

A Fantasy of Foreignness: The Use of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender to Solidify Self in Henry Selick's *Coraline*

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Filled with uncanny representations of femaleness, dolls, doubles, and eyes, *Coraline* explores identity and narcissistic desire. Much of the current scholarship on *Coraline* uses psychoanalysis to discuss representation of identity development, but none articulate the important role that foreignness plays.¹ Foreignness and the uncanny have an important relationship to self development as Kristeva has posed in *Strangers to Ourselves*. Unlike Kristeva's development of foreignness, I portray how foreignness does not lead to an internal foreignness in *Coraline*. Instead, foreignness (largely based in the film on gender, ethnicity, and race) functions as a tool to establish an empowered identity and sets hierarchies between the self and others. I label characters from the film using Kristeva's terms of benevolent and malevolent others. The malevolent others are the phallic Other Mother and the impotent Other Father who are manifested aspects of Coraline's infantile self. Conversely, racialized figures, those of Wybie and his family, and Coraline's foreign neighbors represent the benevolent others. Othering becomes a way to displace malevolence and negotiate threats to a unified self. Coraline destroys one type of double, and co-opts the other. After a description of the overall search for identity as seen in the film and discussed in current scholarship, I analyze characters of Henry Selick's film² *Coraline* based on Neil Gaiman's novel to show how the characters function in Coraline's development of self through their foreignness.

Coraline tells the story of a young girl who moves with her parents into a new home in a new town. Her parents do not pay enough attention to her as they are involved in their stay at home writing careers. Her mother does not cook, has little to no house wife duties, and provides no comfort to the bored and lonely Coraline. Although Coraline's father seems to be a bit more entertaining, he cooks food that she doesn't like, and defers to his wife in all questions of power. Unhappy in her family situation, Coraline explores her new home and finds a door that leads into another world. As Peter Gutterez identifies in "Identity and the Uncanny: A *Coraline* Study Guide" much of the film emphasizes the uncanny through representations of dolls, puppets, and doppelgangers—distorted mirror versions of Coraline's normal world. David Rudd looks at the

¹ Race and foreignness are different in the book since the book takes place in England instead of America, Bobo (Bobinsky) isn't Russian, and there is no character of Wybie. But, even those few articles discussing the film instead of the novel neglect the important role that race and foreignness plays.

² The issue of identity development has been considered by critics, but most of these articles have been on the book. Since there is a significant amount of thematic crossover between film and book, I use sources on the book as well as the film but focus my argument on the film since it emphasizes foreignness which is the main feature of this article.

Other World through Freud's term *unheimlich*. In this world, Coraline's mother's doppelganger, the Other Mother, is everything that her mother is not. She enjoys cooking, dressing up, and pampering Coraline's every desire. Soon, Coraline realizes this happy surface covers a deadly world, and the Other Mother is trying to kidnap and consume Coraline as she has done with three previous children. With the help of her neighbors, Coraline fights to survive, free her parents, and release the trapped children's souls before returning to and learning to love her normal life.

When analyzing the identity formation in the film, Coraline's struggle to develop past childhood identification with her parents is first and foremost. In "Family Romance" Freud states that the "separation of the individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary achievements of his development, yet at the same time one of the most painful" ("Family Romance" 37). As Richard Gooding states "Coraline imagines the game as a struggle against a hostile antagonist, it is more fundamentally a struggle against her own desire for dependency and identification" (397). In attempting to move beyond the infantile stage where the child sees no boundary between mother and child, Coraline must battle the uncanny place that mother/child bond has become. Coraline believes at first that she wants to be entertained by her parents, to play with them and remain with them forever. Rudd's "An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and Questions of Identity" takes a psychoanalytic approach to demonstrate that the film relies on a cultural fear of existence as separate beings; we want to neither be consumed by another nor be completely overlooked. Coraline feels that her parents ignore her, and she travels to the Other World where she receives the family she thinks she wants. Freud describes the stage of development where "the child's imagination is occupied with the task of ridding himself of his parents, of whom he now has a low opinion, and replacing them by others, usually of superior social standing" ("Family Romance" 38). Coraline's other parents seem far superior. Her mother is prettier and better at being a mother (i.e. cooking, cleaning, paying attention to children) and her father is more charming and entertaining.

Although the Other World first appears to Coraline to be the answer to her dreams, it soon becomes clear it is the flipside of Rudd's proposal—consumption in contrast to isolation. The shift that takes place in the Other World represents the shift from mother-child infantilism to social relationships. The Other Mother is far too controlling, and Coraline must learn to live without her. Elizabeth Parsons, Noarah Sawers, and Kate McNally explain that the Other Mother "By providing 'all' for Coraline, traps Coraline in a pre-Oedipal state where she is not allowed to desire because all her needs are met...she cannot grow up and understand cultural law that allow her to properly function in a (nuclear, heterosexual) family" (373). Coraline must develop beyond the role as her mother's child into an individual participant in a larger social setting. In "Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic," Karen Coats explains that Coraline's boredom indicates that she is ready to develop independence (87). Coraline is clearly aggravated that people around her cannot differentiate her name as Coraline not Caroline, and she tells her mother on a shopping trip that she wants gloves

different from all of the other school children. She wants to be recognized as a particular individual, not any child. But, it is not until her fantasy of wish fulfillment is granted in the other reality that she realizes that she must function outside of her parents as independent.

As *Coraline* demonstrates a child's struggle for identity separate from her parents, it is also specifically a struggle for a woman's identity. *Coraline* is a female fantasy, marked as occurring in a pink palace where Coraline tries to figure out her mother's place and function allowing Coraline to find her own as well. Parson, Sawers, McNally connect the film's use of psychoanalysis to its postfeminist framework that undermines material feminism. According to the film, a woman should be feminine but not too feminine, and she definitely shouldn't be a phallic monster. Parson, Sawers, McNally state that in *Coraline* "The too-powerful (phallic) mother's dominance must be overthrown, and as the happy resolution attests, it is only through a psychoanalytic journey that represses the fantasy of feminine power and agency that the 'normative' position for... female protagonists are attained" (371). Although the film portrays lessons like being brave, standing up for oneself, and helping others, by destroying the Other Mother, the phallic female aspect of Coraline's fantasy, Coraline's journey towards selfhood is dramatically undercut and normalized. The film portrays Coraline speaking for (and therefore take the voice of) others and internalizing the law of the father. Although the men portrayed are mostly castrated and impotent, my exploration of the foreignness of gender and race show that the film highlights and supports a patriarchal and heteronormative white structure.

The Other Mother and the Other Father are marked as foreign since they live in the *Other* world. Kristeva writes, "Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (1). And yet, in *Coraline* the recognition of the foreigner includes what Kristeva hopes to avoid, a leveling. For Kristeva the "foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my differences arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamendable to bonds and communities" ("Toccata" 1). But while the foreigners emerge when consciousness of differences arises, Coraline internalizes the foreigners instead of recognizing it in herself. The Other Mother is portrayed as a malevolent other that Coraline destroys in order to better function as an individual in society, and her foreignness is depicted through her monstrosity phallic femininity. At first a welcome sight to Coraline, the Other Mother's feminine performance grows more horrifying and uncanny as the adventure progresses. All of the Other Mother's characteristics are distinctly gendered; these include her connection to dolls, her mothering consumption, and her development into a black widow. The opening credits show the Other Mother's spider-like hands sewing dolls. Coraline finds a miniature doll version of herself that the Other Mother made. And the most prominent feature of the characters in the Other World is their button eyes. The other parents offer Coraline button eyes so she'll stay in the Other World. Rudd explains that "Coraline's button replacements have the related association of giving up

one's soul, the eyes being its windows... 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." (Rudd 163). Coraline can become forever her Other Mother's possession. Dolls represent the stereotypical women's gender role of nurturer, of mother.

In the *Other Mother*, mothering becomes more and more uncanny. Still something that should be home to us, the female body and mothering instincts become monstrous, terrifying, and all consuming. In an artist conception drawing for the *Other Mother*, artist Chris Appelhan notes that at the peak of the *Other Mother* she is beautiful and glamorous but then becomes too hard and monstrous (Jones 81). This first version of the *Other Mother* is Coraline's (and the film's) version of what a perfect mother (woman) should be: beautiful and nurturing. Henry Selick says that "every time Coraline goes back to the Other World, her Other Mother seems a little more beautiful. In fact, she is transforming. She is becoming the ideal version of Coraline's real mother" (Jones 152). But, this gendered portrayal goes terribly wrong. She is represented as ultra feminine, doll-like, and far too powerful. The film shows that gaining too much power through the connection between mother and child is to be foreign through a phallic femininity. The *Other Mother* is a fairly traditional witch character which Carolyn Daniel describes as "the embodiment of the bad breast—the devouring mother figure" (117).

In the film, the cat explains to Coraline that the *Other Mother* "wants something to love [...] something that isn't her... or maybe she'd just love something to eat." This is later confirmed by the ghosts of the captive children, who tell Coraline that the *Other Mother* "locked us here, and ate up our lives." Although juxtaposed by the cat as an either/or relationship (that the *Other Mother* either wants to love or wants to eat) the relationship between loving and consuming is far closer. To love too much is to consume. Daniel discusses the portrayal of food and eating in detail in *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature*. Daniel discusses how "the primal experience also involves absolute fulfillment" (88). In particular, the abundance of food first portrayed in the *Other World* depicts "a land where hunger and anxiety are unknown, where there is only constant warmth, comfort, satiety, and satisfaction. There is no self and other, no inside and outside, and no desire because nothing is lacking. This is a place of total fulfillment" (Daniel 87). The *Other Mother* (and Coraline at the beginning) is unhealthily attached to the mother/child bond.

The ultra-feminine doll-like representation of the *Other Mother* devolves into a bug (insect and arachnid). Head story-artist Christ Butler describes this version of the *Other Mother*: "She has a bug face. Down below, she has four legs. She is part-witch, part-insect at this point" (Jones 114). Describing deadly women as bugs is not particularly new. Playing into this stereotype, the *Other Mother* becomes a "black widow" set to spin webs and devour young. The film's visual depiction of the transformation to insect plays on her feminine characteristics. The *Other Mother*'s bustled skirt resembles something like a beetle's exoskeleton or as Stephen Jones

describes it “an arachnid’s tail section,” and her long nails become spider-like claws (114). After her full monstrous transformation, everything around the Other Mother becomes insect-like from the furniture to the food she eats. Later, when her hand is removed, it resembles a spider scuttling across the floor. The Other Mother’s creative productions at the beginning of the film, her spinning thread and sewing dolls, merges with her as a spider spinning silk and creating a web to catch and consume Coraline. In stark contrast to the Other Father’s devolution into a round pumpkin, the Other Mother grows in height, becoming more erect and phallic in shape. Her shape changes as her control and power becomes more apparent. To be fully in charge of Coraline and the other children means more power. But as a woman, this power is unnatural hence the transformation. The Other Mother explains to Coraline that “even the proudest spirit can be broken with love.” The Other Mother’s foreignness comes through these gendered representations.

The Other Mother (thus Coraline before she beats the Other Mother) is at an infantile stage of development unwilling or unable to differentiate and engage in normal social interaction. By stealing the ghost souls from the Other Mother and finding her parents, Coraline beats the Other Mother and therefore moves past this stage of development. As Coraline slowly takes away the Other Mother’s possessions and powers, the Other World and all of the other characters in it unravel, turning gray and falling to pieces before disappearing altogether. Coraline with the help of her friend Wybie locks every aspect of the Other Mother away, destroying all aspects of power from this malevolent doubled threat. Rudd states, by the end of the film “Coraline has realigned herself in the Symbolic, no longer feeling oppressed by her status (which hasn’t changed—her parents are much the same). She simply sees the world in different terms, and celebrates her own artifice” (Rudd 167). Coraline’s resolution with the Other Mother is a resolution within herself and her own perception. From the Other Mother’s gendered foreignness, Coraline learns how to be appropriately feminine. Coraline resolves the uncanny feminine by repressing it as other. She steps into the position of an appropriately gendered individual, learning how to interact in a proper way with the people outside of herself. The film represents certain gendered portrayals as abnormal, in this case phallic femininity, and others and destroys it. Phallic femininity is not the only gendered representation presented as foreign.

Coraline’s father in the film calls her mother “Boss,” and the mother clearly is positioned as a voice of power in their family. Henry Selick calls him the “put upon father. Mother is the leader in the family” (Jones 174). These aspects grow into the phallicness of the Other Mother in the Other World with her sadistic, devouring, and beastly aspects. Similarly, the passiveness of Coraline’s father threatens to lead to impotence as reflected in the figure of the Other Father. The film’s representation of the Other Father emphasizes the controlling nature of the Other Mother, the psychological sickness that results, and the deterioration of the heteronormative unit because of female dominance. Upon first entering the Other World, Coraline’s relationship with

her Other Father is through her Other Mother. She is told by the Other Mother to fetch him or to go play with him in the garden. And in Coraline's second visit with him, he tells her that he has made a garden for her because "Mother said you'd like it! Boy she knows you like the back of her hand." Although happy scenes, there is still the subtle sign that the Other Mother controls him and the father/daughter relationship. After making the offer of the button eyes to Coraline, the Other Father slowly devolves. The next morning, Coraline finds her Other Father sitting unmoving at a piano. He explains that "All will be swell, soon as mother's refreshed. Her strength is our strength." Then as a mechanical hand stretches out from his piano and covers his mouth, he states, "Mustn't talk when mother's not here." It becomes clear that the Other Father is under the control of the Other Mother and is only able to function under her power.

The Other Father's uncanny puppet-like characteristics become more prominent through this deterioration. He moves when the Other Mother moves him and speaks when she allows it. Along with the Other Father, all aspects of the Other World including the environment and setting are under the control of the Other Mother. When the Other Father answers Coraline's questions and shares information the Other Mother would rather remain hidden, the Other Mother uses vines to cover and gag his mouth before dragging him out of the house. Dakota Fanning, the voice of Coraline, explains that "he has no control in his relationship. He's just a robot being controlled by the Other Mother. He really doesn't want to be hurting Coraline, but the Other Mother is making him" (Jones 179). The Other Father is depicted as a tool of the Other Mother. Not only is he uncanny because of his representation as a puppet (something not quite human but human-like), the Other Father is also uncanny because he represents a departure from current cultural social norms. Although male, he has no power or control; this is a representation of the familiar and repressed mother-child dyadic relationship where the mother is the central position and the father has a lower standing.

Reducing the father to an aspect of the phallic mother has health repercussions for the Other Father. As the film progresses and the Other Father is presented as more and more ineffectual, he is depicted as sickly and unsightly. In the scene discussed above, when Coraline finds her father sitting still at the piano, he looks ill and his voice is slowed down. He continues to shift, next appearing much shorter and squatter than before with melted features and slack limbs that emphasize his puppet-like nature. As the Other Mother becomes more phallic in shape, the Other Father melts into a round blob. According to the script of the film, he is transforming into a pumpkin. The Other Father's physical and emotional wellbeing is clearly damaged by the Other Mother's control. He cannot exist as a healthy person without his individuality and personal authority, and because he is a father without familial and social authority as well.

Before he sacrifices his life for hers, the Other Father tells Coraline, "Sorrory, so sorrory, Motherrr making meeee. Don't waaaanna hurrrrrt you" and gives her the first of the lost children's souls. Although unable to act for himself, the Other Father has enough will to destroy

himself and therefore an aspect of the Other Mother's power. He cannot live and defy her, and therefore he must die. The heteronormative unit is unable to function under the overwhelming control of the Other Mother. The Other Mother has taken the phallus leaving the Other Father with nothing, and the couple cannot exist in these circumstances. Coraline learns what happens when the balance of power shifts too far into the hands of the female. The Other Father must be destroyed by the Other Mother but also by Coraline in this fantasy of development. Coraline can only learn to be a productive social female by destroying not only the female monster but the foreign impotent father as well. She grows up by learning what gendered roles to not be. By actively destroying the mother and father (unlike the other characters), the film shows these figures as doubles the child once conflated for self.

But how does Coraline develop in connection to the other characters? Aside from her family (other and non-other), the film presents very extravagant, prominent characters, and I argue they also play a critical role in her development through their foreignness. Kristeva notes that along with malevolent others there is also "the image of a benevolent double that used to be enough to shelter it the image of a malevolent double" (Kristeva "Might" 184). While Coraline represses and removes the Other Mother and Other Father, the benevolent doubles are foreigners who help Coraline and provide ways to negotiate her own identity. These characters break down into two groups, the first being the ethnic foreigners—the British neighbors; Miss Spink and Miss Forcible; and the Russian circus performer, Mr. Bobinsky. I refer to these as benevolent others with malevolent aspects. They represent malformed and damaged development, but Coraline does not destroy them. Instead, she learns from and uses them to develop and succeed. They are not identities independent of Coraline. The second group is the racially othered and fully benevolent group—the ghosts, the cat, and Wybie and his grandmother. With these characters, she subordinates them in order to boost her independence. Like the Other Mother and Other Father, all of these characters are externalized representations of Coraline's identity fantasy.

The British neighbors are two sisters who used to be actresses who had an acrobatic duet act. The original novel is implicitly based in Britain, but the film changes the setting to Ashland, Oregon. So, in the film the British neighbors are now foreigners. They're elderly and clearly not "normal." Their cultural differences mark them as other in the film, and their otherness represents negative qualities that Coraline uses but moves beyond in her development. These cultural differences are based on their age and their foreignness. Coraline reveals that her mother thinks of them as "dingbats." Their exaggerated comic appearance reflects this depiction. The sisters are visibly elderly with wrinkles, walkers, and wigs; Miss Spink is short and very rotund, and Miss Forcible is tall with outrageously proportioned breasts. Both have very prominent and colorful makeup as well as ornate, fancy, and outdated clothing. In Miss Spink's first appearance in the film, she remarks about the hotness of the male movers. She runs into her apartment, eager to share this sexy information with her sister. They are depicted as

oversexed and vain women who have never learned to live without each other. Also, they surround themselves with nostalgic mementos of their past career including posters from their Shakespeare performances. This suggests the lack of lifelong satisfaction that career has brought these women; they cannot continue to work past their prime and must constantly commemorate their heyday.

The film focuses on their Britishness, including their theatrical past and their obsession with tea, tea-reading, and “hand-pulled taffy from Brighton, best in the world.” In discussing the transition from book to film, Neil Gaiman explains that “I just wanted to make sure that Miss Spink and Miss Forcible were English, because there’s a particular elderly, English, full-bosom spinsterhood that you don’t really seem to run into quite so much elsewhere” (Jones 55). The sisters are both aloof and confident as detailed in Kristeva’s “Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner.” The only time the sisters attempt to leave their home is in an attempt to go to the theater. Even this fails because Coraline’s mother has disappeared and cannot drive them. The sisters and their relationship with the theater reflect Kristeva’s articulation of the “lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping... The time of a resurrection that remembers death and what happened before, but misses the glory of being beyond, merely the feeling of a reprieve, of having gotten away” (Kristeva “Toccata” 7-8). They cling to the place that was theirs but is no longer. Because of who they were (and therefore are) they are set apart from the rest of the world, aloof and beyond “attacks and rejections” (Kristeva “Toccata” 7). The sisters, in looking back at what they were, have “changed [they’re] discomforts into a base of resistance, a citadel of life... Without a home, [the foreigner] disseminates on the contrary the actor’s paradox: multiplying masks and ‘false selves’... never completely true nor completely false” (Kristeva “Toccata” 8). The British sisters and the Russian Mr. Bobinsky are the actors with false selves. They are caricatures of their ethnicities, or according to Kristeva foreigners—othered for Coraline, fascinating and useful.

Although portrayed as dangerous and damaging, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible represent a relationship with community that Coraline uses in the film. They give her a yonic stone which Coraline takes into the Other World in order to see souls. She identifies danger and rescues the lost children with this stone; it connects Coraline to her community, allowing her to relate to others. Although positive to this extent, their connection to each other (a female community) is portrayed as codependent and threatening to heteronormativity. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible do not have husbands or children presumably because of their inability to separate from each other. The satisfaction of their companionship is definitely questionable since they collect numerous dogs and pay a strange and creepy amount of attention to them. Not only do they have numerous dogs barking at their feet, but the sisters’ living room wall is covered in stuffed Scotty dogs in knitted sweaters with angel wings. Miss Spink explains to Coraline, “our sweet,

departed angels. Couldn't bear to part with them ... so we had them stuffed.” They also have repeated names like Hamish the seventh, eighth, and ninth. They are overly connected and unable to differentiate between children and animals and from one pet to another.

Miss Spink and Miss Forcible’s exaggerated representations in the Other World underline their sexualized and codependent qualities. Coraline watches a performance by the other sisters in which both appear on stage scantily clad. Miss Forcible’s barely there bikini reveals breasts far larger than her head; this represents cultural humor of the elderly female body and mocks aggressive, public female sexuality. Also in the Other World, the sisters meld more into each other. The film shows one of their acrobatic acts, where the sister’s have transformed into their younger selves, where they catch, hold, and support each other. They also sleep together in a sac-like cocoon which Karen Coats argues has a fetus-like appearance and represents an infantile state of undifferentation (88). In the casting of the sisters, this interchangeability is emphasized. The comedy duo of Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders play Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. Saunders says, “the funny thing is that because we work together an awful lot, you almost become one person...Even when Henry first called me up, I said ‘I don’t understand which one I’m play,’ because we are strangely interchangeable” (Jones 159). Parsons, Sawers, and McNally argue that the sisters are a representation of feminine bonds; these “bonds threaten the Western worship of individualism and ‘freedom’ for girls” (387). Gooding also believes that they are a “great threat to Coraline’s burgeoning sense of selfhood” (397). Their connection, represented through their sisterhood, conflicts with Coraline’s search for independence. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible’s strangeness is articulated through their foreignness of age, gender, and ethnicity. Because of their othered and problematic natures, Coraline uses the sisters and develops beyond them.

The other neighbor, similar in foreignness to the British sisters, is Mr. Bobinsky. He was called Mr. Bobo in the original novel and was not Russian. The Amazing Bobinsky is introduced in the film performing calisthenics on his porch rail as Coraline’s family moves in. He is a tall blue skinned man with remarkably skinny legs sticking out from under a large paunch who frequently interjects words in Russian. His color and language emphasize his otherness so that visually and orally the film marks his difference. Like the British sisters and their connections to theater and the best taffy in England, Mr. Bobinsky has nostalgia for his Central European past. He tells Coraline after meeting her that she should eat a beet in order to make her strong. This continues until the end of the film where Coraline finds Mr. Bobinsky pulling her roses in order to plant beets. Mr. Bobinsky is a “foreigner who survives with a tearful face turned toward the lost homeland” (Kristeva “Toccatà” 9). Along with his marked foreignness and connection to his homeland, Mr. Bobinsky also represents issues with control.

When Coraline first goes to speak to Mr. Bobinsky, he pulls his door shut before Coraline can enter and scolds her, “Famous Jumping Mouse Circus not ready, little girl!” He is totally wrapped up in training mice to perform tricks in the Famous Jumping Mouse Circus. Most of his

representation is as a playful if odd man who cartwheels instead of walks and plays with mice instead of works. He cannot allow Coraline into his home because he has not learned how to control his mice. Mr. Bobinsky's mice are interchangeable with Mr. Bobinsky himself. Not only does he convey to Coraline information he says his mice give him, collapsing the boundaries between them, but in the Other World the figure of Mr. Bobinsky becomes only a collection of rodents that fill his ringmaster costume. Coraline first sees the Other Mr. Bobinsky during an embodiment of his greatest wish—a live performance of his mouse (rat in the Other World) circus. Mr. Bobinsky is surrounded by cotton candy cannons, a Ferris wheel chicken that poops out popcorn, and a miniature Ferris wheel. Yet this playful depiction only lasts for a short time. In the second appearance of the Other Mr. Bobinsky, rats jump out of every part of his outfit which disintegrates, and the rats run wild all over Mr. Bobinsky's circus. The figure of Mr. Bobinsky does what has been threatened throughout the film and collapses into a violent and selfish chaos. Mr. Bobinsky is an embodiment of the repressed id characterized by moments of light-heartedness but potentially laden with violence and uncontrollability. Mr. Bobinsky's foreignness teaches Coraline to have more control and independence.

In addition to the benevolent neighbors with malevolent aspects, there are also the fully benevolent characters of Wybie, his grandmother, the three ghost children, and the cat. Although there are three ghost children in the novel, none of them have any relation to the house's caretaker. There is no Wybie in the novel and therefore no grandmother, so the second set of benevolent others, the racialized ones, were created for the film. These characters' otherness is complicated because they have the least differentiated doubles in the Other World. Also, their otherness is complicated because Wybie's family has the most connection to the area and the house—they are the least foreign geographically speaking. Wybie's grandmother owns the pink palace and has lived there since she was a little girl; yet, she does not seem to be from that area as her accent marks her as Southern. Although Wybie is introduced in the script as a short boy with a crooked neck, his racial background becomes clearer when he shows Coraline the picture of his grandmother and her sister. The screenplay describes them as "light-skinned black girls" (Selick 110). Only Wybie has an other version in the Other World, and his other version is as helpful and harmless as his normal version.

Wybie is a nickname for his full name Wyborne, this name might have racialized and political connotations, but the film does not explain why he has that name or why he is raised by his grandmother with no parents present. The closest acknowledgement the film gives to this subject is when Coraline specifically calls Wybie "Why-were-you-born." At first irritated and confused by Wybie and his differences, Coraline later internalizes Wybie as a helpmate. His primary function in the film is as a provider of information. Early in the film, he gives Coraline the doll that looks exactly like her. This doll is a channel back to the Other Mother in which she gains information about Coraline's life. Similarly, in the Other World, Other Wybie rebels against the Other Mother in order to share his unhappiness with Coraline and help her in what

limited ways he can. It is through Wybie that Coraline finds out about one of the ghosts that the Other Mother keeps. The ghosts are children from the past that the Other Mother tricked into her world like she has tricked Coraline. Now, they remain trapped as soulless ghosts in the Other World. The main ghost who speaks to Coraline when she sees them is Wybie's great aunt who disappeared when his grandmother was just a child.

As helpful as Wybie is, he and his family are continuously and ultimately silenced. Coraline has silenced Other Wybie because she had previously wished for a quiet Wybie in the normal world. The Other Mother explains, "I thought you'd like him more, if he spoke a little less. So I fixed him." Coraline asks, "So he can't talk at all?... Hmm, I like it." The Other Mother (or Coraline since this is her fantasy), further silences Other Wybie by stapling his mouth into a smile after he refuses to play happy for her and Coraline. Although Coraline gets along with Wybie in the normal world, she changes him to make her happier. Coraline becomes the voice for all three family members, Wybie, his grandmother, and the ghost aunt by finding the family truth for them and freeing the enslaved. This is a hierarchical arrangement where Coraline must act for the people who apparently cannot act for themselves. The ghost girl frequently begs Coraline, "Help us, miss." She acknowledges Coraline as the empowered person in charge. This positions the little black ghost girl as subordinate. Similarly, Wybie abdicates power to Coraline. After finally believing Coraline about the crazy adventures of the Other World and the history of his great aunt, Wybie ponders how to tell his grandmother. Coraline responds, "Just bring her by the house tomorrow. We can tell her together." When Wybie's grandmother enters Coraline's garden at the end of the film, Wybie and Coraline walk up to her arm and arm and Coraline says, "**I've** got so much to tell you!" [emphasis added]. Although Wybie rides in to save Coraline and help her eradicate the Other Mother, the last depiction of the two of them is when Coraline steps in to speak for him and take over their family's history.

Coraline literally speaks for Other Wybie, agrees to help Wybie talk to his grandmother, and steals the ghost aunt's trapped soul away from the Other Mother. Kristeva explains that "the foreigner has no self. Barely an empty confidence, valueless, which focuses his possibilities of being constantly other, according to others' wishes and to circumstances. I do what they want *me* to but it is not "me"—"me" is elsewhere, "me" belongs to no one, "me" does not belong to "me," ... "does "me" exist?" ("Toccata" 8). Being fully other and ranked, these silenced black characters allow the pathway for Coraline to find herself and her function. As an individual, she can only be created through her interactions with others. Coraline's position as savior allows her independence to solidify. They become strangers within, but not in order to recognize that "we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners" (Kristeva "Might" 192). Instead, Coraline internalizes the stranger to externalize herself.

One of the most unusual characters in the film is the black cat. He is voiced by Keith Davids, a black voice actor famous for his work as black animated characters like Dr. Facilier, the black voodoo magician in Disney's 2009 *The Princess and the Frog*. The cat is also

positioned in the role of the mystical shaman. Although a cat, he fits the role of the “magic negro” that Cerise L. Glenn and Landra J. Cunningham as well as Matthew W. Hughey have written about. Hughey asserts that the magic negro “has become a stock character that often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possess supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform the disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken white...” (544). The cat is racialized in his position as well as his voice. Rafiki in *The Lion King* is another example of the magic negro appearing as an animal in an animated film. Although connected to Wybie and his family, Wybie explains, “he’s not really my cat, he’s kinda feral you know, wild?” Glenn and Cunningham identify characteristics of the magical negro in their textual analysis of a sampling of top-grossing films from 2003. These characteristics “include (a) using magical and spiritual gifts for the White character, (b) assuming primarily service roles, (C) exhibiting folk wisdom as opposed to intellectual cognition, (d) possessing limited role outside of magical/spiritual guide, and (e) displaying an inability to use his or her powers to help himself or herself” (Glenn 142). The cat talks to Coraline inside and outside of the Other World. In the real world, the cat frequently communicates through nods and blinks, and he drags out the doll versions of Coraline’s mother and father when they have gone missing. The first time Coraline meets the cat in the Other World, she guesses that he is the Other Cat. He informs her as he looks up with blue not-button eyes, “I’m not the other anything. I’m me.” The cat moving through both worlds is an example of the magical gifts of the “magic negro.” He is the only character that moves between both worlds, and he has knowledge far beyond a cat or even a human.

Along with his heightened knowledge and not being other in the Other World, the cat also has power. His heightened power comes from his animalistic qualities; he is closer to nature and has sneaky cat qualities. He’s more than human because “we cats... have far superior senses than humans.” He shows Coraline that he has his own rules—he can appear and disappear when he likes, and he’s “been coming here for a while. It’s a game we play. She [Other Mother] hates cats and tries to keep me out. But she can’t, of course. I come and go as I like.” Common to Gaiman’s stories and novels is the the powerful and mystical all-knowing figure. This figure is frequently racialized and gendered. Along with being black, the cat is clearly male. He is the “individuation and law of the father *par excellence*” (Parsons 381). Unlike the other characters, the cat has no double and is always himself. As powerful as the Other Mother, he is the “paternal metaphor that saves Coraline from the phallic mother, allowing separation and thus individuation” (Parsons 381). Rudd argues that the cat acts as the Lacanian therapist because of the novel’s cat’s position on language and individualization and refusal to acknowledge fantasy (167).

As powerful as the cat is, he acts in a service role. He tells Coraline that the Other World is not a dream come true, and advises her to challenge the Other Mother because “she might not play fair but she won’t refuse. She’s got a thing for games.” At the end of the film, the cat kills

the rat in order to give Coraline the last of the lost children's souls, shows Coraline that her parents are hidden in a snow globe, and scratches at the Other Mother so Coraline can get away. Although not exactly folk wisdom in nature, his service role functions in connection with his world weary wisdom about the world. Like the other racialized characters, Coraline silences the cat in the normal world. When Coraline tells him that cats can't talk at home, he responds "No? Well, you're clearly the expert on these things. After all, I'm just a big fat wuss puss." He suggests that not only does Coraline mock him and not take him seriously, but that Coraline's focus on verbal talking ignores other aspects and types of communication. By reminding her about "wuss puss," he lets her and the audience know that this is the same cat from the normal world. Along with being silenced, the cat only exists for Coraline's journey exactly as a magic negro has "limited roles outside of their spiritual gifts" (Glenn 145). By the end of the film when Coraline has found resolution and her self, the cat disappears. Although a strong and prominent character, the cat serves Coraline's purpose, and like Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, he labors for the consciousness of Coraline. All of Coraline's friends and neighbors serve a purpose for Coraline. According to Kristeva, the "foreigner's friends, aside from bleeding hearts who feel obliged to do good, could only be those who feel foreign to themselves" (Kristeva "Toccata" 23). Coraline learns how to not be foreign and develops a self through her relationships with the other characters in the film.

Coraline portrays how to [and not to] develop through each of the characters, and through the film and her interaction with the characters, Coraline learns to accept her position in order to function in society. She must accept the divided self away from parents and have consolation that an individual can have a self divided in society. Similarly, she must see that the individual serves in a social role. Kristeva sees how recognizing foreigners can provide a pathway in which people can recognize the foreignness in themselves. She states, "Living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of *being an other*. It is not simply—humanistically—a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of *being in his place*, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself" ("Toccata" 13). I have analyzed the machinations of *Coraline* to portray how foreignness provides a resolution to the uncanny by emphasizing the function of others in the creation of the self. Race and foreignness then is reduced and used merely as a tool to solidify white master identity. Where the Other Mother is Coraline's first fantasy, Coraline replaces it with her neighbors, making them through their foreignness—an other to her self. For the film, gender and race become not about individuals and people but about fantasies; they are used as stories to satisfy and solidify one's self.

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