Aschenputtel from my first wife, but she be the bride."¹⁷. Maria Tatar sees two mother figures in the story, the real, good, mother and the evil stepmother, as two halves of a single character. She argues that the wicked stepmother is the more significant figure of the two because it is the negative feelings toward the real mother that are expressed.¹⁸ This is an interesting

¹⁷ Grimm, Brothers. *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Collins Classics. Harper press London, 2013. Print. PP. 171.

¹⁸ Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1987. Print. PP. 223.

observation, though taking the film literally and working with the information provided to us on screen, neglects the real hardship and injustices that Cinderella faces from her wicked stepmother. In the Disney version, Lady Tremaine plays as a contrast to Cinderella's character. She is the complete opposite. She's vain, egocentric and jealous. Every time she's on screen she is either lit in a way that's supposed to make us feel scared and uneasy, or framed in a way of having power over Cinderella, visually communicating to the viewer that Cinderella has no choice but to do as she's told.



Figure 1: Lady Tremaine standing in the shadows looking down maliciously.



Figure 2: Again, she is hidden in the shadow of her own bed.



Figure 3: Lady Tremaine centre screen, she is wearing red to represent anger and power.

The most disturbing scene in the movie is when Cinderella's stepsisters rip her dress to pieces while the stepmother watches cunningly. The fast, sharp cuts and the black and blood red background indicate the abuse that Cinderella is experiencing, leaving the viewer feeling as though they watched a violent assault.



Figure 4: Cinderella crying after having her dress torn to pieces.

1.3 A DREAM IS A WISH YOUR HEART MAKES

It is normal for people to fantasize, in fact in more recent years the idea of 'romanticizing' your life became a common thing among young girls on social media platforms. Zipes said, 'We seem to anchor our understanding of reality in artworks dependent on the fantastic'¹⁹. As many victims of abuse do, Cinderella retreats into her imagination and uses her dreams as a way to escape. Her dreams emulate the future of happiness and freedom she so desperately hopes for. 'Fantasy matters because it can enable us to resist such criminality, and it can do so with irony, joy, sophistication, seriousness, and cunning'²⁰. Cinderella abandoned all hope of freedom. Through the tiniest bit of hope that she did have left, Cinderella's inner wish materializes turning into a mother figure. Though it may seem at first glance that the godmother saves the day by bibbidi bobbidi boo-ing, upon rewatching the scene it's not really the case. The song 'A dream is a wish your heart makes' plays as Cinderella is crying in the garden, the title of the song literally demonstrates what is happening on screen. When she is upset, we see the animals on screen sharing her emotion, Cinderella has been kind to them and in turn they share her sorrows. Having hit rock bottom when she says 'I can't leave, not anymore. In the Grimm story, *Aschenputtel*, there is no fairy godmother, her wishes come to life due to a wishing tree she planted on her mother's grave and visited often to get away from her wicked step family.

The fairy godmother's first few words in the Disney movie were 'Nonsense child, if you'd lost all your faith I couldn't be here' further proving that Cinderella's wishful heart brought on the magic she is about to experience. The fairy godmother's magical transformations such as the pumpkin turning into a carriage, the mice turning into beautiful horses or Cinderella's handmade dress turning into a jaw dropping, glittery ball gown comes from hidden potential in what Cinderella already has. Certainly, the heroine wouldn't have made it to the

¹⁹ Zipes, Jack. "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, University of Illinois Press, 2009. Journal. PP. 78

²⁰ Zipes, Jack. "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, University of Illinois Press, 2009. Journal. PP. 77-91

ball by herself, but she has created the dress, made friends with the mice and probably took care of the pumpkins in the garden, the fairy godmother only had to embellish what already existed. To reference the quote by Zipes 'the plain junk turned into gold that glitters'²¹. With all that Cinderella has endured is making her wish harder. She breaks the rules by going to the ball. That is her way of standing up for herself and her dreams. The passing of her cruel threshold into the doors of a magical fairy tale castle represent her growth as a person.

Cinderella's dream of love is primarily constituted by her yearning for freedom from servitude and the equally important desire to be found worthy of that freedom. 'Thus, Cinderella dreams not just of a man but of Prince Charming'²². Rather than searching for her prince charming Cinderella was searching for freedom, love was just a reward. The need to go to the ball was not just for her to meet the prince. Her stepsisters were more obsessed with the idea of meeting the prince than she was. In fact, when Cinderella walks into the main ballroom it is the prince that notices her first. The prince's meeting with his one true love is being narrated by the duke; he is trying to reassure the king that his son will find a suited wife 'For, lo, there she stands. The girl of his dreams' upon when the prince sees the heroine. Cinderella, however, is too busy taking in the utter beauty of her surroundings and her freedom to even realize that the prince is looking at her. The comedic narration of the duke mocks the fairy tale romance 'who she is or whence she came, he knows not, nor does he care, for his heart tells him that here is the maid predestined to be his bride. A pretty plot for a fairy tale sire, but in real life, oh no'. There is a play on words in his speech, a maid is another word for an unmarried young woman, but also a maid as in a female servant which both clearly point to who Cinderella is. Even the script pokes fun at the idea of faith. Two people destined to meet and be together. Neither the prince nor Cinderella expected to meet each other at this ball, let alone fall in love. When Cinderella was dancing with the prince, she was

²¹ Zipes, Jack. "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, University of Illinois Press, 2009. Journal. PP. 79

²² Panttaja, Elisabeth. "Going up in the World: Class in 'Cinderella.'" *Western Folklore* 52, no. 11993. Journal. PP. 85-104.

oblivious of his social standing. Sure, she had her ideas of the prince coming to rescue her on a white horse but this ball for Cinderella had a higher significance. It meant getting out of the chains that were put on her at home, to experience freedom if only for one night. The male Gaze is still dominant in this film, the prince is attracted to Cinderella because of her looks, but under the living circumstances back home it is easy to understand why she would be interested. When Cinderella runs away from the prince she loses her glass slipper, leaving behind a piece of her soul. Glass usually represents purity and the fact that Cinderella left her glass slipper with the prince may suggest that she lost a bit of her purity and a part of her grew up. When Cinderella hears that the duke is on his way to try on the glass slipper on all the girls in the kingdom she falls into a state of calmness, ordered by Lady Tremaine to help her stepsisters to get ready she ignores them going to get ready herself. The glass slipper is physical evidence of her dreams. It is the only thing left to her when the clock strikes midnight and the only thing that brings the prince to her at the end, giving her the freedom from being a slave in her own house. When her stepmother shatters the first glass slipper before Cinderella can try it on, she simply takes out the second one, representing that her dreams can't be broken, they cannot be taken away from her.

Throughout the film Cinderella stayed true to herself, she didn't change who she was or her dreams. Through perseverance and a positive mindset Cinderella got her freedom from her evil stepmother and stepsisters. Falling in love was just a reward. Disney's *Cinderella* shines light on compassion, which despite Cinderella's circumstances she managed to have for herself and for others. Just like Coraline both characters endured some sort of parental neglect, they rely on themselves and come out learning a lesson of self-discovery.

Chapter 2:
Coraline: Is the grass greener?

2.1 RELATIONSHIPS: THE I IN CORALINE

“Fairy Tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten”

-G.K. Chesterton.²³

This quote is the first thing we are introduced to in the book. It perfectly captures the essence of the entire novel and movie. *Coraline* is a story about a girl who moves to the countryside with her mother and father. They move into a big house that is divided into apartment blocks. Her parents work remotely and Coraline feels like she is being ignored. While counting doors in the house to pass the time, Coraline finds a small door that is bricked up. Her mother tells her it must be an old passage to one of the apartments. Coraline is restless but one night the door opens, the bricks are gone, and a long tunnel stretches out. She follows the tunnel and finds herself in a mirrored version of her world where her Other Parents live. This Other world is exciting and Coraline gets all the love and attention, but her Other Mother is actually a creature who lures children to feed on their souls. Coraline with the help of a cat escapes and fights to beat the beldam.

One of the main themes in *Coraline* is relationships. Both between Coraline and her relationship with herself and that with her and her real parents and her Other Parents, with her neighbours and Other Neighbours and that with a black cat who becomes her companion. In the movie we also get introduced to Wybie, whom she later develops a friendship with. There are a lot of characters that surround Coraline and help guide her in her journey of self-discovery. Coraline’s parents work from home and in her eyes, they ignore her. In the movie when Coraline tells her mother she nearly fell down a well and could’ve died her mother’s response is ‘that’s nice’. David Rudd explores the idea of Coraline’s search of identity in a paper titled ‘An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman’s

²³ Gaiman, Neil, *Coraline*. Published by Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, 2002. Print. PP. VII.

Coraline and Questions of Identity' making some great points. Both in the film and the book Coraline feels alienated wishing for a connection with her parents. In the book Coraline writes a note for her mother. The word 'mist' is written as such²⁴:

M T
 S

I

'Her feeling of boredom and loneliness are captured beautifully with a *mise en abyme*'²⁵. This could symbolize Coraline's feeling of loneliness. The 'I' is separate from the rest of the letters but without is the word still sounds the same showing how Coraline feels that she doesn't make a difference in the family. This could also show her wanting to be 'submerged into the mist, to be held in its embrace'.²⁶ Throughout both the book and the film we see Coraline's need to stand out, to feel seen. When she goes shopping for uniform with her mom, she asks for green gloves: "But Mum, everybody at school's got grey blouses and everything. Nobody's got green gloves. *I* could be the only one"²⁷. Coraline's final sentence represents her want to be unique. That the personal pronoun 'I' truly signifies her as an individual rather than a mere pronoun. "the only one" could also mean that she wants to be the only one in her mother's eyes. The doll that the beldam uses to spy on Coraline only appears in the movie, it represents Coraline's internal struggles of finding herself. Her inner monologue is directed towards the doll and it in a sense becomes her friend.

In this sense Coraline and Cinderella both share the same wish, a mother that will care for them. Where Cinderella's dream materialized into a magical fairy godmother Coraline's wish provided her with a passage to another world where her 'Other Parents' showered her with affection and gifts immediately only proved to be plotting against her. To refer back to a point made by Maria Tatar

²⁴ Gaiman, Neil, *Coraline*. Published by Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, 2002. Print. PP. 17.

²⁵ Rudd, David. *An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman's Coraline and Questions of Identity*, Published Children's Literature in Education, 17 May 2008. Journal. PP. 160.

²⁶ Rudd, David. *An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman's Coraline and Questions of Identity*, Published Children's Literature in Education, 17 May 2008. Journal. PP.160.

²⁷ *Coraline*. Laika Studio, 2009.

on the mother figure in Cinderella being the two halves of a single character²⁸ it can also be applied to the Characters of Coraline's mother and the Other Mother. Both mother figures are the same person, the real mother is the one Coraline struggles to get along with and the other mother who showers her with attention and whom Coraline wishes could surface more in her real mother. Zipes said, 'It is through fantasy that we have always sought to make sense of the world, not through reason'²⁹, Coraline is trying to make sense of her place in the world and in the family through a fantasy of a perfect family. The perfect dinner with a smoothie chandelier and a gravy train, fine clothes and a wonderful garden were all a mere trap to lure Coraline back into the beldam's trap. The beldam told Coraline she can have anything she wants if she chooses to stay. This is a great learning curve for Coraline, this makes her make a 'grown up' realization that one can't have everything they want, or it will feel meaningless: "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. What then?"³⁰. As a signifying person, Coraline has come to terms with the fact that she's no longer really a child, she doesn't always need the supervision of her parents, she is eleven and can look after herself.

Coraline borrows from ancient forms of storytelling. Both the book and the film utilize underlying fairy-tale structure to shape the protagonist's journey of maturity. Henry Selick said "Coraline may be a fairy tale, but it is set in our times, modern times"³¹. All the fairy tale like elements were used to lend power to the story by reinforcing one of its central themes of relationships. Another relationship that Coraline builds is a friendship with a black cat. It is common in fairy tales to involve animal allies. That is also seen in Cinderella with her mouse friends. Since moving from Michigan Coraline doesn't have any new friends so she confided in the talking cat. The cat teaches her about the other world, providing information on how to beat the beldam: 'challenge her. She

²⁸ Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1987. Print. PP.224.

²⁹ Zipes, Jack. "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 43 no. 2, 2009. Journal. PP. 77

³⁰ Gaiman, Neil, *Coraline*. Published by Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, 2002. Print. PP. 139.

³¹ Henry Selick in Conversation. Focus Features. Interview. 02.09.2009.

may not play fair, but she has a thing for games.’ Coraline’s boredom and search for excitement quickly turns sour when she returns to the other world in an attempt to save her parents. Returning to the other realm makes her reflect on her relationship with her real father as she recalls to the cat about the time he saved her from some wasps. It is in the human nature to wish for more, to be unappreciative of the things we have. Coraline’s adventure helps her grow as a person, the passing of the tunnel in that door to save her parents, being accompanied by her furry companion helps her realize what she’s needed to learn all along, gratitude for what she already had - ‘real parents’ and to appreciate the relationships that already exist in her real life.

2.2 OTHER WORLDLY WONDERS

Another common fairy tale element that is being used in *Coraline* is striking a deal with the enemy. This element creates a clear task and a dire stake. This can be seen in stories like *Rumpelstiltskin*, where the protagonist promises to give up her first-born child in turn for him to help her spin straw into gold, or in *Hansel and Gretel* where Gretel tricks the witch, pretending to help her in order to plot her and her brothers escape. The beldam created a universe where the children who felt abandoned could feel 'loved'. An eerie world that tricked them and aided to their aching hearts that craved attention from their parents. She created so called wonders that were exciting and captivating. She used the 'real' neighbours and the 'real' surroundings to create an alternate mirrored reality where those things appeared to be better. This is similar to how the fairy godmother in *Cinderella* created beauty from things that already existed, except the beldam did this to trick Coraline in an attempt to sew buttons in Coraline's eyes and consume her soul.

One of the so called 'wonders' the beldam uses to lure Coraline is food. Food plays an important role in many fairy tales. It is used as a tool to drive the plot forward. For example, in *Alice in the Wonderland* (1951) the food can make Alice grow bigger or shrink smaller. Japanese culture uses food in a lot of their animated films. One of those being *Spirited Away* (2003) where a girl's parents get lost stumbling onto a forbidden buffet and deciding to feast which ultimately turns them into pigs. 'It is probably in tastes in food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it'³². This quote supports the point made prior. Coraline missed her mother's cooking. Since her mum is busy editing the garden catalogue her father takes the role of the cook. The food looks less that appetizing and Coraline refers to it as 'Slime'. In comparison the food she is greeted with in the 'Other' world is colourful and very appealing to the eye.

³² Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984. Print. PP. 71.



Figure 5: Coraline's dinner made by her 'real' father that she refers to as 'slime'. The tone of the scene is very green which creates feeling of sickness.



Figure 6: The dinner Coraline is greeted with in the other world. They are saying 'grace' which in many cultures represents a family coming together before enjoying a meal.

'Food is the most personally powerful object of barter'.³³ Food was used as a tool of storytelling even in biblical times. When Adam bit into the apple given to him by Eve humanity was doomed. Food lures are symbolical and appear in myths, fairy tales, folktales and cautionary tales, it represents temptation and corruption. The giving into temptation was shown to us many times in fairy tales. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the siblings give into the hunger and start eating the mouth-watering gingerbread house even after the witch approaches from within. Bruno Bettelheim refers to this as 'a cautionary tale of oral greed'³⁴. Much like the beldam the witch in *Hansel and Gretel* built the house to lure children in so she could eat them. In Proverbs 25 16, it says "Do you like honey? Don't eat too much or it will make you sick!"³⁵. This quote shows how easy it is to give into temptation and how it can make you 'sick' in other words how it can turn against you.

Apart from creating delicacies, the beldam lures Coraline in with affection. All that Coraline wishes for is her mother's approval and care. She wishes to be seen. The beldam creates a garden that looks like Coraline's face (7). It is filled with magical flowers and is bursting with colors and energy. When Coraline sees the garden, she is amazed. She finally feels like she is seen. It is not a coincidence that this was the first wonder she encounters, as it directly shows a reflection of herself.

³³ Honeyman, Susan. *Gingerbread Wishes and Candy(land) Dreams: The Lure of Food in Cautionary Tales of Consumption*. *Marvels & Tales*, Volume 21, Number 2, 2007, Published by Wayne State University Press. Journal. PP. 195

³⁴ Bettelheim, Bruno. Hansel and Gretel. *Uses of Enchantment and Abuses of Scholarship*. " *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 104. Journal. PP. 158.

³⁵ NLT Bible. NLT Study Bible: New Living Translation. Tyndale House Publishers, Incorporated, 2017. Proverbs of Solomon, Proverbs 25, 16. Print.



Figure 7: Coraline getting a look at her face created by beautiful flowers in the garden.

The neighbours that the beldam also created are very affectionate towards Coraline. They quite literally put on a show for her to enjoy. As a child that is all one wants, attention and affection. ‘The fictional world in this story is identified as narrative pluralities that unfold in dream like spaces and belie the fact that the “primary” narratives, constructed as “real world” are, in fact, as ephemeral, decentered, and unstable as those other scenarios that are presented as surreal and “other-worldly”³⁶. In this world characters are presented as reflections of their fears in familial fantasy settings. When Coraline enters Miss Spink’s and Miss Forcible’s show the dogs ask her for a ticket which she does not have, they then say, ‘another one without a ticket’, which suggests that she is not the first child to enter this ‘Other’ world. In this world everything appears better but something sinister is afoot.

³⁶ Wilkie-Stibbs, Christine. *Imaging Fear: Inside the Worlds of Neil Gaiman (An Anti-Oedipal Reading)*. The Lion and the Unicorn, Volume 37, Number 1, January 2013, Published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Journal. PP. 37-53

2.3 GROTESQUES: HUMOUR & HORROR

Marina Warner describes fairy tales in *'Fairy Tales: A short introduction'* as 'a work of imagination'. A fairy tale story is embedded in a fairytale setting or has a fairy tale ending, heightened by its fictional magical aspects.³⁷ Henry Selick notes that *Coraline* doesn't just borrow from fairy tales it is like a combination between *Alice in Wonderland* and *Hansel and Gretel*³⁸. Just like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Coraline* is heightened by grotesques. Grotesques as a literary complex mean the blurring of boundaries. Many scholars consider Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the looking glass* (1871) to be some of the literatures most classic examples of grotesque imagery. Some traits of a grotesque include, disharmony or paradox, a combination of the comic and the terrifying, an exaggeration of reality and a sense of alienation, where something once understood becomes foreign and threatening. When artists invoke the grotesque, they cause us to reexamine the way we seek to understand and organize the world around us, calling into question previous assumptions³⁹. *Coraline* utilizes grotesques in its character design and setting. Though the two houses are similar the house belonging to the other world is eerie. In the book *Coraline* feels uncomfortable once she enters it, words like 'nasty', 'peculiar', 'skin as white as paper', 'taller and thinner', 'fingers too long' and curved nails all signal danger and *Coraline's* confusion.⁴⁰

We can see elements of grotesque in the character design of *Coraline*. The supporting characters, her neighbors all have exaggerated features. They are caricatures of real people and consist of exaggerated shapes. As *Coraline* passes into the other world she experiences a through the looking glass feeling where the familiar eventually becomes foreign and threatening. She meets

³⁷ Warner Marina, *Fairy Tale: A Short Introduction*. Great Clarendon Street, Oxford UK, 2014, 2018. Print. PP.49.

³⁸ Henry Selick in Conversation. Focus Features. Interview. 02.09.2009.

³⁹ Harpham, Geoffrey. "The Grotesque: First Principles." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 34, no. 4, Summer 1976. Journal. PP. 461-468.

⁴⁰ Gaiman, Neil, *Coraline*. Published by Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, 2002. Print. PP. 34.

different versions of her neighbors whose features become unnerving and sinister as the plot moves forward.



Figure 8: Example of grotesques. The familiar becomes foreign and threatening. Dogs turn into bats.



Figure 9: Another example of grotesque. Coraline's other neighbors. They look like they're made of jelly, bordering on comedy and horror.

Bruno Bettelheim argues that 'a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious'⁴¹. He believes that children not only want to be scared but need to experience fear in order to learn to deal with it. Processing emotions can be hard and Coraline is in the stage of her life where the line between childhood and self-reliance becomes blurry. In *Uses of Enchantment* Bettelheim makes a point that many fairy stories begin with a death of a parent⁴², the most agonizing problem for a child. This was evident in the story of Cinderella where she lost both of her parents in the 1950 Disney film. Though Coraline's parents are alive they ignore her need for attention and simply dismiss her when she asks them to spend time with her leaving her alone. Coraline gets close to losing both of them when the beldam kidnaps them leaving Coraline with only one option, be brave and save them. Nearly losing her parents makes her realize the connection she had with them. When the beldam tells her that they must have just been bored of her and they left Coraline's response is "They weren't bored of me," said Coraline. "You're lying. You stole them" ⁴³. These uses of grotesque imagery leave the audience unsure of whether this is comedy or horror. The soul of the grotesque is most evident in the other mother who eventually morphs into an actual spider-like creature (10). All these images support the stories' themes. Coraline soon learns that the perfect world she thinks she wants is in actuality rotten and terrifying beneath the surface.

When Coraline learns the error of her actions and attempts to disobey her other mother, she punishes her by throwing her into an old mirror. Mirrors are often associated with the soul. It is bad luck to buy used mirrors. The mirror in Coraline is said to come from a very old wardrobe, perhaps suggesting it once belonged to the beldam. The other mother tells Coraline she may come out when she's learned to be a loving daughter. It is behind this mirror we learn that *Coraline* is also a ghost story. It is important to consider the setting of *Coraline*.

⁴¹ Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment. The struggle for meaning*. Vintage book. 2010. Print. PP.7.

⁴² Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment. The struggle for meaning*. Vintage book. 2010. Print. PP.9

⁴³ Gaiman, Neil, *Coraline*. Published by Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, 2002. Print. PP. 124-125.

Coraline moves into an old Victorian haunted house. This is a classic ghost story setting with a mysterious and disturbing history.



Figure 10: The other mother morphs into the true monster she is. Her features are exaggerated and grotesque.

When Coraline moves in she meets Wybie, a neighbor boy around her age. The suspense is created when he tells Coraline about a child that vanished in the house that she and her family had just moved into. While trying to escape her captivity Coraline is introduced to three ghost children, one of them being the girl Wybie told her about, his grandmother's sister. As in many classic ghost stories the souls ask something from Coraline in order to help set them free. The ghosts tell her that the beldam lured them in with treasures and treats and games but they wanted more. This makes Coraline realize that the ghost children like her, were tempted by the promise of a perfect family, but it cost them their lives. These ghost story elements heightened the stories' theme, teaching Coraline about the dangers of obsession. *Coraline* reinforces a timeless theme that chasing something that appears to be better can prevent us from appreciating what we already have.

CONCLUSION

“We speculate with the fantastic. Fantasy is a celebrity and money-making machine. As a module in our brains, it has the capacity to transform plain junk into gold that glitters.”

- Jack Zipes⁴⁴

The quote by Zipes above resembles a mind of young child whose imagination is so strong because they have not yet been corrupted by the horrors of society. Our brain holds impeccable power of imagination in which we can create worlds of our own. We have been introduced to fairy tales as children. The fantastical worlds have been embedded in our brains as young impressionable youths. Disney studio is most associated with manufacturing “family entertainment,” “it was a master at fostering and responding to this legitimating ideology of domestic amelioration’⁴⁵. The theme of coming of age is evident in all of Disney’s enterprises from Snow White onward, but the insistence on the definition and containment of the adolescent woman is nowhere stronger and subtly articulated than in *Cinderella*. Disney dominated the field of animated fairy-tale films, and many if not most of his live-action films followed the format that he developed for his animated films—a conventional reconciliation of conflicts and contradictions that engenders an illusion of happiness, security, and utopianism⁴⁶. Our ideas and concept of fairy tales have been influenced by this Disneyfication. It created a stereotype in our minds since we were children that fairy tales end happily ever after. However, in saying that it would be misleading to consider solely Disney studios as having twisted our perceptions of reality and utopia as there have been competing films that offer a different version of fairy tales.

⁴⁴ Zipes, Jack. “*Why Fantasy Matters Too Much.*” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, University of Illinois Press, 2009. Journal.

⁴⁵ Zipes, Jack. *The enchanted screen: The unknown history of fairy-tale films*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2010. Print. PP.16.

⁴⁶ Zipes, Jack. *The enchanted screen: The unknown history of fairy-tale films*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2010. Chp 2. *De-Disneyfying Disney*. Print. PP.17.

Both *Coraline* and *Cinderella* experienced a form of childhood trauma, though their lives are considered a 'fairy tale' and have a happy ending the encounters they faced will stay with them forever. Both protagonists learned a lesson of self-reliance, assertiveness and maturation through passing of threshold. When *Cinderella* came down the stairs to try on the slipper she became a different person, one that can stand up for her beliefs and desires. Having spent most of the movie suffering in obedience she finally escaped the prison of her own home. Same applies to *Coraline*. Passing through the tiny door into the other world to save her parents showed her she could be brave. In the book when Miss Spink warned *Coraline* about dangers ahead *Coraline* thought to herself that it sounds 'exciting'. 'Fairy tales seek to awaken our regard for the miraculous condition of life and to evoke profound feelings of awe and respect for life as a miraculous process, which can be altered and changed to compensate for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that most people experience'⁴⁷. To quote Bettelheim, 'There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our very own nature'⁴⁸. *Coraline* then realizes that she is the one who's being too demanding of attention from her parents and her neighbors relying on them to be her entertainment. She finally takes control of her own world burying her desire to stay a child. Her wish to experience something other than boredom be it even danger led her on a journey of self-discovery and maturity.

To conclude then, *Coraline* and *Cinderella* explore themes of childhood, maturation and finding one's place in the world. These two stories shine light on adolescence and the struggles of a child coming into adulthood, having to let go of the idealistic expectations of life and rely on oneself. When we sleep, we drift off to dreamland, most of the time these dreams are a better version of our reality because that is what we wish for, but it is our nightmares that allow us to appreciate what we already have. Fairy tale motifs are experienced as wonderful because the child feels understood and appreciated in his feelings,

⁴⁷ Zipes, Jack. *The enchanted screen: The unknown history of fairy-tale films*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2010. Print. PP.22.

⁴⁸ Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment. The struggle for meaning*. Vintage Books, 2010. Print. PP.7.

hopes and anxieties, without these all having to be investigated in the harsh light of reality that is still beyond them⁴⁹. They each had their own dragons to beat. Strung between the real world and the world of fairy tales and fantasy these two protagonists fought their way out of 'childhood' and into maturity finding their place in the world. Bettelheim said, 'Fairy Tales offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover on his own'⁵⁰. Showing how fairy tales can help young girls process growing up by using their imagination. The true impact of fairy tale can be appreciated when analyzing these two stories.

⁴⁹ Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment. The struggle for meaning*. Vintage Books, 2010. Print. PP.7-9.

⁵⁰ Bettelheim, Bruno. *The uses of Enchantment. The struggle for meaning*. Vintage Books, 2010. Print. PP.8.

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