

The Significance of the Cat as a Character with Moral Ambiguity in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the cat in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* as a character with moral ambiguity in children's literature. Since it deals with children's literature, it is expected, even desirable, to discuss a non-human character as long as it possesses human characteristics or is created as a form of anthropomorphic character. This study used new criticism theory, focusing on the formal elements, which are the plot of the story and the cat's character and its characterization to analyze the cat's role and its significance towards the main character, Coraline. By applying Janet Burroway's character presentation methods, this research aims to analyze how the cat with moral ambiguity influenced Coraline in deciding her decisions and choice. This research also discusses the relationship between the cat and Coraline in order to know how deep Coraline's trust towards the cat is, to know the significance of a character with moral ambiguity, and to investigate the cat's role in the novel by analyzing the plot of the story. The result shows the significance of the cat in influencing and changing the main character's mind and point of view. The existence of a character with moral ambiguity is quite unusual in children's literature which mostly has prominent narratives about polarity; nevertheless, the cat's presence has a significant role because it not only guides Coraline but also serves as an illustration that not every person with a bad attitude is evil; even though the cat has moral ambiguity in its character it accommodated Coraline in escaping from the Beldam.

Keywords: *Children's Literature, Coraline, morally ambiguous character, new criticism, the cat.*

INTRODUCTION

One of Neil Gaiman's notable works is *Coraline*. *Coraline* is a children's book whose genre is relatively uncommon: horror. It is obvious that in children's literature, most of the characters are easy to distinguish, either good or bad, so the children who read the book are not confused in differentiating the characters and following the story. As Nodelman (2008) stated in his book, the texts for children are short and straightforward because children have

short attention spans, use simple language because children can't understand complex language, and have large, bright pictures because children are incapable of responding to small or dark ones. He also stated that children's texts tend to conclude with decisions made or implied that reinforce one pole or another, such as home or away, black or white, winner and loser (p. 62). This is contrary to *Coraline*, which has the cat as a character with moral ambiguity in children's literature. According to Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2014, p. 4), a morally

ambiguous character is a character that is ambiguous, causing doubt or uncertainty, or that can be understood in two or more possible ways. In the novel, it was described that the cat used a sarcastic tone toward Coraline, making her uncomfortable. In a way, characters who have moral ambiguity have more complicated and complex characters, which might be too hard for younger readers to understand.

The cat's appearance in *Coraline* is uncommon; its behaviors are a little bit questionable for being a good character, but the cat is too good to be a bad or evil character. The 'cat' character in other children's literature is also found, though not many, in other children's books such as *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. In the novel, Alice meets a grinning cat called Cheshire Cat, an iconic cat character in children's literature. However, the cat in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* is more interesting to analyze in this sense because a character with moral ambiguity is somewhat unusual in children's literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previously, three studies on *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman have been conducted. The first study by Handayani (2017) investigated the characterization of Coraline, analyzing the conflict that Coraline experienced and finding out the moral value that was revealed through how she solved conflicts. The theories used in this paper are the theory of character, theory of characterization, theory of conflict, and moral value theory. This paper only discussed the characterization of Coraline; it did not include the analysis of the cat's characterization.

The second study by Julia (2019) discussed the characterization of Coraline, her real parents, and the other parents in the Other World to find out what kind of parenting style was used by Coraline's real parents and analyze the significance of Coraline's parents' parenting style towards Coraline's emotional security. The theories used in this paper are the theory of characterization, the theory of parenting style, and the theory of the relationship between parents and children. This paper's author does not analyze the cat's role in influencing Coraline but focuses on Coraline's parents and their parenting style's effects on Coraline's emotional security.

The third study by Schers (2016) examined the presence and impact of the Freudian uncanny in children's literature to provide evidence for the claim that the uncanny is a positive development in children's literature. The theories used in this paper are Freud's theory and theory about the changing view of the child. The result of this paper is the elements of the uncanny (anxiety, repression, paranoia) are found in *Coraline*. This paper used a psychoanalytic approach and not using a characterization approach.

The last two studies do not focus on *Coraline*. These studies discuss more morally ambiguous characters. The fourth study, a journal article written by Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2013), explored the morally questionable behavior of characters in entertainment. The theory used in this paper is the affective disposition theory. The results of this study revealed both motivation and outcome affect perceptions of the character's positive and negative attributes, the character's liking, and moral disengagement. This study focused more on the character's morally questionable behavior, but it does not mention and analyze *Coraline*.

Fifth, a journal article by Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2014) examined the effects of a person's self-perception on responses to characters who display varying levels of morality using comparison theory. The result of this study indicates that morality salience is an important factor in determining responses to different character types. Like the previous study, this study focused on the character with moral ambiguity. However, the study of morally ambiguous characters is still considered something new, especially in the field of children's literature. Therefore, this study potentially contributes to the study of children's literature, both practically and theoretically.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concerning the objectives, the present writer applies new criticism theory to analyze the formal elements of the novel, which are the plot, the characterization of the cat, and its significance in the novel. New Criticism is an approach that focuses on understanding literary works within the text itself;

the text or the passage is all that matters (Tyson, 2006, p. 137). This theory has a distinct difference with approaches to literary study that emphasize historically focused scholarly research, morally oriented readings like those of New Humanists such as Irving Babbitt, and Marxist sociological analysis (Hickman & McIntyre, 2012, p. 7).

Tyson (2006) stated that in new criticism reading, the focus of analysis is neither the author's intention nor the reader's response (p. 136). Hence, the text itself is carefully examined with close reading to interpret the evidence provided by the language of the text, such as its images, symbols, metaphors, point of view characterization, plot, and so on (Tyson, 2006, p. 137). New criticism takes a role here as the theory which could help to analyze the characters; as O'Connor stated in his journal, "The very character of the morality implicit in the situation is dependent upon how fully the novelist has been able to dramatize and evoke the thematic lines quickening and informing his structure." (Tyson, 2006, p. 494). Tyson, in her book, said that new critical readers usually confined themselves to the analysis of some aspects of the work, for example, the role of the narrator or of the minor characters and some other elements that are shown to play an essential role in the text development of its themes and thus contribute to the unity of the work as a whole (2006, p. 149).

Burroway, Stuckey-French and Stuckey-French's methods of characterization also have the showing and telling method. The difference from Abram's method is that Burroway et al.'s methods are more detailed. In their book, Burroway et al. noted that there are six basic methods of character presentation divided into two—the direct method, which has four methods, and the indirect method, which has two methods (Burroway et al., 2019, p. 65). The four direct methods are dialogue, appearance, action, and thought. These methods show the readers how the character speaks to other characters, how they look, how they act, and their thoughts about something or anything. Meanwhile, the two indirect methods are, first, the authorial interpretation, the author telling the readers about the character written in the text and not implying such as their background, motives, values, virtues, and the like (Burroway et al., 2019, p. 97), and second, interpretation by another character,

including how one character is 'being interpreted' by another character. The purpose of using Janet Burroway's character presentation methods is to be able to analyze the cat and Coraline's character and characterization in order to analyze the influence of the cat with moral ambiguity on Coraline as a person and to know its significance to Coraline.

New criticism theory is chosen for the research because this study attempts to analyze formal elements of the literary text, which are the plot and the characterization, to find out the significance of the cat towards the main character, Coraline, and how it influences Coraline to make her own decisions. By using new criticism, the present study attempts to analyze the causal effect of the story and how the plot affects the characters—Coraline and the cat—in changing or developing. Further theories related to the character are also applied as they are necessary to the analysis.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, moral ambiguity is a lack of certainty about whether something is right or wrong. The term "morals" refers to human behavior, and it is a practical activity (Churchill, 1982, p. 297). Churchill also stated that there are two views of the nature of moral values, which are (1) values must be absolute if they are to be worthy of our esteem, and (2) values are a strictly private and personal affair and hold no greater validity than a purely aesthetic validation (p. 298). Meanwhile, ambiguity (n.d.) means the quality or state of being. McGregor (2014) notes that doubtfulness causes uncertainty as regards making sense of the event, situation, circumstances, or possible outcomes (p. 6). The cat in the novel has ambiguous behavior, which could be confusing for the younger reader to understand. Is the cat the good guy or the bad guy? The cat not only has a bad attitude towards Coraline, but it also gives her advice sometimes, although not always directly—more like in an implicit way. The cat's ambiguous character and Coraline's character will be further discussed in the analysis.

METHODS

The method used in this study is library research—first, the data obtained from written materials that

are relevant to the study. Second, the data would be analyzed by applying the chosen theory. Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* will be the primary source of the data, and a secondary source will also be used to enrich the analysis.

The primary data obtained from Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* are passages and excerpts related to two characters, the cat and Coraline. The data were obtained by close reading of the novel as the data source, marking and sorting important data, and taking notes of the needed data from the novel. The primary data consisted of selected written materials from the novel, such as narration, description, and conversation related to the characters mentioned before, to support the analysis of the study. This was then followed by data interpretation employing the New Criticism method of analysis, for example, by positioning the researcher as the reader who interpreted the qualitative data based on the objective structures taken as data. Since the New Critics believe that the text, in this case, the novel, is a self-defining object, any external sources other than the primary and secondary data previously mentioned were excluded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characterization

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the cat in *Coraline* is considered to have moral ambiguity based on the passages found in the novel. In this chapter, the cat and Coraline's characters, along with their characterization, will be discussed. In the novel, the cat's characters are mostly recognized by their dialogues and actions. For instance, in dialogues, these are some of the passages found in the novel.

The cat leaped smoothly from the wall to the grass near Coraline's feet. It stared up at her. "Well, you're the expert on these things," said the cat dryly. "After all, what would I know? I'm only a cat." (Gaiman, 2012, pp. 47-48)

"Well, you're the expert on these things," said the cat dryly. "After all, what would I know? I'm only a cat."... "We could be rare specimens of an exotic breed of African elephants," said

the cat. "But we're not. At least," it added cattily. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 48)

"How fortunate I am," said the cat, "in having a travelling companion of such wisdom and intelligence," Its tone remained sarcastic... (Gaiman, 2012, p. 71)

The passages above indicate the cat's annoying and irritating attitude toward Coraline when they are having conversations. The word 'cattily' could be interpreted as the cat intended to be 'cruel' when it answered Coraline's questions. The cat also used a sarcastic tone to respond to Coraline's story about her father, who saved her from wasps when she was a little girl. For actions, the following are some of the passages found.

- (1) It began to walk away, head and tail held high and proud... The cat stopped walking, sat down, and began to wash itself thoughtfully, apparently unaware of Coraline's existence... The cat yawned slowly, carefully, revealing a mouth and tongue of astounding pinkness. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 48)
- (2) "By the by," it said. "It was sensible of you to bring protection. I'd hang on to it, if I were you." "Protection?"

"That's what I said," said the cat. "And anyway—"

It paused and stared intently at something that wasn't there. Then it went down into a low crouch and moved slowly forward two or three steps. It seemed to be stalking an invisible mouse. Abruptly, it turned tail and dashed for the woods. (Gaiman, 2012, pp 49-50)

From the passages above, it could be seen that the cat is arrogant around Coraline; it is written that the cat is 'unaware' of Coraline's existence and does not care about what Coraline is doing there. The cat also said the word 'protection' when Coraline did not understand what it could mean and left Coraline without any further information about it. Coraline did not understand what the cat meant by 'protection,' which probably meant the stone she got

from Miss Forcible and Miss Spink's place because, at that time, she just brought the stone in her pocket without any intentions. It often talked to Coraline with unpleasant tones and manners, such as yawning (Gaiman, 2012, p. 48) or leaving without warning (Gaiman, 2012, p. 50).

For the indirect methods, there are two methods that Burroway et al. mentioned in her book: the authorial interpretation and interpretation by another character. At the beginning of the book, Gaiman introduces the cat as a 'haughty' black cat who watches over Coraline on their first encounter.

- (3) There was also a haughty black cat... (Gaiman, 2012, p. 17)

This passage fits the authorial interpretation in Burroway et al.'s method which the author wrote in the novel that the black cat was haughty. As for the interpretation by another character, the following passage is Coraline's opinion about the cat's traits,

- (4) There was something irritatingly self-centered about the cat, Coraline decided. As if it were, in its opinion, the only thing in any world or place that could possibly be of any importance. Half of her wanted to be very rude to it; the other half of her wanted to be polite and deferential. The polite half won. (Gaiman, 2012, pp. 48-49)

Coraline is the only person who talks to the cat. At first, she is nice to it but when she learns that the cat has this irritatingly self-centered attitude towards Coraline, half of her wants to be very rude to it and the other half wants to be polite and deferential yet she chooses to be polite instead.

Even though the cat's attitude towards Coraline is considered rude, it helps Coraline indirectly in deciding her decisions and choices. The cat consistently gives Coraline hints here and there, in obvious ways or impliedly, which makes her wonder what the cat means. The cat also accompanies Coraline when she decides to walk back to the Other World and respond to her childhood story. If Coraline asks the cat questions, it always answers but the answers sometimes do not really answer what Coraline asks.

Plot Analysis

To show the cat and Coraline's relationship and how the cat influences Coraline in making her decision, the plot of Coraline is described below.

Exposition

The story begins when Coraline and her family move into an old shared house and live there with other people: Miss Spink and Miss Forcible in the flat below Coraline's and Mr. Bobo in the flat above Coraline's. Coraline is introduced as a girl who likes to explore. She likes to explore the house and the neighborhood. Coraline met the black cat first and sat on walls and tree stumps, but it always ran away if Coraline wanted to play with it (Gaiman, 2012, p. 17). While exploring the new house, she found a door in the drawing room that was not going anywhere because it was blocked by bricks. She insisted that the door should go to another room when she talked to her mother (Gaiman, 2012, p. 20).

Rising Action

In the rising action, the character's conflicts appear one by one. This part also discusses the cat and Coraline's conversations throughout the story. Coraline has had several conflicts since she found the door; she wondered where she could go through the door if the bricks weren't there (Gaiman, 2012, p. 20). One day when she was alone at home, Coraline opened the door and went through it, finding the Other World where the Other Mother or the Beldam lived. While exploring the Other World, she met the cat, and they had their first conversation. As she talked to the cat, she found that the cat had an annoying attitude towards her, but she chose to be polite to it, proven by the following passage,

- (5) There was something irritatingly self-centered about the cat, Coraline decided. As if it were, in its opinion, the only thing in any world or place that could possibly be of any importance. Half of her wanted to be very rude to it; the other half of her wanted to be polite and deferential. The polite half won. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 47-48)

She continued to explore the place after having a conversation with the cat. She liked all her events in the Other World until the Other Mother told her to sew buttons on her eyes. Coraline rejected the offer and returned to her real home, but her real parents never were there. Eventually, she should return to the other world and save her parents. While sleeping alone in her house, she was woken up by the cat's paw batting her face. She started talking to it, but the cat could not answer because they were both in the Real World. The interaction between the cat and Coraline happened even though the cat did not talk back to her. Coraline interprets the cat's blinking eyes as the answer to her questions.

In the real house, when she called the police and decided to return to the Other World, the cat was there, accompanying and listening to her. She told the story about when she was a little girl, she went exploring a hill with her father but ended up getting stung by wasps. The cat listened to her and walked with her through the door; it finally responded to Coraline in the dark corridor connecting her house with the Other World.

After she arrived in the Other World, she said to herself, "I will be brave. No, I am brave" so she could keep strong and survive in 'fighting' the Beldam. She had a conversation with the Beldam, and as she suggested Coraline sleep, she stepped outside the house and sat down on the bottom step of the stone stairs because she did not want to sleep under the same roof as her (Gaiman, 2012, p. 76).

Coraline met the cat again and asked for advice from the cat. There are situations when the cat and Coraline have a conversation about how the Other World is made, and it is a new discovery for Coraline, proven by the following passage,

- (6) "Why does she want me?" Coraline asked the cat. "Why does she want me to stay here with her?"
- (7) "She wants something to love, I think," said the cat. "Something that isn't hers. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that."

"Do you have any advice?" asked Coraline. The cat looked as if it were about to say something else sarcastic. Then it flicked its

whiskers and said, "Challenge her. There's no guarantee she'll play fair, but her kind of thing loves games and challenges."

- (8) "I'd go inside if I were you. Get some sleep. You have a long day ahead of you." And then the cat was gone. Still, Coraline realized, it had a point. (Gaiman, 2012, pp. 77-78)

From the passage above, the cat gave Coraline helpful advice that she could consider before facing the Beldam. Coraline considered the cat's advice before facing the Beldam because she thought that the cat "had a point" in its statements. The cat accommodated Coraline in deciding her decisions and choices. The cat is the only creature Coraline could share her story with and talk to without her being suspicious in the Other World. On that account, the cat gave Coraline insights and advice to face the Beldam so she could run away and come back home safely. In the following passage, the cat shows Coraline another point of view of the Other World,

- (9) "And what do you think you're doing?" said a shape to one side of her

"I'm exploring," Coraline told the cat.

... "Bad place," said the cat.

"If you want to call it a place, which I don't. What are you doing here?" "I'm exploring." "Nothing to find here," said the cat. "This is just the outside, the part of the place she hasn't bothered to create."

"She?" "The one who says she's your other mother," said the cat. "What is she?" asked Coraline. The cat did not answer, just padded through the pale mist beside Coraline.

"There is something there!" And then it took shape in the mist: a dark house, which loomed at them out of the formless whiteness. "But that's—" said Coraline. "The house you just left," agreed the cat. (Gaiman, 2012, pp. 85-86)

In the passage above, the cat and Coraline explore the neighborhood in the Other World together, and it could be seen from Coraline's dialogue, "There is something there!" she was expecting something different will appear aside from the house. Still, it turned out they came back again to the house. Coraline got to know the Other World from a different point of view as she was with the cat. Coraline continued to add "small world" after she heard the cat's explanation and experienced the short walk around the neighborhood.

Coraline started looking for the ghost children's souls and her parents after challenging the Beldam in an exploring or finding-things game. She could easily find the first two ghost children's souls in the form of marbles, but she nearly failed to find the third soul. The black rat was carrying the marble, and she lost it when she tried to catch it. She thought she was failing everything (Gaiman 134), but suddenly she saw the rat when she opened her eyes. The cat caught the rat and said something to her in the following passage,

- (10) Beside the decapitated rat, a smug expression on its face, was the black cat. It rested one paw on the gray glass marble.

"I think I once mentioned," said the cat, "that I don't like rats at the best of times. It looked like you needed this one, however. I hope you don't mind my getting involved."

"I think," said Coraline, trying to catch her breath, "I think you may—have said—something of the sort." The cat lifted its paw from the marble, which rolled toward Coraline. She picked it up. In her mind a final voice whispered to her, urgently. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 134)

The cat surprisingly helped her catch the rat and gave the marble to her. When she was having a conversation with the cat, she knew that the Beldam would not let them escape from the Other World. She thanked the cat for what the cat had done to her, proven by the following passage,

- (1) "Whatever's happening," said Coraline, "thank you for helping with the rat. I suppose I'm almost there, aren't I? So you go off into the mist or wherever you go, and I'll, well, I hope I get to see you at home. If she lets me go home." (Gaiman, 2012, p.135)

Coraline realized the cat was right about the rats being the Beldam's spies. She experienced how the rats tried to stop her from finding the last marble or ghost children's soul she should find. The cat had told her about the rats, but it also helped her take the marble from the rat. As they talked, the cat recognized that the Other World was getting strange, and it acted strange in the following passage,

- (11) "What's wrong?" asked Coraline.

"They've gone," said the cat. "They aren't there anymore. The ways in and out of this place. They just went flat."

"Is that bad?"

The cat lowered its tail, swishing it from side to side angrily. It made a low growling noise in the back of its throat. It walked in a circle until it was facing away from Coraline, and then it began to walk backward, stiffly, one step at a time, until it was pushing up against Coraline's leg.

"You'll be fine," said Coraline. "Everything's going to be fine. I'll take you home."

The cat said nothing. "Come on, cat," said Coraline. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 136)

The cat said that the usual ways it always passed in and out of place were not there anymore. Coraline reassured the cat by saying, "Everything's going to be fine. I'll take you home." Then she picked it up and went to the house again.

Climax

The plot reaches the climax when Coraline has to face the Beldam after she finds her parents and the ghost children's souls. She needs to escape from the

Other World by entering the door, but she is sure the Beldam will not let her go. She tells the Beldam that her parents are inside the door—while her parents are inside the snow globe—so she can run away with the cat into the door. As she is going to close the door, she has trouble and is unsure if she can close it; the Beldam's hand is also trying to reach her so she cannot escape. Fortunately, she could close the door and go back home safely. After Coraline locks the door with the key, she apologizes to the cat because she threw it to the Beldam to distract her, so they all have enough time to escape the Other World. Once again, the cat and Coraline interacted without the cat talking back to her in the following passages,

- (12) "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry I threw you at her. But it was the only way to distract her enough to get us all out. She would never have kept her word, would she?"

The cat looked up at her, then rested its head on her hand, licking her fingers with its sandpapery tongue. It began to purr. "Then we're friends?" said Coraline. She sat down on one of her grandmother's uncomfortable armchairs, and the cat sprang up into her lap and made itself comfortable... Then she looked down at her lap, at the way that the rich sunlight brushed every hair on the cat's head, turning each white whisker to gold. (Gaiman, 2012, pp. 48-49)

From the passage, it could be seen that the cat begins to purr after Coraline apologizes to it. The cat climbs onto Coraline's lap, responding to her question, "Then, we're friends?" After resting for a while, they fell asleep on the armchair after a long journey in the Other World.

Falling action

Even though Coraline can escape and rescue her parents and the ghost children, the Beldam's terror is not over because the hand is looking for the key to the door, whether to bring back Coraline or to keep the two worlds connected. Therefore, Coraline put on a show to trick the hand by playing with the key

near the well that Miss Spink and Miss Forcible told her to avoid because of how dangerous the well was. She played with her dolls and made the well look like a table where she put the key in the middle of the tablecloth covering the well. The Beldam's hand was tricked and fell into the well along with the tablecloth then Coraline put the heavy planks back covering the well. As she put her dolls back in the cardboard box, she saw the cat in the following passage,

- (13) Something caught her eye while she was doing this, and she straightened up in time to see the black cat stalking toward her, its tail held high and curling at the tip like a question mark. It was the first time she had seen the cat in several days, since they had returned together from the other mother's place. The cat walked over to her and jumped up onto the planks that covered the well. Then, slowly, it winked one eye at her. It sprang down into the long grass in front of her, and rolled over onto its back, wiggling about ecstatically.

Coraline scratched and tickled the soft fur on its belly, and the cat purred contentedly. When it had had enough it rolled over onto its front once more and walked back toward the tennis court, like a tiny patch of midnight in the midday sun. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 171)

The passage shows that both of them—Coraline and the cat—are very much at ease knowing that Beldam's terror has ended. The cat walks over to her, different from the first time they meet when the cat is annoying and rude to Coraline. It was the last time Coraline interacted with the cat in the novel.

Resolution

After the Beldam hand's gone, Coraline felt safe enough to let her bedroom window open wide and let the wind enter her bedroom. She realized that there was nothing left about school that could scare her anymore (Gaiman, 2012, 173). The plot and characters in the story are important because both cannot be separated; as the plot evolves, it will

stimulate how the characters will respond to the future course of events and actions. In the story, Coraline deals with two choices: does she want to stay forever in the Other World by simply letting the Beldam sew the buttons on her eyes or escape from the Other World even though she must face several obstacles before finally going home? As the cat appears in the plot, it gives Coraline insights and advice about surviving in the Other World. They interact and have a conversation to exchange opinions.

How the Cat Influenced Coraline in Making Her Decision

The explanation above shows that Coraline is a good and kind-hearted girl, whereas the cat's behavior and attitude are the opposite. Coraline is just like children with an immense curiosity about almost everything, even though sometimes the curiosity leads her to bad situations. The cat's existence is vital to Coraline because it keeps her accompanied and guided, even indirectly. They had several conversations to build trust between them; Coraline finally realized the cat was right, and the cat opened to Coraline, let her touch it, and petted its body.

Considering how Coraline treated the cat in the story, the cat is obviously not an ordinary cat because it could talk to Coraline even though only in Other World; she was polite to the cat, so they could talk longer and share ideas. In the Real World, the cat cannot talk to Coraline, but it responds to Coraline's questions, and she interprets what the cat means by blinking her eyes or purring as a reflection of Coraline's thoughts in accordance with what Coraline's thinking about it. In the Other World, Coraline was somehow 'lost'; she was confused about the new world she entered. She felt happy and not bored anymore, but there was something peculiar about the Other World, especially the button's eyes. Coraline needs somebody to talk to: the cat, not the Beldam, not the Other Father, or all creatures that have button eyes in the Other World. When the cat talked to her, she felt about her feelings, missing her real home, anxieties, and thoughts. Coraline did not avoid talking to the cat because she felt saved and relieved; it was very different from when she was with the Beldam. Therefore, whether or not the cat talked back to her when the cat responded

physically, Coraline would interpret it in accordance with her feelings or thoughts, as when the cat's eyes were blinking, she considered it a yes to the answer to her question. Coraline had no real friends in the Other World, yet she was trapped and needed to make decisions and anticipations. The cat appeared as 'someone' to whom Coraline could talk; the cat was like a reflection of herself. There is a passage from the novel which supports this statement,

- (14) Its voice sounded like the voice at the back of Coraline's head, the voice she thought words in, but a man's voice, not a girl's. (Gaiman, 2012, p. 47)

The passage clearly states that the cat's voice is like the voice echoed in her head but in a man's voice and not a girl's. The conversation between the cat and Coraline could be seen as a conversation between different thoughts in Coraline's mind. For instance, when Coraline told the cat about the story of her father being brave even though she got stung by wasps, the cat was making sure whether Coraline also tried to be brave like her father. On the other note, when the cat realized the usual way to get in and out of the Other World was to disappear, it trembled and showed that the cat was scared, but Coraline reassured it to calm down. Those conversations could be assumed as the struggles Coraline experienced and how she managed to keep her mind calm and encourage herself in crisis. Eventually, the cat helps her make a decision and escape the Other World because the cat is the reflection of herself. Coraline might not understand the cat's intentions in their early conversations. However, Coraline still decided to greet and talk to the cat politely so she would know another perception and be aware of everything that happened in the Other World by conversing with the cat. Younger readers or children could learn from Coraline's character about always being a well-behaved person towards other people and also how to solve problems as well as could also help the children to think critically in deciding which choices are good or bad. However, it might be a bit difficult for some children. Therefore, from all the passages explained before, it can be observed that the cat's presence and its conversations with Coraline helped her decide to escape from the Other World and save

not only herself but also the cat, her parents, and the ghost children's souls.

The Black Cat and Cheshire Cat

Compared with the Cheshire Cat from Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland*, there is a similar pattern in how both cats (Cheshire Cat and the Black Cat) give hints to the main characters (Alice and Coraline). Both cats indirectly hint at their main character, so Coraline and Alice should think twice about the cats' advice to solve the problems. Cheshire Cat's conversation with Alice is proven by the passage below,

(15) "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the cat.

"—so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Alice felt that this could not be denied, so she tried another question. "What sort of people live about here?"

"In that direction," the cat said, waving its right paw round, "lives a Hatter: and in that direction," waving the other paw, "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad."

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the cat:

"we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

Alice waited a little, half expecting to see it again, but it did not appear, and after a minute or two she walked on in the direction in which the March Hare was said to live. "I've seen hatters before," she said to herself: "the March Hare will be much the most interesting, and perhaps as this is May it won't be raving mad—at least not so mad as it was in March." As she said this, she looked up, and there was the cat again, sitting on a branch of a tree. (Carroll, 1998, pp. 88-89)

In the passage above, Alice asks Cheshire Cat about the direction she should go by asking, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?" but the cat does not give her a direct answer. The way Cheshire Cat tells Alice which way to go with "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," and "Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," are enough to make Alice think twice and then she asked Cheshire Cat another question: "What sort of people live about here?", then decide to go to the March Hare's place. Cheshire Cat and the Cat in Coraline have the same treatment as the main characters, which is ambiguous; they help Coraline and Alice, but their attitudes are the opposite.

The Significance of the Black Cat in Coraline

Vogl (1982) said that some people hold a cat morally responsible for stalking birds or wolves for killing deer (p. 68). These standards are made by human judgment; there is a tendency to judge animals by human standards in children's literature devoted to anthropomorphic creatures, as argued by the biologist (Vogl, 1982, p. 68). Cats, especially black cat, in certain folklore and culture, is often considered bad luck or related to witchcraft (Vogl, 1982, p. 68). Black cats could also represent the devil; archival materials related to folk beliefs also reveal accounts of the devil himself, assuming the form of a black cat (Siikala, 2002, p. 138). The black cat in Coraline did not seem to have traits associated with witches or demons. The cat indeed has a bad attitude, but it is also kind to Coraline by giving her little hints and advice to fight against the Beldam. In Coraline, the cat is colored black, which one could

immediately recognize as a creature having supernatural power. Indeed, there are pieces of evidence of ‘the supernatural power’ that the cat has; it could talk to Coraline and travel between the two worlds without entering the door of the house—these two might be the only power the cat has, with the fact that should be kept in mind that it talked to Coraline only in the Other World, not in the Real World. It also did not act as a bad creature, just right in the middle—the grey area of morality.

The cat definitely has a significant role throughout the story. The cat’s bad attitude toward Coraline, which sometimes irritates her, is also an important element in the story. It could be the example and early introduction to children about the complex characters and traits that humans have in reality, which may be different from what most children’s books and literature teach about good and evil. The cat’s attitude could be an example of not all people with bad attitudes being evil, compared with the Beldam, who acted kind to Coraline at first but evil inside. If Coraline did not greet the cat or the cat did not appear in the story, Coraline might agree to let the Beldam sew the buttons in her eyes. Coraline is a curious person, even though, at first, she refuses to sew the buttons on her eyes (Gaiman, 2012, p. 57); she might get lured by the Beldam to do it if the cat decides not to meet her. If the cat did not share its thoughts with Coraline, it might also not know about other points of view of the Other World—the rats being the Beldam’s spies. Several encounters and conversations with the cat are enough to make Coraline put her trust in the cat. Hence, meeting and having conversations with the cat helped Coraline decide her life choices in a crisis situation.

CONCLUSION

The existence of the cat in *Coraline* has an important role throughout the story. Coraline is indeed a good and kind-hearted girl who is willing to save her parents and the souls of the ghost children while escaping from the Beldam. Her curiosity sometimes resulted in bad situations like being stung by wasps and almost trapped in the Other World forever. Coraline met the cat in the Other World and had several conversations with it; as a result, she had a change in her opinion and point of view of the Other

World so she could decide what to do to save herself, the cat, her parents and the ghost children’s souls from the Other World. The cat’s bad attitude is considered an essential element in the story because it illustrates that not every person with a bad attitude is evil. Even though the cat has ambiguity in its character, it is considered a good character to Coraline compared with the Beldam, whose attitude is so kind at first; she even has the image of an ideal mom, but it turns out she is evil inside her heart. The cat’s presence could be an early introduction to young readers and supports the idea that humans have complicated characters and traits in reality or the real world.

On another note, it is interesting that Coraline’s cat has traits similar to Cheshire Cat from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Both cats were giving the main characters a little hint and advice, so they should think twice about their decisions. Alice and Coraline have to face obstacles in the “other world,” unfamiliar with their real world. The presence of both cats in the “other world” assisted Alice and Coraline so they could solve the problems they encountered. Therefore, by meeting and having a conversation with the cat in the Other World, Coraline could decide what to do in order to save not only herself but also the cat, her parents, and the ghost children’s souls from the Beldam.

These points show the potential for further research since there have been more chances to discuss morally ambiguous characters in other children’s books and because plenty of books have “cat” characters to discuss and analyze in various ways.

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