Gabrielle Giles

3.2 Coraline

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Within the story *Coraline* the author, Neil Gaiman, narrates an adventurous and quite eerie story in the third person which sends a large point to the audience. There are several messages and themes Gaiman shares with his readers, dissatisfaction, courage, family, fear, different versions of reality, identity, and finally choices.

Gaiman begins the story's plot with Coraline, the main character, expressing to her parents and aloud to herself how bored she is. Her boredom and dissatisfaction lead to her looking for something more. She is very restless and looking for an adventure, something more exciting. Coraline's dissatisfaction leads her to look for something else, something more, and this gets her into trouble. The witch, known as the other mother, uses Coraline's boredom and dissatisfaction to intrigue Coraline in hopes to keep her in her other reality.

Haiman uses Coraline's boredom to also send the theme of a quest/adventure, elements found in children's literature. Coraline distracts herself from her boring life and reality by going on adventures. She calls herself an adventurer often. She explores her new flat, the yard, a well near the house, the garden, and everything on the property, until one day it rains and she can no longer explore outdoors. Gaiman uses this time to put emphasis on the adventure, as Coraline finds a door in the flat that leads to another reality. Coraline is very courageous, and climbs right in the eerie doorway that leads to what seems like another version of her life. There she meets her other mother, other father, and other versions of her neighbors. While Coraline explores this other reality, we witness more recognizable elements of children's literature. Within this reality animals can speak. For example, she goes to a show and the dogs are all in the audience. They are able to talk to Coraline, ask her for her chocolate, and engage in conversations about the show. Secondly, we see Coraline's cat, who serves more as a mentor and a guide through this other world, and he is not only able to talk, but very witty, sarcastic, impatient, and sometimes speaks in riddles. The rats are the other mother's spies, they are aggressive, scary, and on the evil side of the story.

Another element Neil Gaiman uses within Coraline that is recognizable within children's literature would be good versus evil and trickery. Coraline is the good character, she has good morals, is brave and courageous, and the readers will cheer for her. The other mother is evil. She is some sort of witch. Her goal is to kidnap Coraline to keep for herself in her other world. She preys on Coraline's dissatisfaction with her boring life, and tries to entertain her as much as she can so that Coraline will choose to stay. The other mother uses her wit, creating an alternate

world for Coraline that is much more exciting, the neighbors upstairs are actual actresses, and their audiences are talking dogs. There are more spaces for exploring and adventures, and the people are more interesting. The characters the witch has created all tend and cater to Coraline's interests and needs. Coraline does not fall for these tricks. She has a sense of intuition that tells her this is not right, something is very wrong. She continuously talks about an uncomfortable feeling. We view the good vs. evil element once again when Coraline is on an adventure, and finds three children. They state that the other mother has taken their hearts and souls, and they have been trapped in the darkness for a long period of time, so long, that they don't remember their names, their families, or even their gender. Coraline brings this to the evil character's attention, the other mother, but she simply dismisses it and has totally forgotten about them. We know Coraline is a good character in the good versus evil battle because she makes a bet with the other mother. She challenges her to save her parents, and the three children she just met. It's also important to note that not only do we see the good versus evil element in this piece of literature, but we also see beautiful versus ugly. As the story's plot unravels and we begin to figure out that the other mother is not actually a good spirited character, Coraline begins to discuss how she could have confused the other mother in the first place. The witch gets uglier and uglier as the plot comes to an end and she does more horrid things.

There were many other characteristics of traditional literature Gaiman uses within *Coraline*. We see magic objects, enchantment, and spells. The magic object would be the door, the well, the food the other mother cooks every meal, and lastly the buttons. Coraline wouldn't be in this enchanted world if it weren't for the door, connecting her reality to this eerie dreamland. The key connects them, and there is a battle for the key in the end of the story. Coraline has identified this key as the magic object that connects her to the other mother's world, and wears it around her neck so she doesn't lose it to the wrong hands. She is on edge until the other mother's hand escapes into reality and Coraline is able to get rid of it into the well, which seems enchanted as well. She uses the key as bait for the other mother's hand, and when the other mother reaches for it, Coraline tricks the hand into falling into the well, never to be seen again. Coraline is finally able to sleep at night because she knows the hand has gone into the well and will never arise, the battle is now ever and she and her family are safe. The food seemed to have some sort of magic of spell linked to it. The other mother tried to feed Coraline every day. She cooks her favorite meals knowing Coraline is starving in hopes of tricking her. Coraline knows not to eat this enchanted food, and is constantly eating her apples to satisfy her hunger that she has brought from the real world. The children Coraline met in the cupboard explain to her that if she eats the food one day she will wake up hollow, without a soul or a heart. Lastly, the buttons were a magical object. All of the witch's objects had buttons instead of eyes. She was able to control them. She has morphed and created people and other creatures. They all have buttons rather than eyes in their sockets. The other mother insisted that she sew on the buttons to

Coraline's eyes so she can stay forever. The buttons seemed to be a way for the witch to control her characters.

Gaiman uses the traditional literature element of a quest to elaborate on his theme and message of identify and family. Coraline hunts for her parents who have been kidnapped by the other mother. The other mother is constantly telling Coraline that she will love her forever, however Coraline denies her again and again, repeating that she doesn't want her love, and wants her family back. Coraline knows her identity now and does not wish to be anywhere but in her old life, with her real parents, in the flat that bored her so much before. She risks her life to save her real parents that she loves and the children that are lost in this alternate world. They mean enough to her to risk her life to get her life back.

The last message Gaiman portrays is a theme of reality. There are different versions of reality within the plot of *Coraline.* Of course, the two different worlds Coraline is trapped in using the key and the enchanted door to travel back and forth are different worlds and versions of Coraline's reality, however I thought it was interesting to note how the parents behave at the end of the conflict. Once Coraline has resolved the issue, and everyone is back home safe and sound, the parents no longer have any recollection of the traumatizing experience. We saw them in the middle of the text stuck in a mirror, terrified, asking for help, yet in the end once Coraline has saved the day, they act as if nothing has happened and have seemed to forgotten all about the incident, as if it was a bad dream. Coraline knows this certainly wasn't a dream because of her injuries and terrible state of her clothes.

Neil Gaiman used children's literature recognizable elements to help portray his larger point of courage, family, fear, versions of reality, identity, and finally choices. We viewed greed and a battle of power between Coraline and the witch. We see the characteristic of traditional literature of magical objects with the door, key, and spells the witch practices. Trickery is shown in the witch's character the mot, and lastly the entire story is a giant quest and adventure. Gaiman uses these recognizable elements in Coraline to tell his exciting, eerie, and adventure of a story.