

**Tribhuvan University**

**Coralin's Metamorphosis into the Self-reliant Girl: Reading Neil Gaiman's *Coraline***

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**By**

**Srijana Shrestha**

**Exam Roll No.: 00006187**

**T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-756-44-2012**

**Central Department of English**

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## Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Coralin's Metamorphosis into the Self-reliant Girl: Reading Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*" submitted to Central Department of English, TU, Kirtipur by Srijana Shrestha has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

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Mr. Pradip Raj Giri

Internal Examiner

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Dr. Komal Phuyal

External Examiner

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Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota

Head

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Srijana Shrestha

## Coralin's Metamorphosis into the Self-reliant Girl: Reading Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

### Abstract

*This paper studies Neil Gaiman's children fantasy Coraline based on identity formation of the title character, Coraline. Neil Gaiman, as an author of juvenile literature, presents the transformation – from reliant to self-reliant– of the pivotal character in this novella. Therefore, the researcher attempts to embody the interconnectedness of the transformation of the novella's heroine and all the struggles she has to go through just to establish herself as a bold and independent girl who does not rely on any man, not even her father. In this regard, this dissertation asserts that Coraline is on the verge of becoming a new woman who fights with everything, as a man fights in most of the stories, to save her family. In order to examine the minute process of the major Character's transformation and her search for the true self, the paper borrows the relevant insights from Erik H. Erikson's theory of 'psychosocial development'. As far as the dissertation's argument is concerned, the researcher analyzes the text using some of the theoretical insights propounded by Erikson: Intimacy vs. Isolation, Trust vs. Mistrust, and Identity vs. confusion. As claimed by Erikson, that each new stage builds upon the living experiences of the subsequent stages that are clearly observed in the life of Coraline as she involves in a perilous circumstances. Based on these three stages of psychological development the research paper explores the world of Coraline where the protagonist undergoes the surreal circumstances that insist her to explore the inner self so as to imbibe a tremendous transformation in her life.*

**Keywords:** transformation, existential crisis, identity, true self, existence

*Coraline* is a dark fantasy children's novella published in 2002, which narrates the adventurous story of a small girl named Coraline Jones. In addition, the novella's

author, Neil Gaiman, an English author born in 1960 November 10, is the writer of juvenile literature. Therefore, it is obvious that the narrative is set in England. However, he does not directly mention the exact location, city, or town in the story. Still, the author develops the plot into two different worlds: the real world and the other world. In other words, the story takes place in a world where the heroin of the novella is living with her biological parents, but she is impatiently bored; and it shifts into another world where the little girl faces the unpredictable circumstances and characters that have a great impact in her life. Given the novella's account, this paper concentrates on the metamorphosis of the central character as a new woman. Hence, in order to examine the minute process of the major Character's transformation and her search for the true self, the paper borrows the relevant insights from Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

The story begins in a newly shifted apartment of Coraline somewhere in England where she does not have anybody to play with or anything to make herself busy with. Hence, as an idle kid, she begins to venture about the apartment, for she is bored. Besides, parents do not seem to have time for her. Alone and sad, she unenthusiastically explores her place, and happens to befriend with some neighbours, but she is not content with all this. However, the author creates twist in the narrative when she uncovers a hole in one of her apartment's rooms. Eventually, her banal life turns out to be exciting one with full of horrifying incidents and unearthly creatures which all have been waiting for her arrival. This tiny incident makes a huge difference in her life. As a matter of fact, the adventure and experience in the world behind the wall make her realize the courage and power she possesses as a girl which she never had realized before.

The issue of identity has always been complex and controversial. However, no

one has succeeded to come up with a universal definition of it. If we go on digging as to the issue of identity we encounter various kinds of identities, for instance, black identity, gender identity, cultural identity, and not to mention, self-identity. Therefore, while leafing through Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, as a researcher, I could not resist the urge to venture the idea of knowing the self, which is subtly embedded in the text. To be more precise, the researcher attempts to unfold the author's intent of exhibiting the inner transformation of the main character that eventually led her realize her true self.

Moreover, the author uses third person narrative technique in *Coraline*. Meaning, the narrator of the story is anonymous. Therefore, the anonymity of the narrator certainly makes the readers ponder on the purpose of using the technique as such. Furthermore, the narrator lacks his/her true self in the story and it is, as the paper assumes, the cleverest strategy of the writer telling us about the uncertainty of our existence and identity. The omniscient narrator narrates without using 'I' in the narration, but he/she knows all the things about the other characters and keeps record of everyone except for the narrator him/herself. Most often than not, children literature applies the omniscient narrative technique, and *Coraline* is no exception.

Madison Sedgwick, in his 2019 write-up, mentions, "This book has a theme that we should all use in our life and has characters that have a lot of dimension, background, and personality. The theme of this book is 'appreciate what you have or who you truly are' (1). Indeed, *Coraline* is trying to do the same. Although, she is acquiring everything she desires while she is with her other parents, she is not entirely content with them, for she realizes the true significance of her biological parents. Moreover, Gaiman says that *Coraline* was not written in a vacuum; he designed it to entertain his own daughter. In one of his interviews on YouTube, Gaiman reveals his intent and origin of writing this scary novella. He says,

My daughter Holly was about four years old. She would go off after kindergarten and come back and see me writing. She would clamber up onto my lap and dictate stories to me that I would type out for her. The stories would be about young girls very much like Holly who would normally have evil witches pretending to their mother and the witches would lock the little girl up and she would escape. I thought this is so cool; she loves stories like this. I intended to buy her some. I went to the bookshop and started looking for really good scary books for four-year-old but could not find anything. Eventually, I thought I will write her one and that is how it all began. (1:05-1:37)

In addition, Patrick Ness has a disparate take on the novella. In his review on *Coraline* he writes, “Coraline is a creepy novel that frightened the life out of me. I had to read it in two sittings because I was so utterly spooked. The author, Neil Gaiman, conjured up such amazing pictures in my head. He made it scary in a very succinct manner and still his book tells a fascinating story that is both weird and wonderful at the same time” (1). Undoubtedly, this novella is one of the scariest books that does not only frighten the children, but also the adults. However, the fright that the girl experiences throughout the story can be considered as the fright of her inability to save her as well as her dear ones’ lives. That is to say, she seems to be in a constant battle with the unearthly creatures in the other world just to prove that she is as courageous as any man can be. It indicates that she is fighting against the stereotypical concept of being a goody-goody sort of girl. Therefore, this paper argues that she is on the brink of being a new woman our society can merely find.

Phillip Pullman in *The Guardian* expresses his inputs on *Coraline* regarding the voice applied by the author. He writes:

The narrative voice is not Coraline's, but hers are the only thoughts and feelings we are told about, so she is at the centre of the story. This is the best point of view from which to tell a story about a child: the telling voice is an adult's, so it can plausibly observe and say things a child would not, but all the sympathy is with the child. Gaiman brings it off with a skill that you wouldn't notice unless you were looking for it. (29)

This review compels the readers to think on the narrative technique of the book. Although, Coraline is the central character of the story around whom the plot spins, yet she is not the one who is narrating the story. The enigmatic voice of the narrator discloses the fact that Coraline's innermost voice is imposed although the speaker is trying to speak the feeling and thoughts of the child. Therefore, narrator is narrating the story through the child's point of view, and this is another challenge for her to raise her voice against the mighty narrator who has failed to regurgitate the true emotions and ideas of Coraline

*Coraline* is a dark fantasy for both children and adult, which has the feature of horror and adventure at the same time. The protagonist reckons, to gain freedom and establish recognition it is crucial to explore not only the real world but also the virtual or the magical world. Mary J. Kehily in her research "What is identity? A sociological perspective" borrows the idea of Bauman that differently mentions his idea of identity in this post-modernist world. He writes:

Everyone has to ask himself the question "who am I, 'how should I live', 'who do I want to become' - and at the end of the day, be prepared to accept responsibility for the answer. In this sense freedom, is for the modern individual the fate he cannot escape, except by retreating into the fantasy world or through mental disorders. Freedom is therefore, a mixed blessing.



One needs it to be oneself; yet being oneself solely on the strength of one's free choice means a life full of doubts and fears of error ... Self-construction of the self is, so to speak a necessity. Self-confirmation of the self is impossibility. (1)

The aforementioned extract pours the idea that before searching for other's reality, first one needs to asks to oneself 'who am I'? How should I live or what do I want to become? The answers of these questions are only possible when one gets freedom or liberty. So, what is freedom then? When one has nothing to worry about then he/she is free. This is possible through fantasy or sometimes through intoxication. Not only this, one can set himself/herself to freedom by taking into the fantasy world or through the psychological path. It further explains creating identity means being oneself, but self-construction leads to doubts and error. Self-construction of Coraline leads her to the world full of doubts and terror.

Mark R Leary and Tangney P June have a different notion regarding this issue. In their *Handbook of Self and Identity* they borrow the idea from Erikson. It develops a widely used model of identity development that focuses on the idea "development of identity via exploration and commitment. Erikson used the term identity in ways synonymous with what others have termed self-concept". Coraline loves to explore. While she has nothing to do, she explores her new flat and garden. This attitude of her is revealed more precisely through this conversation, "What should I do?" asked Coraline. "Read a book," said her mother. "Watch a video. Play with your toys. Go and pester Miss Spink or Miss Forcible, or the crazy old man upstairs" "No," said Coraline "I don't want to do those things. I want to explore"(6). Not in the real world but in the other world she believes herself as an explorer. When the other mother makes a deal, if she (Coraline) wins the game she can go to her real world and take

her real parents. Coraline offers other mother a game where she offers; “An exploring game,” suggested Coraline. “A finding-things game.”(52). She offers her soul – as Dr. Faustus had offered his soul to Mephistopheles – if she losses the game. She does not hesitate to sacrifice her own life to save her parents’.

A true explorer can only show such bravery. Coraline tries to remind herself repeatedly that she is an explorer. In the other world, she keeps on finding where her parents are, then she walks up to the stair where the crazy old man lives. She feels thrill but consoles by saying, “I’m an explorer,” said Coraline out loud, but her words sounded muffled and dead on the misty air” (63). Only an explorer can be brave. It does not matter what kind of bravery one possesses. Her bravery exemplifies the fairy tale where she makes the readers learn that bravery comes in any form. Even though a person is afraid of something, but does it anyway then he/she is brave. And the bravery is what makes all the difference in life; Coraline is the epitome.

Although children’s literature is simple and straight forward, Neil Gaiman, the 2003 Hugo Award winner for *Coraline*, has designed this novella in a way that even the adults enjoy reading. About this practice or we’d better call it the achievement of the writer, Neil Gaiman says; "It was a story, I learned when people began to read it, that children experienced as an adventure, but which gave adults nightmares (90)". In fact, this cliff-hanger creates excitement and suspense in the children. However, the same story may generate dread in adult. All in all, this narrative is not only loved and adored by the children but also by the grownups. Children’s literature might be defined as the literature targeted to attract the children audience but this is not so much what children read as what writers intend children will read. It is distinctive than what we think of such literature. Such literary books are meant for children but the actual purchaser of this literature is always parents, teachers, librarians (adults)

rather than children.

The definition of children's literature according to Perry Nodelman in his book *The Hidden Adult* defines:

Children's Literature is a distinct and definable genre of literature, with characteristics that emerge from enduring adult ideas about childhood and that have consequently remained stable over the stretch of time in which this literature has been produced. Those ideas are inherently ambivalent; therefore, the literature is ambivalent.....Its central characters are children or childlike beings, and its main concern is the meaning and value of being childlike as understood by adults. It implies (or hides) a relationship between an adult narrator and a child narratee. (242-43)

The above-mentioned excerpt vividly exhibits the definition of children's literature, as it is a different but at the same time definable literature in which adults use their language to narrate the story of childhood experience. However, it cannot entirely express the genuine experience of children. Therefore, there may rise the question regarding the ideas that are found in the children's literature, for adults cannot completely justify the children's psyche or experience.

Not only that the key feature of children's literature is successful ending. For this Nodelman in the same book in chapter three, *Children's Literature as a Genre*, he pours his views; "A number of theorists see happy endings not only as a key characteristic of the texts but the main import of their existence. And since a happy ending inevitably implies an optimistic view of reality, children's literature is characteristically hopeful and optimistic in tone" (216). In this kind of literature, most of the characters are children and the story begins with a child's point of view that is optimistic throughout their journey. The protagonist of the story is optimistic that

even she has gone through many obstacles throughout her exploration, she always has a hope that helped to take her as well as the other characters out from the trap.

Nodelman further borrows the idea of children's novelist Natalie Babbitt that writes; "a happy ending "turns a story ultimately toward hope rather than resignation and contains within it a difference not only between the two literatures [for adults and for children] but also between youth and age. . . . When one learns to compromise, one learns to abandon the happy ending as a pipe dream, or—a children's story" (216). Everything seems fine and hopeful if the ending of the story is felicitous but there is a distinguishable part as well where children learn to compromise the things and adults learn to abandon for the successful conclusion. In addition he writes; "The happy endings of characteristic texts of children's literature almost inevitably suggest that, after a series of unexpected, unusual, and unsettling events, what has been achieved is the expectable, usual, safe daily round" (233). Although, the protagonist of the story goes through several wicked situations, she manages herself to come out of that level and goes back to her genuine world.

These definitions of children's literature give the idea about such genre which most of the children like. Children are the purposive audience for whom such literature purposefully gives the readers pleasure. Therefore, the books that adults appropriately call as children's literature must surely be the ones children enjoy reading. However, children literature most of the time target the little readers but Gaiman's *Coraline* is not only creepy but it gives the adults thrill while reading this story where he writes; "It was a story, I learned when people began to read it, that children experienced as an adventure, but which gave adults nightmares" (90). For instance, *Coraline* has the elements of children literature including the gothic elements. Children like to read books that include adventure, magic and fantasy that

are the essence of this book. Whereas, while reading this book gives adults terror and thrill. In a sense that children take it as a regular storybook including magical adventurous fantasy but adults or the parents may think whether their children may go to find the other side of their home that is the thrilling part of this book.

Before starting the story Gaiman has borrowed the blurb of G.K Chesterton; “Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten” (4). This statement states that fairy tales are always a fantasy, but the fantasy involves something that we cannot deny. It is hope. Everything can be defeated through hope. The fantasies and magic, such unreal supernatural things are coined as “uncanny” by Sigmund Freud who terms; “the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition” (15). The uncanny has deeper meaning than just supernatural things found in literature because this thing is somewhere in our alter ego in a suppressed condition.

As most of the central characters in children’s book, Coraline Jones is also one of the protagonists with average features. She belongs to the normal family where none of the members of Jones family sticks out from the house. However, they are most of the time occupied by their own study. Coraline is no more different from other children except the zeal for her exploration and often finds entertainment in witnessing things around her surroundings. In the text, an ordinary girl who loves to explore turns herself into a brave girl. At the beginning of the novel, Coraline finds herself as an explorer bound between the walls of her apartment, finds herself boring explorer. Her days were extremely boring that she has nothing to do except knocking from one door to another. Her exploration from the real world to the magical world eventually turns her from ordinary girl to an extraordinary one.

There is a reason behind her exploration. She unknowingly starts her perilous journey from an ordinary apartment to the world full of horror and terror. She is extremely attracted to the door in her living room. She wants to know what is there behind the door. Children are always curious to know and experience new things. The characters of the children's literature want to test themselves but are unknown to the consequences. However, at the end of the story they are able to solve the mysterious problems. Neil Gaiman shows the transformation of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood in terms of mental growth because she bears the responsibility of rescuing her parents from the very wicked creature. The situation helps her grow her ability to think like an adult.

The idea developed by Erikson and the scenario created by the author in the story exhibit that exploration and commitment can create identity of any person, for once we begin exploring things we change our perception about things. Coraline not only explores things but she is committed towards her responsibility, she is courageous to save her parents from the other world. This commitment also brings changes in her, which affects in her personality.

Furthermore, given the loss of identity, Marina Kompar writes, "the loss, or rather, uncertainty of identity, is also seen through the namelessness of the black cat and the lost children. When asked its name, the cat replies: "Cats don't have names ... Now, you people have names. That's because you don't know who you are" (15). This phrase explains names are the ultimate source of identity. If we do not have a name then we belong to nowhere. Therefore, we have desire to belong somewhere, and to achieve that goal name matters. As a result, every human has a name.

When it comes to talking about human identity, Erik H. Erikson is a prominent name. He was a German-born American developmental psychologist as well as a

psychoanalyst who was notable for his concept of psychosocial development of human beings. The term 'psychosocial development' is the combination of both psychological growth and socialization of a person in general. Moreover, he also talks about 'ego identity', which means the sense of identity that enables individuals to experience their sense of who they are. According to Erikson, ego identity is the means of a person's continuity. It protects individuals amidst the personal and situational changes. The essence of ego, hence, is creating an inner coherence. He believes that both psychological growth and socialization process of a child go hand in hand, and the former normally depends upon the latter. Erikson is best known for his 1950 book *Childhood and Society* in which he talks about the "Eight Ages of Man" that everyone is supposed to go through during their journey from infancy to old age. Each stage has two opposing emotional forces to which Erikson calls 'contrary dispositions'. Followings are the stages:

- a) Trust vs. Mistrust
- b) Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
- c) Initiative vs. Guilt
- d) Industry vs. Inferiority
- e) Identity vs. Role Confusion
- f) Intimacy vs. Isolation
- g) Generativity vs. Stagnation
- h) Ego Integrity vs. Despair. (22-43)

Erikson states that each stage builds upon living experiences of the preceding stages. However, considering the age of Coraline the research paper focuses on the three of these stages of psychological development, namely: Intimacy vs. Isolation, and Trust vs. Mistrust, Identity vs. Role Confusion.

As the plot of the narrative unfolds, we learn that Coraline and her parents have recently shifted in a new apartment. Her parents are busy all the time working. Thus, she feels that she has been ignored by her guardians. As a result, Coraline has to spend her time alone, doing nothing. Besides, she does not have to go to school on account of which the banality engulfs her. In other words, she finds herself isolated from her parents. Therefore, to kill time she begins roaming about the apartment, and unfortunately or fortunately, she discovers a door with a brick wall behind it. To her astonishment, she stumbles upon another world (replica of the original one) in which her parents are unbelievably intimate and caring.

Initially, Coraline seems content with her newly found Other mother and other father, for they take good care of her and provide her with a delicious meal. She is thankful to them and trusts them without a question. However, as the story begins to spin further she happens to uncover the fact that parents of other world are the evil ones because they want her to replace her eyes with the buttons, and keep her there forever. This is how and where her trust for them is demolished. Hadn't they forced her to replace her eyes and attempted to keep her there with them, she would have never been able to discover her strength.

In short, when her real parents ignore her presence, her other parents accept her. Therefore, she establishes a profound attachment with her foster-parent. However, in the course of time, the true nature and purpose of her adoptive-parent is revealed. Hence, she feels betrayed and afraid at the same time. Eventually, she makes effort to escape from that evil world. In addition, after she finds herself trapped in other world with her other parents, she is unable to distinguish where her real place is and who are her real parents. Also, she cannot decide which world she belongs to. It seems that she is on the threshold of her real existence. This confusion creates a desire



for longing for a certain place where she can be who she indeed is. This is how her journey for discovering her genuine existence and identity begins.

The clash of identity between the real character and the characters from the other world can be considered – as the paper argues – as the pivotal issue. To make the claim more precise, Coraline is flabbergasted because she is stuck between the two worlds: one is the real world where she thinks her biological parents have ignored her, and the next one is the eerie world where she finds the duplicate version of each character, including her mother, father, Miss Spink, Miss Forcible, and Mr. Bobo. Among them, the other mother is the one who is mechanizing other characters. The other mother controls all these characters. They do not have their true self, for they do not have anything that would make them who they really are. The other mother creates the other world and the other characters are just the part of that world. All of the other characters are just puppets without souls assigned to trap Coraline. Coraline experiences a strange attitude and behaviour of her other mother and other father in the magical world because they take too much care of her at their first meet. When she enters in the magical world, she encounters with her other mother. As soon as she encounters with her she finds out the difference between her mother and the replica of her mother. The other mother has a white skin, long fingers with a dark red nail, and the creepiest thing is that she has the eyes of buttons.

The other mother shows all her love and care to Coraline at first that almost makes her believe that her other mother is better than her real mother. She faces the reality much more to her liking. As a matter of fact, what she sees in this new world is the manifestation of her wishes; a loving and caring mother with interesting neighbours and a warm comfortable house that can be called home. To her this new world is an example of perfection but in reality this delusion will put Coraline's

existence into danger. Other mother gives most of the time to Coraline that she never got in her real world. Similarly, her other father pretends to be a perfect father than her biological father by showing the affection and playing with her. They provide her very delicious food as Coraline always wanted because she is satiated with her father's recipe.

Unlike her real parents, these "other parents" suggest her to do the things that interest her like playing with rats upstairs and even act positively her wanderings outside the house as an explorer. After her return, she realizes that her other parents are so much caring and contradictory to her real parents, give each other company where Gaiman writes in the text; "Her other parents were waiting for her in the garden, standing side by side. They were smiling. "Did you have a nice time?" asked her other mother" (27). The above statement is applicable to the situation because Coraline's real parents rarely notice her as they are always occupied with their work. The waiting of other parents show the love and care that the real parents lack. Children's literature often observes these critical desires of children and portrays other worlds in which they find a way to persuade themselves.

However, her "other mother" and her "other father" treat her nicely at first. She soon realizes the snare they are scheming. It is to trap her in the other world so that she will be unable to leave that place. Also, she sniffs the cruel attempt of replacing her eyes with buttons. What if her eyes are replaced by the buttons? If so, she can never free herself from the fake world and she has to be like other characters dolls without soul. However, there are other three characters in the story, which the other mother has trapped. They are the three ghost children. They are there for many years and they even do not know where they have come from, and what their names are.

A person's identity is defined by his/her name; however, Coraline has a problem with the name as her neighbours misspell her official name. This signifies that her identity is in crisis. Not only Coraline's identity is in crisis but also the ghost children found in the other world do not have names as a result they are presented as discrepancy characters. At first, the beldam shows her love towards to those children, where the children think she is showering her love and care towards them. On the contrary, the beldam wants to take the soul of the three innocent children. Unknowingly, they accept to replace their self-character by letting her to sew button in the place of their eyes. The children ghosts are in quest of love, they follow to the other world seeking for love and affection that they would get in there and stuck forever.

Most of the children have love-seeking nature comparable to Coraline along with three ghosts children who possess the same nature whom the beldam tricks by her falsity. In pursuit of finding love, care and affection how one can lose his/her own self is the idea this paper deals with. Thoroughly, this paper mainly focuses on how the identity is in clutch. Specifically, the paper concentrates on the character called Coraline and how her identity is in constant change while finding for love and affection of her parents.

Most of the works of Neil Gaiman are implicitly or explicitly related to the issue of identity. Therefore, even Coraline is not untouched by the subject matter of identity. In the narrative, he employs a little girl who does not belong in a certain place or holds a specific identity. Neil Gaiman is trying to showcase the conflict between the real world and the world of fantasy where characters have problem with their real existence and identity. For instance, he employs Coraline as such character who seems to be trapped in a world of evil wherein she is utterly segregated from the

world where she belongs. Therefore, the author creates such a world where Coraline has to fight with unearthly creatures and face the perilous circumstances to regain her lost self.

When a person has fear, he/she loses the ability of reasoning or thinking vividly. In such circumstance, she/he forgets her/his identity and existence, and *Coraline* is no exception in which the central character seems to be in a confused state of mind taken to her personality. Therefore, the author introduces creepy and deadly creature like beldam only to plant fear in her. On doing so, Gaiman is trying to make the girl face her weakness so as to sow bravery in her. In addition, she always wanted to be courageous throughout the story, but never got a chance until she encounters with the beldam. Besides, to show bravery one must face some dangerous incidents. Once she undergoes such circumstance, she says, “When you’re scared but you still do it anyway, that’s brave” (34). She desperately wants to introduce herself as a girl with tremendous courage, as a result she finds a place which is so much relatable to her will but she is in dilemma whether she needs to explore that world or not. Therefore, she repeatedly comes to her own apartment and goes back then.

Mental growth, as the matter of fact, is more important than physical growth. Nevertheless, there are myriad of confusions considering this stage. In this context, Erik Erikson in his *Childhood and Society* in chapter seven Eight Ages of Man states – as the paper has already mentioned above -, “The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of the moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and ethics to be developed by the adult”(263). By blending the idea of Erikson with the text as a child, the state of mind of a girl is waiting for the right time for her identification. The morality and ethics that she has learned as a child make her more responsible to act as an adult. Right

after she moves to her new apartment she finds something unusual that she keeps on finding why such unusual things are happening in her apartment. Within a very short interval of time, she makes herself mature enough to solve the mystery, finding the cause behind the forming the duplicate world by the other mother.

Coraline, as a daughter and a little girl, is longing for her own self. The question may arise curiosity in the readers as to her quest for the true self. As a daughter, it is undeniable fact that she is looking for love and attention of her parents because most of the time they are busy minding their own job, which made the little girl feel alone. As a result, she begins to ponder on her being. Furthermore, she wants to make her father realise who she really is, he suggests her to do the things, which really interest her. "Look—here's a piece of paper and a pen. Count all the doors and windows. List everything blue. Mount an expedition to discover the hot water tank. And leave me alone to work."(7). Rather than emphasizing his daughter he barely notices her presence. He just wants his daughter to leave him to his work and does not bother to know what she actually doing with her life. Once children start to realise their inner selves they begin to worry about their selfhood, which is unwanted or shameful that many children struggle with. The girl unknowingly starts her exploration of finding herself and she discovers the other world where her presence is recognized and appreciated.

Likewise, human beings long for their individualism most of the time. They can never be the same for every person. Individuality of a person keeps on changing according to time, place and situation that is never the same. It does not have any fixed point. It is in an active process of change, for one can have different forms of identities through disparate things and relationships. For instance, Stuart Hall states:

Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unsolved question in that

space, between a numbers of intersecting discourses. ... [Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action... the logic of something like a 'true self'. ... [But] Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself. (5)

Stuart Hall, in the above-mentioned extract talks about the need of rework regarding self-hood. Before we go somewhere to know our true self, we certainly attempt to know ourselves first and our relationship with others, for we have realized that our relationship with others defines who we indeed are. In short, who I am is predetermined by what my relation is with the people around me. To be more precise, Coraline's parents stand as Other. Therefore, thanks to this particular otherness with the relationship to their daughter her identity as oneself (daughter) has been determined.

Coraline knows, she is a girl with a perplex name. Her neighbour calls her Caroline instead of Coraline, "You see, Caroline," Miss Spink said, getting Coraline's name wrong, "both myself and Miss Forcible were famous actresses, in our time. We trod the boards, luvvy. Oh, don't let Hamish eat the fruitcake, or he'll be up all night with his tummy."

"It's Coraline. Not Caroline. Coraline," said Coraline"(5). The essence of her name gets stuck between 'Coraline' and 'Caroline'. Even after spending plenty of times with her, Miss Spink still incorrectly spells her name, "Have you seen Miss Spink, Caroline?"(11). Two of the old and retired actresses first known the girl by the name 'Caroline'. Maybe, they do not care about her name, but Coraline does not want her to be called by the wrong name. This attitude of Coraline vividly reveals that how a person is worried and fights or negotiates about his/her place in the world.

If a person has a unique name, behaviour, qualities, and belief then these aspects of human feature also contribute in forming identity. The children in the story conceive and seek the observation of their parents. Along with her, the ghost children are trapped into the other world for the love they wanted from their parents. While she has nothing to do then she asks her mother that what she should do. Her mother passes a piece of paper and suggests her to draw something. She draws a playful doodle, “MIST”(13) gives us hint that Gaiman is delved into the idea of identity through I where ‘I’ is hung down. “As Rudd points out, this doodle shows us that, out of context, it is hard for the “I” to signify anything meaningfully, to ward off the abject whiteness of the page”(160). The remaining of the book is about recovering that I.

On the other hand, Chloe Germaine Buckley in his book *Twenty-First-Century Children’s Gothic* writes:

In the psychoanalytic readings I have explored here, the ‘I’ in ‘mist’ is particularly significant. Coats, Gooding and Rudd retell *Coraline* as a story about attaining secure subjectivity: The ‘I’ seems unstable at the beginning of the novel, floating away from the other letters in ‘mist’, but the child claims it back at the end, where it becomes a fixed point of meaning anchoring identity. However, in my inter textual reading, the subject position indicated by ‘I’ is always floating, never fixed. (67)

Buckley’s statement clearly shows that the ‘I’ is floating which means the identity of the protagonist seems unstable. Only after defeating, the other mother Coraline earns her true self which no longer is that floating ‘I’. The significant meaning of ‘I’ is always identity and our whole life goes on searching for the fixed ‘I’. Disintegration of oneself is a trouble in *Coraline*, confirmed by the three ghosts children caught

behind the mirror by the other mother, tragically missing ghostly revenants who have failed to remember their names and even whether they used to be male or female.

However, Coraline saves these lost kids, finding their souls and re-establishing their individual personalities. We can find the same ideas in Lacan's notion "the self's radical ex-centricity to itself" is covered over with the fantasy of salvation and redemption"(189).

If someone or something has identical of that person or place, then the real existence is in crisis. Coraline finds a door in the apartment that has a new world where everything is identical with her real apartment:

Coraline walked down the corridor uneasily. There was something very familiar about it.

The carpet beneath her feet was the same carpet they had in her flat. The wallpaper was the same wallpaper they had. The picture hanging in the hall was the same that they had hanging in their hallway at home.

She knew where she was: she was in her own home. She hadn't left.

She shook her head, confused. (18)

Although, everything is identical to her apartment but she is in confusion either she is in her own house or not; she falls in an existential dilemma. The same thing happens in the case of her mother too. In the story when someone shouts by calling her name "Coraline?" It sounds like that of her mother. Coraline goes into the kitchen, where the voice comes from. A woman stood in the kitchen with her back to Coraline. She looks a little like Coraline's mother" (18). This is how her dilemma regarding her existence is created. When everything is similar, the real 'I' changes into other 'I'.

In the text, names are the first priority where the main motif for balancing the identity occurs. Throughout the whole novel; none of the people Coraline meets seem



to remember her name correctly, while the children she meets do not even remember their own names after what the other mother did to them: "Who are you?" whispered Coraline. "Names, names, names," said another voice, all faraway and lost. "The names are the first things to go" (57). By succumbing to the other mother's power, the children who lived in Coraline's house before her were trapped by the other mother behind a mirror, not even remembering their own names, thus losing their identities. (15)

The above-mentioned paragraph shows that names are the most important factor. If someone does not remember his/her name then that person is losing the identity. He is just a doll without soul and heart who do not know where he come from and who he is. The three ghost children in the story appear in the new world. Coraline asks them what their name are, but they are unable to remember their names. They do not even know their gender. This brief conversation with the ghost children explains more, "Are you a girl?" asked Coraline. "Or a boy?" There was a pause. "When I was small I wore skirts and my hair was long and curled," it said, doubtfully. "But now that you ask, it does seem to me that one day they took my skirts and gave me britches and cut my hair" (48). Before the soul taken by beldam, one of the ghosts says that she used to wear skirt and her hair was long but now her hair is short, and she is wearing britches in place of skirts. They have doubt regarding their individualism. At the same time, they lose their soul because they do not remember their names. The cat does not have his proper name; he is commonly a cat to everybody. Therefore, he does not have a separate identity.

Names play significant role in human life. Name is the first thing we ask to people in the first meet. That is why; babies are given names right after their birth. If there were no any rituals of naming then what would be the identity of people. How

would we call to each person in our family, or the people whom we want to communicate? Many questions arise in the absence of name. Names are important to distinguish one from another and the fact is that they are important to create individuality.

Additionally, in one of the articles, David Rudd writes, "Coraline is being offered the opposite: the prospect of being sutured to the mother forever, of being "buried alive." In short, the other mother offers to replace Coraline's eye with her own I: an eye for an I, in fact" (7). From Rudd's idea, what we know is the other mother tries to replace Coraline's eyes to button eyes because she wants to keep her in that place forever. The other mother wants the girl to be alive but she wants to change her identity all of the sudden by sewing the button eye instead of her real one. By replacing her eye, the other mother is trying to change the personality of Coraline. Eye is one of the parts of human body that helps to distinguish ones identity as well to identify others.

Psychologically too, losing an eye is the most didactic scenario of human body. For instance, Sigmund Freud in his *Uncanny* asserts; "We know from psychoanalytic experience, however, that this fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible fear of childhood. Many adults still retain their apprehensiveness in this respect, and no bodily injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye" (7). This notion clearly shows that eye is the most important part of human body not only it defines the human identity but also it is the foremost part of a body. The girl in the text exposes her terrific fear in losing her eye. The target of the other mother is to replace her eyes with buttons because she must have thought that this act will transform Coraline into another Coraline who will lose the original Coralineness.

In the text when Coraline explores the flat, which is identical to her

apartment, she meets a woman who is indistinguishable to her mother as well as a man who resembles her biological father, but they have buttons in the place of eyes. The following conversation from the text shades more light on this point, “Coraline?” the woman said. “Is that you?” And then she turned around. Her eyes were big black buttons. The man turned around. His eyes were buttons, big and black and shiny” (18). Through the excerpt, we assume that eyes are the very crucial part of human body to differentiate from one person to another. Besides, without eyes nobody can recognize anyone. Therefore, eyes, in the first place, are the tools that help us know and identify things and people.

If there was a real eye instead of buttons of the other mother and the other father, then Coraline may have difficulty to identify them as unreal ones. That is why, the eyes play important role to distinguish selfhood. Furthermore, as names are important to create an identity precisely eye is also an important factor to form an identity especially to those who are in the magical world because they all have buttons instead of eyes and by replacing eyes with buttons other mother is trying to ruin Coraline's identity.

After many obstacles, she finally succeeds to get back her father and mother from the illusionary apartment to the real flat/apartment, but they cannot recall what had happened to them. Coraline has not only the ideal ‘I’ of her father, but the virtual father even suggests her to run from that magical world. The other father is just the puppet of the other mother working for her but at the end he wants Coraline to get out of that place. Coraline knows that the puppet is just doing the things that the beldam ordered. She feels pity towards her other father and states:

You’re just a thing she made and then threw away.

The thing nodded vigorously; as it nodded, the left button eye fell off and

clattered onto the concrete floor. The thing looked around vacantly with its one eye, as if it had lost her. Finally, it saw her, and, as if making a great effort, it opened its mouth once more and said in a wet, urgent voice, “Run, child. Leave this place. She wants me to hurt you, to keep you here forever, so that you can never finish the game and she will win. She is pushing me so hard to hurt you. I cannot fight her. (61)

In the aforementioned excerpt, Gaiman is talking about the character of a father in which he portrays the persona of a father as a hero. The responsibility of a father is always to save his child. Therefore, the father is just obeying the order given by the beldam. However, he can do nothing except suggest her to flee from that place. The act of the father is reforming Coraline’s freshly established awareness of her identity. In this case of *Coraline* Rudd agrees that; “We could say that by the end of the novel Coraline has realigned herself in the Symbolic. She simply sees the world in different terms, and celebrates her own artifice.... And she is rewarded by being properly named”(167). The symbolic order of her father is logical and she establishes her new individualism. By the end of the novel she has nothing but, to celebrate her own deceitfulness because of that she is able to keep her name as it was till the end.

Michael Howarth in his article expresses his opinion regarding the issue of self-identity in which he states, “There are certain elements that play vital role in forming the identity. Specifically, Michael’s query concerning the formation of self-identity is worth pondering. In his article, he asks; "How can gothic elements help children deal with conflicts in their lives, and in doing so, contribute to the formation of their self-identities” (369)? As a matter of fact, there is no exact answer to this question. However, this rhetorical question reveals that scary things or situations make us realize who we literally are.

To be precise, Coraline's exploration is not just a usual kind of venture. However, she wanted to do more than just a banal act of roaming around; yet she succeeded in making her boring life something worth living when she finds a creepy hole in one of the rooms. This is when she finds herself in the entirely new, yet the same place. This is how her life splits into two challenging her to find her true self. Moreover, she does not only yearn to appear in the real world – for she is stuck in another world – but she also craves to become a real daughter of her real parents in the genuine world. Therefore, the hurdles and hardships she experiences in another world thanks to the peculiar creatures; she undergoes a completely different circumstance that allows her to see the world from a different angle in which her own self is also included.

Likewise, in the book *Torch of Enlightenment*, chapter eight (*The True Self and The False Self*), is a quotation that reads; “if we follow the desires of the physical body, the soul will have to take the consequences. The physical body can cause the downfall of the spiritual body”(70). This statement is relatable to the situation of the three ghost children. They follow the beldam in pursuit of love and care that they did not get in their domicile. They chased their body in hope of getting the things, which, they really wanted, but as a negative consequence, they had to pour their soul to the beldam. Obviously, they did what their body wanted them to do. After entrapped by the beldam their soul stuck there without their names and gender. They are mentioned as ghost children throughout the story. As a penalty, they are no more alive, the soul is no more with the body. The situation is worse than anyone can imagine, for they have already fallen down from the genuine world. As a matter of fact, the declination of the soul of the three children not only makes them weak but also makes them raise question regarding their individualism.

Furthermore, in the text due to the insufficient caring of parents, the girl happens to be wandering in her own world. Her parents do not have sufficient time to talk and play with the girl except at dine. In contrary to the situation of the text, the book *Torch of Enlightenment*, chapter seventeen (What Is The Best Gift For Our Children?) mentions; “Parents play a most significant role in the upbringing of children. It is commonly said that every parent wants the best for their child”(152). If this is truly the case, why the parents of Coraline are not giving their full attention to her? For instance, they are not totally ignoring her but because of the busy schedule they are not properly into their child.

However, Coraline’s parents are engaged in the work not only to earn money, but to make their daughter’s life better. In such condition, the girl feels as if her parents are not paying attention to her so in search of love, care and affection she wanders to the place where she thinks she actually gets all those things she has desired. If parents do not give their full attention to the children, then they feel outcaste and act as if they are far away from home. For this Nodelman states:

Home is a place of both safety and freedom, as is, to some degree, the world away from home. Children should feel as much responsibility for fostering the well being of the adults in their lives as vice versa. Adults are in some ways as ignorant as children. . . And children are in some ways as knowledgeable or more knowledgeable than adults. (57)

In addition, although the girl feels bored and ignored at her home, at the end, she realises that home is the only place where one could feel secure than away from home. She is the one who is the most responsible character in the text rather than other adult characters. Being ignored by her parents makes her wander about.

However, they do not bother to know what the girl is doing in their absence. She acts

as an adult through her knowledge of exploration.

In case of freedom of a child, Erik H Erikson in his book *Identity Youth and Crisis* talks about the children who follow the path of their of their parents in case of self- governance and appearance. For this, Erikson writes:

The kind and degree of a sense of autonomy which parents are able to grant their small children depends on the dignity and sense of personal independence they derive from their own lives. The infant's sense of trust is a reflection of parental faith; similarly, the sense of autonomy is a reflection of the parents' dignity as autonomous beings. (113)

Erikson, in the mentioned extract talks about the reflection of parents to their children that the child derives from his/her parents. The children have faith towards their parents and they think that their parents have the right power of self-government. For instance, Erikson further writes in the relatable subject, "the child must now find out what kind of a person he may become. He is, of course, deeply and exclusively "identified" with his parents, who most of the time appear to him to be powerful and beautiful, although often quite unreasonable, disagreeable, and even dangerous" (115). According to Erikson, as a parent one should be very careful that what we do or talk has a tremendous effect on the children. Most of the time, they follow their parents footpath, and strive to be like their parents. Although their parents are illogical, wicked, offensive, parents are always powerful and appear to be the hero to their children.

The girl in the story does heroic deeds. She saves her parents from the wretched and cursed world, which is the replica of her de facto world. She even manages to set free the souls of the three ghost children. She does not care about her own life while making things normal, but at the end of the creepy situation, she

believes her parents are the hero of her life. As Erikson has mentioned parents influence most of the time, influence their children.

Similarly, Coraline's parents are always busy working on the computers. Therefore, she too attempts to make herself busy roaming about the house as instructed by her guardians. In the story, the girl makes an effort to follow the path of her parents in terms of work as well as in terms of bravery. Once she is tired of exploring the house and the surroundings, she has nothing to do so; she sits nearby her father's computer and starts typing her own created story. She scribbles, "CORALINE'S STORY. THERE WAS A GIRL HER NAME WAS APPLE. SHE USED TO DANCE A LOT. SHE DANCED AND DANCED UNTIL HER FEET TURND INTO SOSSAJES THE END" (31).

Likewise, before coming to their new flat, she wanted to explore, thus, she keeps on asking to her father to take her to somewhere so that she can explore. Her father took her to the place for a walk but after some twenty minutes of walk her father said to move from that place because something was coming their way and it was wasp. He picked her up in his arm to save her, she says, "while I was running up the hill, my dad stayed and got stung, to give me time to run away. His glasses had fallen off when he ran" (34).

This incident shows that, although her father is not a superhero kind of person, he is brave enough to save his child. Similarly, Coraline also shows her bravery to save her parents as her father did to save her in the past. In this regard, it is proved that the children always tend to follow their parents act.

What's more, Erikson further proposes his insights as regards to the appearance and self-identity, in his book *Identity Youth and Crisis*. He asserts that not only children follow the footstep of their parents, but they also follow themselves.



Once they are satisfied with their work, which are easy to do, and simple to solve, they seek for better option to be more developed. According to Robert B. Ewen in his book, *An Introduction to Theories of Personality*, he writes:

Freud contends that the child must be forced against its will toward maturity, Maslow argues that healthy children actively seek to gain new skills and satisfy their growth motives. Once they have received enough need satisfaction appropriate to a given developmental level, they become bored with these old delights and eagerly proceed to higher and more complicated ones. "Given sufficient gratification, free choice, and lack of threat, [the child] 'grows' out of the oral stage and renounces it himself. He doesn't have to be 'kicked upstairs'. (224)

The above-mentioned statement reveals the fact that the more children are provided with the things they want, the more desire for something else will increase. To be more precise, they are bored with their regular playthings or the places they go to play. They need some immediate change in their life by replacing their toys or changing their junction where they frequently go. While Coraline thinks herself as an ordinary explorer, her exploring was limited up to the flats and garden before she discovers a very eye-catching door. Unless and until she has discovered a door, she satisfies by roaming around the house but she immediately gets bored after finding everything that are in the house as well as garden. She starts seeking for new exciting things like more exploration but full of miseries. The door is the only thing that attracts her as a result she ends up venturing the world behind the door. Her venture or adventure is what transforms her from one person to another. What is more, this inner transformation brings some sort of tsunami in her existence. Once she enters into the door, she feels so excited because of the sameness of her flat.

Moreover, she knows that place may drag some dangerous situations in her life. The uncanny situation of that place attracted her to know more about the reality as to how it can be possible to build flat inside flat. The weird flat and the people in the flat are beyond her imagination but she is content for having explored the place beyond the door, for it took her to the unnatural domicile on account of which her craving for being an extraordinary explorer is fulfilled. Undoubtedly, that particular exploration changes everything, not to mention, her identity too. She is no more the same Girl as she used to be.

Taking everything into account, this paper halts at the conclusion that Neil Gaiman's children's fantasy *Coraline* deals with the issue of identity formation as a person grows up and faces diverse critical circumstances in the course of living. To be more precise, Coraline – the title character of the novella – undergoes unearthly and spectral occurrences that almost wash her existence out. In other words, the protagonist fights her way back from the other world where the uncanny creatures' effort to erase her existence assists her to realize the tremendous power she possesses. As far as the issue of self-identity is concerned, no one is going to fight for anyone to obtain it. One has to struggle through the atrocious world and circumstances to establish it. This is what our pivotal character has done in the narrative; she has ventured the world of dead, fought with the supernatural creatures, and what is more, she has surmounted all the adversity and catastrophe to find her own identity. Therefore, the researcher concludes the dissertation by poking into the transformation the heroine of the story goes through; once recognized as a meek and flimsy Coraline is now perceived as a self-reliant and fearless girl which can be defined as the sign of being a new woman that we can merely find in the society.

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