

CORALINE'S JOURNEY: THE IDENTITY'S SEARCH BY YOUNG GIRL IN GAIMAN'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This study analysed the development of the identity of a female character in *Coraline*, a fiction written by Gaiman (2002), based on hero's construction by Campbell (2003). This essay, performed through bibliographic research, discusses the adolescent phase, as well the nonbeing and the distress of reality. Also, it recognized the emergence of the double that represents the alterity as a main function in the formation of identity. In this sense, it understood Coraline's journey as a return to her origin and inner darkness where the *other* means secureness and refusal of reality at the same time. Therefore, the *self* emerges from the renounce of the double for becoming a subject aware of her self-existence and vision about the real world.

Keywords: Coraline. Journey. Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Coraline's story was selected for the literary aspects. The fiction presents a young female protagonist who expresses an authentic personality and determination in her actions different from the classic fairy tales. Also, the protagonist represents the currently early worry about the development of the adolescent.

Into the young reader's literature *Coraline*, Gaiman created a heroine who moves to a new place to live and faces the changes of thoughts and behavior. But this is not an easy transition, since it involves some obstacles to be overcome. The plot includes rejection of the parents' feelings, the nonbeing, the adolescent transition and the theme of the double. These aspects contributed to Coraline in her journey. Thus, the fiction is narrated in third person with short dialogues and a sequence of events that confers a fast pace to the production.

In this way, the main objective in this study is analyzing Coraline's fiction from the perspective *The hero of a Thousand face* by J. Campbell (2003) focusing in her identity

construction. The literature study is a bibliography research constructed under the scope myth taking into account the language, the social, and the psychological aspects.

The paper is organized in two parts. The first explores Coraline's story and its literary features analyzed by the Campbell pattern. The second presents a conclusion about the developing identity question.

The fiction used the metaphor to describe the conflicts of adolescent of a young girl and her reborn in a new stage of life. This main question aimed to discuss the identity of a growing girl and such a discussion can help students practice critically the English language in class. That is the academic relevance of the study.

1 CORALINE AND THE SEPARATION FROM REALITY

Coraline moved with her parents to another address. The house was old and big with unknown places and had three floors, Coraline would live in the second one. In the first day, she met her neighbors, ladies Spink and Forcible who were an actress in the past and now live in the flat below. In the flat above Coraline, Mr. Bobinski lived. He is an old and crazy man who has a mouse's circus.

She discovered the door soon she had arrived in the house, however, she paid some attention just in a raining day, when she had nothing to do and could not to go out, because it was raining. She asked her mother about that little door in the drawing room and had got the answer: "It doesn't go anywhere" (GAIMAN, 2002, p.8). It was true, because in the first moment the door just opened onto a brick wall.

In the introduction's paragraph is possible verified some protagonist's features as she an exploring. This peculiar trait personality will induce Coraline in all her journey. According to Mark and Pearson (2001) the exploring personality is switched on outside features as young rebel or someone from mainstream culture. In the fiction, Coraline was disagreeing with her new life and because of it the life for her is boring.

During the night, Coraline dreamed with spiders and shadows from a thin and giant woman. She decided to follow her until the drawing room where she saw the old little door opened onto the

brick wall. She locked with the black key and went to bed. It is the first called from another world. From there, the connection to another world will always seem dream-like.

The rain finally stopped in the next day and Coraline could walk out. The protagonist received two messages in this day, the first was from the Robinski's mice which said: "don't go through the door" (GAIMAN, 2002, p.12). And the second was from the cup of tea that ladies Forcible and Spink had read and told her "You are in terrible danger" (GAIMAN, 2002, p.14). These messages illustrated the refusal of the call that is characterized by the will to avoid creating new problems to the protagonist (CAMPBELL, 2003). It warned she should be careful. Likewise, the reading of destiny represents the revelation of one feared event that probably will happen (ROSSET, 2008).

In the same day, Coraline won a gift to ladies Forcible and Spink, it was a stone with a hole. The ladies warned that it was for bad things. This stone was magic and according Campbell (2003) symbolizes the protecting power to supports with courageous at the mighty task.

Since the protagonist arrived at a new house she almost always was bored. Her parents were always busy and ignored her desires. This uncomfortable situation works as the mainly motivation for Coraline to find and cross the portal.

In this way, Coraline's parents were not at home when she decided to take the key, open the door and go through the gate. She walked down the hallway and when she arrived she felt something very familiar. She was in her home with the same objects and family, although she could not fail to notice a peculiar aspect in their face, in the place of their eyes there were buttons.

In this creepy world, but familiar one there was a woman who was called "the other mother", or also the *beldam*¹. She was white as paper, taller and thinner. Likewise, the other mother cooked very well and cared about Coraline. In the first day in "the other world" Coraline ate a delicious dinner, played with new dolls, watched an exciting theatrical performance by Spink and Forcible, and talked with the black cat. It was terrific to Coraline, though in the final day, the other mother made a weird proposal to her. According to Campbell (2003) staying inside the magic place confined for while illustrates The Belly of the Whale. It is important for captured the firsts impressions the unknown world by the protagonist.

1 The term *beldam* has its origin in Latin and means The Witch. Consult it: <https://www.webtran.pt/latin/para-portugues/>.

In the kitchen the *beldam* showed something to Coraline “On a china plate on the kitchen table was a spool of black cotton, and a long silver needle, and, beside them, two large black buttons (GAIMAN, 2002, p.27)”. If she had to stay there she would have to have the button eyes. The protagonist said no and went back to her home.

Frame 1: The Separation Period

Separation or Departure	Coraline and her parents moved to a new house.
The Call to Adventure	At night, Coraline dreamed with spiders and a shadow from a thin and giant woman. She followed them until the small door.
Refusal of the Call	She wanted to discover what had across the door, however she received two messages that said her should be careful.
Supernatural Aid	Ladies Forcible and Spink gave to Coraline a stone with a hole in the middle for see the unseen. Also, the haughty dark cat. It was a speaker`s cat which gave some advices to Coraline.
The Crossing of the first Threshold	She finally opened the door and found the same world, but she changed her view and it was more fun.
The Belly of the Whale	In the other world she found the other mother who loved her, but she had buttons eyes and made a proposal to Coraline remain there.

Source: Table elaborated by the authors in 2018.

2 CORALINE’S THE INITIATION

She woke up in the drawing room, prepared her breakfast and looked for her parents, but they had not arrived yet. She had talked to her neighbors and after she bought something eating in the dinner. She was completely alone, thereby in the middle of the night she started to cry until the black cat came and left her into the hall.

For Campbell (2003) when the character lives a crisis moment which its weakness and fears are exposed, but someone appears and console the protagonist by giving advice and help is *the meeting with the goddess*’ stage. In this case the cat became her mentor. In the hall, she saw her parents trapped in the mirror hung on the wall. She called on the police, but nobody believed in her.

In this dangerous situation, the protagonist decided to face the challenger. She dressed up, got some food, heard the cat’s advice and took the charm. When she had arrived at the other world again, she looked at the mirror and did not find her parents there, just a little child. The *beldam* tried

to convince her that the reflection on the mirror was not real. Also, the *beldam* asked for the keys and Coraline denied. Later, she fell asleep.

In the next day, she woke up a little confused and different she was wearing black clothes and had not more the key. The character asked the other father about the other mother, and he answered that she was out. The other father explained to her “This is all she made: the house, the grounds, and the people in the house” (GAIMAN, 2002, p.41). After that, she said to herself she was an explorer girl and should walk around the neighborhood for looking something, after that she just found an empty world.

The heroine discovered that the other world was a creation by the *beldam*. Thereby, Coraline decided to confront the *beldam* and demanded for her real parents. However, the other mother tried to convince Coraline to stay there ever after. Coraline got angry and opposed *beldam*, by saying "You are sick (...) Sick and evil and weird" and "You aren't my mother"(GAIMAN, 2002, p.44).

Staying there would imply in accepted all the other mother's rules including to change her eyes for buttons. Freud (1919) points out taking off eyes symbolizes the fear of castration what implies a maturation process of an individual with the external world or with the others. It happens through the repression, the prohibition, that is the imposition of limits. The threshold is positioned to Coraline. She had to decide if left her old behaviors and accept her limits in the reality or stay there and remain always infant.

The psychological structure goes by a process through with the children overcome his/her fear to become a social subject. Therefore, Freud (1919) states the uncanny derives by something that was lived but forgotten, well covered and should have stay secret, but for any reason it comes to light. The uncanny brings the infantile sources. This why it was natural and desired and when it reapers, it is strange and repudiated.

For teaching some manners to Coraline, the *beldam* trapped up her in the mirror. Inside the mirror was darkness and colder. There, Coraline met the children who told her how the *beldam* had made them prisoners and stole their names, memories, and souls. She heard and thought about that.

The protagonist lived the inner and outer adaptation processes. During her childhood she just received parents' influence, it represented the unique human model to her. As she is growing she will start to have conflicts with her models. The mirror stage for Lacan (2006) is an important moment of recognition to the children and it means the formation of subject's vision. However, the

mirror reflections give a false impression of autonomy to the child beyond the sensation of a full person. But, the subject still dependent on the others. The reflection of the mirror is characterized by the initial distress at reality.

When the other mother released Coraline from the mirror, the girl made a deal between them. The deal was a finding-things game and for win it, Coraline should find her parents and the children's souls to be able to go back her house. But if Coraline lost she will have to stay there forever and put the black button eyes.

The other mother agreed happily with the deal, because she did not think to keep her word if Coraline won. On the other hand, Coraline knew that she cannot trust in the *beldam*, but the girl needed to confront the villain to try save herself what illustrated *the atonement with the father* in Campbell (2003).

After Coraline had asked the *beldam* for clues and did not get any, she started to look into her bedroom. There, she looked in each part, in the toy's box, in the cupboards, and in the drawers until she remembered the child's voice in the darkness and took the magic stone to look at the bedroom: "Through the stone, the world was gray and colorless, like a pencil drawing (GAIMAN, 2002, p.54)."

With the magic stone she found a gray glass marble from the bottom of the toy's box and heard the boy's voice. She got his soul in it and so she had to find the others. Out of the house, Coraline discovered the other child's soul in something like a spider's egg case and got it too. The third soul was with the rat in Bobinski's flat. Coraline ran back it, but she could not catch up the rat, as it was faster. She did not have more hope, but she saw the rat was lying on the brick when the black cat appeared and decapitated it. She then finally got the last child's soul.

Frame 2: The Initiation

The Road of Trials	Coraline saved the children's soul and her parents. Thereby, she overcame obstacles using her bravery.
The Meet with the Goddess	The black cat supported the heroine when she was crying and encourage her to face the challenges.
Womam as the Temptress	The beldam tried to persuade Coraline to stay there promising to her that she will be happy always and ever.
Atonement with the Father	Coraline proposed to the Beldam a "find-things game", whereupon, the protagonist will win the game if she finds her parents and the children's soul.

Aphoteosis	It was the last conversation with the beldam. To save herself Coraline threw the cat at the other mother's face.
The Ultimate Boom	She came back to her house and accepted her parents like they are. She took on the real world with its defects.

Source: Table elaborated by the authors in 2018.

3 CORALINE'S RETURN

When Coraline came back home, the other mother was waiting for her. Coraline still had not found her parents, but she had a hunch. She had not looked in the mantelpiece. In this way, the protagonist attracted the other mother to a trap. She told to the *beldam* that her parents were in the passageway between the houses.

Thus, when the other mother took the black iron key to open the door into the passageway, Coraline threw the cat at the *beldam*'s face, caught up the snow globe in the mantelpiece and ran for the passageway. She was over again in the real world.

Coraline was woken by her real mother. She was in the drawing room and afterwards she had a common day with her family. At night, she dreamed she was at a picnic with three children. They were wearing old clothes. The children thanked her and said that something was not over. Coraline tried to think what could be, but she did not have any clue.

In the next day, she woke up early in the morning and felt something strange in the bedroom. She said to herself "It isn't over, is it?" (GAIMAN, 2002, p.78). She heard the scuttling thing and thought about what could be. It was the other mother's right hand which wanted the key. And the one who detain the keys become the portal's guardian. She did not know how to act and decided to talk to ladies Forcible and Spink which gave another message to her. The tea's cup showed something good, but a hand too. "Everything is coming up roses, (...) Well, almost everything (...). It looks almost like a hand." (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 80).

For Freud (1919) the hand cut off with own movements is considered uncanny. This sort of animism means the other mother's presence and her will to continue in control and take her daughter to her little round world.

Coraline had an idea to throw a tea party with her dolls and she took the black keys around her neck. But she put the tablecloth on the well in the yard with her dolls around, the plastic tea on it and the keys in the middle. She waited the other mother's hand. When it came it jumped and the

fingers closed around the key. The other mother's hand fell in the darkness of the well. She put her dolls in the box and went back home. She saw the black cat in the way, it was very good and safe. She went to Forcible and Spink's house and thanked them for the messages and the charm.

Winnicott (1965) states the false self-creation is a consequence of abnegate (defence) of new relationships with others in society by the child. Further, the protagonist needed to retriated in her safe world for a time. This other safe world was constituted by all symbolic realizations (mimicry of environment) to her, including her perfect mother. Winnicott (1965) argues the mother is the first object-relationship for the child and is important to satisfy the early child's demand for have an individual healthy developing or the "true self".

In this way, the other mother represents the protection against the real world, the social norms and self-governing construction that became the prison of her own self. Thus, the real world and the fantastic world are bounded, as twofold spaces. By the anxiety for non-fitting in the space of reality, she escapes in this double space, where the illusion filled her subject as-non-existent being in reality.

Rosset (2008) points out that we cannot deny the reality, though we can ignore and move to another place as a refusal. The double emerges as a substitute of the reality with an alternative of a better world. Indeed, the other address is not a second dwelling or a copy, but it is the same self unfolded. This apparent world is not a different place if compared to reality, because the reality referred to as "here" and the alternative reality referred to as "there" in this case are the same place.

Culler (1997) states the subject can be defined in two ways, firstly the self is given or made and secondly the self is unconsciously constructed by exterior factors as the social, psychic, sexual, and linguistic ones. Coraline's journey for identity is a process that mixture the two conceptions, because she is someone with a peculiar name, given at birth and also, she is defined by her choices along the road of her life. Implicitly her name includes the features acquired after the external achievements that is the result of her actions.

Coraline lived a distressful moment because she did not recognize herself as an adolescent and at the same time she could not persist in childhood. The frustration about reality left her to lock inside herself to search for the "I", constructing herself as a subject, resulting her identity.

She renounced the double after she realised the visible self lives in reality and the other just survives in the world of illusion in a non-existence. She decided to exist in outside world, as a subject by accepting her real identity as an adolescent girl.

Frame 3: The Return

Refusal of the Return	Coraline did not refuse to go back home. She struggled for that because she wanted her real life back.
The Magic Flight	When she came back she did not have any magic vehicle. She just walked through the hallway.
Rescue from Without	The black cat helped Coraline, while it was fighting with the other mother, the protagonist ran through the tunnel. However, she was not rescued for anybody.
Crossing the Return	It represents her choice and she chose the real world with its defects.
Master of two Worlds	Coraline controlled her inner fears and understood the life outside could be advantageous to her developing.
Freedom to Live	She decided to exist in the outside world, as a subject by accepting her real identity who is an adolescent girl.

Source: Table elaborated by the authors in 2018.

FINAL WORDS

This literature study developed an analysis about Coraline's fiction and her identity construction. The fiction describes a young girl's problematics of her age though through the use of fantastic language. In this sense, it was considered the adolescence conflicts, as well the uncanny, twofold realities and the acceptance of her own self in the construction of the subject. In the fiction it was identified Campbell's pattern in the protagonist's journey, which what the relevance of the monomyth's theory in the current story.

Coraline travels back her origin for overcoming her childhood further to achieve self-discovery. Likewise, the symbolic language represents the struggle for killing her false representations and reborn in a new life. Therefore, she had to break with her origin to become a young adult. She came to understand the twofold realities. The world behind the mirror was no more as a satisfaction to her, but an obstacle to her healthy growth. In this way, the subject emerges by accepting the self and its bounds, as well in the relation with the others not containing in

individually but extending to the interaction with the collective society. Indeed, the dualist life ends when she admitted seeing and being seen in the social reality.

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