MOTHER-CHILD ATTACHMENT: EXPLORING FREUDIAN DENIAL AND AGGRESSION IN NEIL GAIMAN’S CORALINE

Nur Syafiqah Aqilah Ahmad Sabri
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor.
E-mail: syafiqahqilah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Neil Gaiman’s Coraline was published in 2002 and, since then, many studies have been conducted on this literary work of children’s literature. In all these studies, research using Sigmund Freud’s concept of defense mechanism and John Bowlby’s theory of attachment are yet to be conducted. I intend to analyse Coraline using these concepts in this study in order to fill in the research gap. In the novel, the eponymous character, Coraline, has been going through a journey to find her missing parents after discovering the existence of another world that resembles her real world. When Coraline encounters the Other Mother in this alternate world and finds that she resembles Coraline’s own missing mother, she feels confused. From here, my study will focus on the scope of Coraline’s relationship with her real mother and Other Mother through Freud’s defense mechanism and Bowlby’s theory of attachment. My study uses a textual analysis approach and aims to analyse Coraline’s family relationship, her feelings of denial as well as her aggressive behavior towards the Other Mother. Findings show that Coraline’s family relationship with her Other Mother is mirroring John Bowlby’s theory of attachment but in contradiction, Coraline still chooses to return back to her real mother as opposing this theory. Besides, Coraline’s denial and aggression depict her disapproval and rejection towards the existence of her Other Mother.

Keywords: Attachment, mother, denial, aggression, Coraline, Neil Gaiman

INTRODUCTION
Neil Gaiman is a contemporary American author who writes fiction across many mediums, but he is particularly popular in the genre of children’s fantasy literature. This may be due to the fact that Gaiman explores “darker-psycho emotional themes in children literature” (Grace, 33). One of Gaiman’s award-winning children’s novel is entitled Coraline; a novel about the journey of an 11-year old girl to the Other World to search for her missing parents. There, she discovers that everything is similar to her own house and she meets her Other Mother, who resembles her real mother. Along her journey, she finds that the love and attention she desired for, and given by her Other Parents (OP), are not the same as the ones given by her real parents. As time passes by, the true nature of her Other Mother is revealed and, at the end of the novel, Coraline makes a plan to escape from the Other World. The objective of this study is firstly to examine Coraline’s relationship with her real parents and Other Parents through John Bowlby’s theory of attachment, to investigate Coraline’s denial and, lastly, to reveal Caroline’s unconscious thought in terms of aggression towards the character of the Other Mother by using Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical approach.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted on Coraline where most scholars analysed Coraline using Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (Grace A, 18; Stibbs, 13; Buckley, 5; Rudd, 20), though others examined Coraline from Lacanian and Jungian perspectives (Rudd, 8; Duff, 21). One scholar discussed his disapproval of adding a new male character in the movie adaptation of Coraline using a feminist lens (Curtis, 20).

In regards to a psychoanalytic analysis, the application of Freud’s theory of the uncanny on the protagonist, Coraline, has been a common topic among scholars (Buckley, 7; Theresa, 15). Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220). In the novel, Coraline experiences the Other House as being familiar to her own house in terms of carpets, wallpaper and pictures (Gaiman 27). Hence, this situation recalls a feeling of uncanniness.

Another issue that has been examined by scholars on Coraline is the depiction of the fantasy world in the form of a child’s imagination and an interpretation of dreams (Grace A, 8; Stibbs, 20; Klapesik, 25; Duff, 85). In a study entitled “Other Mother: Neil Gaiman’s Postfeminist Fairytales”, Parsons et al. (2008) suggest that Coraline fits into “the genre of fantasy” where the depiction of fantasies has been depicted throughout the existence of “the uncanny”, particularly through the character of the Other Mother. It acts as a vehicle for the protagonist to resolve questions of identity as well as the dilemmas and adventures faced by Coraline.

In terms of the interpretation of dreams, Freud states that “dreams are not nonsensical but meaningful. They are composites made out of the residues […] chosen by the unconscious to represent the fulfillment of a wish” (91). For instance, Coraline’s journey to the Other World to seek her real parents can be interpreted as a dream of an unfulfilled wish: eternal love and attention from her busy parents. In the story, there is an incident where Coraline’s real mother wakes her up from sleep. Coraline is startled because everything is normal, as if nothing had happened and her parents are not missing. This incident shows the possibility that Coraline’s mysterious journey, her meeting with the Other Mother and the hardships that she faces are actually dreams (Coraline 60).

In a study by Prasanna Grace A (2018) entitled “Study of Neil Gaiman’s Coraline as a Novel that Caters to a Dual Audience”, the existence of an imaginary world is discussed and she argues that Gaiman creates the novel to distinguish between reality and the imagination as framed from a Lacanian perspective. Grace argues that Gaiman’s Coraline depicts the imagination and inner-thoughts of a girl when she is immersed in an alternate world. In early childhood, children have difficulties or are in a state of confusion in distinguishing between fantasy and reality as supported in a study by Khursheed Ahmad Qazi:

“[…] during the childhood period, the child moves from a period of need (in which the child is unconscious of its body as a coherent unified whole and can hardly differentiate between self and other, between itself and mother), to the period of want (where it has to separate itself from its mother in order to form its own identity), which is necessary to become a part of society” (9).

During this phase, in the forming of the self-identity of a child, he or she will enter a phase which involves difficulties in distinguishing between fantasy or reality and his or her self with others. This scholar is in agreement with Prasanna Grace A’s earlier view, perhaps
because both scholars use a Lacanian perspective to examine the concept of imagination and the imaginary world. The other world in Coraline can thus be described as a mirror of the real world. Hence, Coraline notices that the other world (imaginary world) that she is trapped in is not a permanent world.

Another issue that has been explored in Coraline is through the lens of magical realism. Todorov defines magical realism as “the supernatural element intervenes that describes elements of fantasy can be recognized similarly in magical realism (90) which also consists of supernatural events that happen in reality. Equally important, magical realism is one of the most prominent genres in adults’ literature after the publication of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (Moghadam & Hosseinpor, 2). Referring back to Gaiman’s Coraline, the story is considered as a magical realist fiction because of features of magical realism that can been seen and analysed by critics: the past and present run in parallel in Coraline’s real world and the Other World.

Besides that, previous research has been conducted on the stages of development in Coraline through the analysis of the eponymous character herself. Carnes (2016) discusses Coraline psychological development using Erik Erikson’s psycho-social theories, making a comparison between Coraline and the character of Deeba in China Mieville’s Un Lun Dun, where the issue of identity has been discussed through the “Eight Ages of Man” which correspond to a set of stages humans undergo during a range of ages (Erikson 247). Carnes examines the stages of development of Coraline, who, according to Erikson’s psycho-social theories, is at the Industry vs Inferiority Stage, a stage which involves the “entrance of life” (Erikson 258). Coraline travels across the door in search of her parents and her adapting to the change of environment is based on her stage of development.

Other studies have applied Erik Erikson’s theory of development in the context of food power, which is then investigated through the mother-daughter relationship in Coraline (Polard and Keeling, 143; Herndon, 20; Bray, 12). In a study by Bray (2012), the role of Mother is described as the nurturer; she is the person who is responsible for the feeding of the children, and they gain power from food (Bray, 12). Hence, the relationship between Coraline, her real mother, and her Other Mother has been investigated focusing on the issue of food. Herndon states that “the mother-children relationship, not only in literature, but in “real life” as well, is one that brings with it many associations of nurturing and provision, especially in the form of food” (4). Food can bring closeness or creates a gap depending on how food has been served to the children. In Coraline, her OM tries to attract Coraline’s attention by preparing the best lunch ever. This incident shows how the Other Mother tries to preserve a good mother-daughter relationship with Coraline by the preparation of food.

Identity and self-discovery are two essential issues in “Coraline” that have also been studied by previous researchers. Staci Poston Corner explains that “mirrors and mirroring in this text play a key role in the development of Coraline’s identity” (70). For instance, Coraline’s action of interacting with a mirror gives us a deeper understanding of her identity as it changes throughout the text, both in terms of how she sees herself and how others see her. In Coraline, the protagonist goes through many challenges, such as battling the Other Mother, in order to find her real parents.

Next, identity formation can be seen through the influence of the house because it symbolises the dynamics of human minds (Drangsholt, 11), where the usage of dark corridors, doors and hallways in Coraline act as depictions of methods to enter the other world. Thus, the second world or “alternate universes” can be a symbol of identity development
In his study, Carnes explains that the existence of alternate worlds, or the usage of portals, represents the physical development, identity and crises faced by the protagonists. Thus, Coraline enters the phase of physical development from childhood into adulthood when she enters the Other World. The portals become the foundation or bridge towards Coraline’s identity development (Carnes 3).

Lastly, in a study entitled, The Other Mother: Neil Gaiman’s Postfeminist Fairytales (2009), the character of the Other Mother in Coraline is seen as representing current trends in postmodernist fairytale adaptations (McInally et. al, 20), where postmodernism is defined by Angela McRobbie as “while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well intended response to feminism,” it is “an active process in which feminist gains from the 70s and 80s come to be undermined” (255). For example, the role of the mother as powerful and over-dominating in Gaiman’s texts to attain resolution for the female protagonist must be overthrown.

Upon completing my review, I have identified a gap in the literature regarding Coraline, which leads me to pursue an investigation of this novel through an understanding of the issue of attachment, denial, and aggression. These concepts will be explained below.

**THEORY OF ATTACHMENT BY JOHN BOWLBY**

The theory of attachment revolves around the mother-child relationship; it begins from infancy to childhood, and can affect children’s personality development when they enter adulthood. Bowlby (1969) describes it as:

“how a very young child behaves towards his mother, both in her presence and especially in her absence, can contribute greatly to our understanding of personality development” (3).

This statement has been supported and elaborated by another scholar, by Jillian F. Logan (2017), who suggests that a mother-child relationship is significant to determine a child’s personality development:

“Childhood experiences give rise to “mental representations of attachment figure, the self, and the environment that form important internal working models which in turn become the basis for the child’s decision making in future relationship (7)”.

According to Bowlby (1969), the mother is considered the primary attachment figure and the closest figure to the child compared to the father. It has been argued that mother and infant develop this innate relationship through the womb during pregnancy (Bowlby, 21).

**SIGMUND FREUD’S DEFENSE MECHANISM OF DENIAL**

This study will also focus on a subcategory of Freud’s defense mechanism, which is the concept of denial, which is one’s refusal to accept certain facts or knowledge. Thus, it can be described as a psychological method that acts as a temporary pain reliever to protect individuals from emotional disturbance. According to Rycroft (1985), denial is defined as a “defense mechanism by which some painful experience is denied or some impulse or aspect of the self is denied” (29). The concept of denial has been applied in psychoanalysis to explain the way a person protects his or her emotional balance by refusing to acknowledge hurtful truths and
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SIGMUND FREUD’S INSTINCT THEORY OF AGGRESSION

The second Freudian concept that will be employed in this paper is aggression, a human instinct that is derived from the death drive “Thanatos”. In this study, aggressive behavior will be highlighted and defined through a Freudian perspective. The protagonist in Gaiman’s Coraline will be examined in terms of her aggressive behavior that results from aggression in her psyche.

According to Freud in his book, Instincts and Their Vicissitudes’ (1915),

“Aggressiveness, too, was a component of the ego instincts – aggression, in other words, was at last given a formal place in the theoretical scheme, though not yet as a full-fledged, separate instinctual drive in its own right”(130).

Freud considers aggressiveness as a component of the ego instinct involving the self-destructive drive: the death drive “Thanatos”. All human aggressive behavior results from a frustration that might occur in one’s unconscious mind and frustrations that result from the death drive can lead to aggressive behavior.

From a different point of view, Robert A. Baron (1994) describes aggression as:

“any behavior that is intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed.” (833)

Based on the above statement, aggression can be defined as any violence or dangerous behavior that can harm other people such as killing, shooting, slapping and cursing.

Correspondingly, the notion of aggression can be divided into two: positive and negative aggression (Bluestein 794). According to Ellis (1976) in Healthy and Unhealthy Aggression, positive aggression can be exhibited as:

“[…] healthy, productive behavior if it promoted the basic values of survival, protection, happiness, social acceptance, preservation, and intimate relations (54).

The above notion of positive aggression is supported by Jack (1999) in Behind the mask: Destruction and creativity in Women Aggression. Here, positive aggression also can be explained as:

“self-protection, standing up in the face of negation, pushing for new possibilities, and defending against harm.” (200)

Both scholars explain that positive aggression is acceptable when it comes to one’s self protection against external factors that might harm a certain individual, where one must be strong and aggressive when being in a threatening situation to protect the survival of the species. On the other hand, aggression can be interpreted differently when it comes to “negative
aggression”. Destroying someone’s territory and hurting someone physically, mentally and financially can be considered as negative aggression (Moyer 70).

**CORALINE’S FAMILY RELATIONSHIP (REAL PARENTS VS OTHER PARENTS)**

In the context of this study, Bowlby’s theory of attachment will be used to examine Coraline’s family relationship with her real parents and her Other Parents. This paper will examine Coraline’s family relationship with her real mother and her Other Mother based on parenting style and how Coraline reacts to the mothers.

Referring back to the novel, Coraline’s life at home is dull. Even though her parents worked from home, they were always busy. Interactions between the parents and the child are limited as exemplified below:

“What should I do?” asked Coraline.

“I really don’t mind what you do,” said Coraline’s mother, “as long as you don’t make a mess.” (Gaiman 2)

The above excerpt shows a lack of a mother-child relationship, where Coraline’s real mother is unresponsive and pays little attention to Coraline. For Coraline, her mother appears to prefer work over fun activities with her daughter. Thus, there is a lack of closeness between mother and child. According to Bowlby (1969), a mother should be responsive towards her children’s needs and desires. Yet Coraline’s relationship with her mother can be read as a form of negative attachment (Ainsworth, 56). Relating back to the notion of attachment theory by Bowlby (1952), he suggests that, “the determinant of attachment is not food but care and responsiveness” (232). A mother’s role is not only to provide food and clothes to the child, but to care and be responsive to the child’s wants and needs. Coraline’s parents’ lack of responsiveness can thus be seen as the causing factor of Coraline’s loneliness and boredom, which thus leads her to visit her neighbours Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, which later leads to the conflict of the novel. Further, Coraline’s parents’ parenting style can be related to one of Bowlby’s concept of anxious-avoidance insecure attachment. This kind of attachment style relates to Coraline as she feels distressed and isolated when her mother does not give her much attention. Anxious-avoidance insecure attachment also describes a child’s personality as being aggressive and anti-social; these traits are also later portrayed by Coraline.

When Coraline is immersed in the Other World, she finds a different type of parenting. Coraline is treated lovingly by her Other Parents, receiving abundant attention and care. The following excerpt shows how Coraline is treated by her Other Parents:

Coraline : Where are my parents?
Other Mother (OM) : We’re here ready to love you and feed you and make your life interesting
Other Father (OF) : Come on into the kitchen. I’ll make us a midnight snack. Hot chocolate perhaps?

(Gaiman 20)

Here, Coraline’s Other Parents act as attachment figures as they play the role of caregiver and guardians of Coraline. Hence, Coraline feels appreciated and finds the love that she has been looking for in the Other World. Coraline feels secure when she is under the
supervision of her Other Parents; this is unsurprising considering the Other Parents’ attachment style fits into Bowlby’s notion as ideal:

“The infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment” (Bowlby, 1951, p. 13)

Coraline feels delighted to be a part of her Other Parents’ family: she is finally loved and taken care of by her Other Parents more than her real parents. Unfortunately, this happiness is short-lived. Coraline senses something strange when she sees her Other Mother eating insects alive and realises that they are not her real parents:

Coraline : You’re sick, sick and evil!
Other Mother : Is that any way to talk to your mother?
Coraline : You aren’t my mother.

(Gaiman 88)

From this point onwards, Coraline decides to destroy the attachment between herself and her Other Mother. Instead, Coraline chooses to return to her real parents, who had not given her as much as attention as her Other Parents. Consequently, this event shows Coraline resisting Bowlby’s attachment theory. This could perhaps be related to a critique of the attachment theory. Harris argues that Bowlby’s theory of attachment is limiting as it only focuses on the mother-child relationship and does not acknowledge other factors that could affect a child’s psychological development; she cites a child’s peers as an example of other influencing factors (67). In this novel, OM is considered as another mother for Coraline as she has been immersed in the Other World. Her care and treatment towards Coraline somehow make Coraline realise that those are her desires before this. But, in the end, Coraline still cannot accept her Other Mother as her real mother as she has seen her true nature and evilness. Based on this finding, it can be suggested that her OM is considered as Coraline’s negative peer who she wants to escape from instead of a motherly figure. Hence, in the end, Coraline still wants to return back to her real mother who does not even appreciate her at all.

It can be argued that Coraline’s growth does not stem from her relationship with her real mother. Instead, Coraline’s personality is indirectly shaped by her Other Mother as she becomes more resisting and mature in her decision-making. Upon realising the threat posed by the Other Mother, Coraline chooses to return to her parents; this decision-making prioritises dull safety rather than danger. In the end, Coraline feels safe and secure from her Other Parents and finds appreciation from her real parents. Thus, Coraline’s encounter with her Other Mother Harris’ fits into an earlier view by Harris.

**DENIAL IN CORALINE**

Earlier, I have shown that denial is a primitive defense which rejects reality and indirectly helps endangered persons to escape an unwanted and undesirable situation (Freud, 12). It is a method to protect one’s internal emotions from a hurtful and unacceptable reality. For example, when there is a death of a loved one, a person might become depressed and is unable to accept the reality of his or her loved one’s passing. Through denial of reality, he or she could feel relief from a state of intense shock and excess grief.
In this section, I will focus on the analysis of the second objective; to explore how denial in Gaiman’s *Coraline* through the lens of psychoanalysis. To begin, the notion of denial can be examined through Coraline’s actions. From the beginning of the story, there is one scene that depicts Coraline’s agitation which is the scene when she enters an empty old flat by using a key that she has taken from the kitchen and meets with her Other Parents. One feels Coraline’s sense of strangeness through her words, “I didn’t know I had another mother” (Gaiman 32). Her other mother keeps calm and replies, “Of course you do. Everyone does” (Gaiman 32). The earlier example from the text foreshadows future unpleasant events. Coraline is curious regarding who her Other Parents are. According to Freud, anxiety and curiosity are the results of conflicts with the Id, Ego and Superego in an individual’s unconscious mind (70). Coraline’s unconscious mind can thus be seen as attempting to process this mysterious event. She is curious regarding what is happening and where her parents have gone to when she finds them missing. When she is in the Other World, she finds something meaningful; her parents’ attention and love that she always has desired. She begins to feel anxious after she discovers her parents’ disappearance. Thus, Coraline’s feelings of anxiety and curiosity towards her Other Parents show arising conflicts within her Id, Ego and Superego. In Coraline’s unconscious mind, the ego plays an important role in solving the conflicts between the Id and Superego, hence the ego defense mechanism of denial can be applied to Coraline’s situation.

Besides, another example of denial in this novel can be seen when the Other Mother shows Coraline’s real parents’ conversation to her and convinces Coraline that they do not want her anymore. Her Other Mother shows these visual images through the mirror and Coraline hears her real parents’ conversation where they do not want Coraline to disturb them anymore and that they want her to be taken care of by her Other Mother. Coraline does not accept the fact that her real parents are tired of her and rejects her Other Mother’s words. She denies the fact that her parents are leaving her and cannot accept her Other Mother’s justification as seen from the example below:

“They weren’t bored of me. You’re lying! You stole them! I don’t see. And I don’t believe it either

(Gaiman 70-71)

Coraline’s refusal to believe that her real parents do not love her shows Coraline’s state of denial. She is afraid that her Other Mother’s words might be true as her real parents have gone missing. It is safe to assume that Coraline worries that she has been abandoned by her real parents. To overcome this possible hurtful truth, Coraline’s ego defense mechanism is raised through the form of denial. This method of defense mechanism acts as a temporary reliever to protect Coraline’s internal emotions. Hence, she talks back to the Other Mother in order to convince herself that her parents love her and will not leave her. Talking back and opposing her Other Mother’s words is Coraline’s method of temporarily protecting her internal emotions through denial.

Coraline’s subconscious mind also shows her denial:

“It’s funny. The other mother doesn’t look anything at all like my own mother. How could I ever have thought was a resemblance?”

(Gaiman 142)
The excerpt above shows how Coraline finally notices that there is a difference between her Other Mother and her real mother. It can be argued that Coraline has initially been in a state of denial, confusing her Other Mother) with her real mother because of a desire for love and attention. Later, however, she refuses to accept that her Other Mother is her real mother because the Other Mother is wicked and evil. Because Coraline has rejected the Other Mother, she now believes that her real mother is safe and, most importantly, that her real mother still loves her. Coraline is thus still in a state of denial; her unconscious mind is attempting to protect her from a possible reality that she has no parental figure that loves her.

CORALINE’S AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS HER OTHER MOTHER

Freud states that aggression is a part of the ego instinct:

“Aggressiveness, too, was a component of the ego instincts – aggression, in other words, was at last given a formal place in the theoretical scheme, though not yet as a full-fledged, separate instinctual drive in its own right” (130).

When the ego is unable to fulfill the demands of Id, it can lead to aggression. From a psychoanalytical perspective, human behavior is derived from the instinctual drive of either “Eros” or “Thanatos”. Similar to denial, aggression can be understood as an ego instinct for self-preservation. Conflicts between “Eros” and “Thanatos” can lead to aggression and can be projected in many forms, such as physical, verbal and relational aggression, as a result of frustration from one’s unconscious mind (McNeil, 5). This statement also goes back to Freud’s suggestion that “the frustration of behavior aimed at gaining pleasure or avoiding pain led to aggression” (cited in Dennen, 10). In relation to the novel, there are several events that foreground Coraline’s aggression due to her frustration towards her Other Mother. One of the events is depicted below:

“I don’t want to play with you. I want to go home and be with my real parents. I want you to let them go. To let us all go. I have no plans to love you. You can’t make me!”

(Gaiman 87)

Coraline becomes angry when her Other Mother continues to force her to take part in family activities. Coraline’s act of yelling and screaming above exemplifies verbal aggression. Coraline has rejected her Other Mother and, when her Other Mother insists in acting as her real mother, Coraline become frustrated and becomes verbally aggressive, hoping to injure her Other Mother’s feelings. This example can thus be read as Coraline’s demands being restricted and her ego being attacked by her Other Mother, which led to aggressiveness caused by frustration.

Another example that shows Coraline’s aggressive behavior is when she plans to escape the Other World with the talking cat:

“Coraline threw the cat towards the other mother. The cat slashed the other mother’s cheek. She was flailing at it. Blood ran from the cuts on her white face – not red blood but a deep, tarry black stuff. Coraline ran for the door.”

(Gaiman 146)
Coraline tries to hurt her Other Mother by throwing the cat onto her Other Mother which results in her Other Mother being injured. This form of aggression is called physical aggression as it intends to cause physical harm and injury to other people by hitting, kicking, stabbing, or shooting them (Bushman and Huesmann 834). Coupled with the concept of “Thanatos”, or the “death drive”, this physical aggression can be further read as a form of self-preservation (Dennen, 42). In this context, Coraline’s ego instinct has been attacked by her Other Mother in terms of her wickedness and her insincere displays of love to Coraline. To escape from this unwanted situation, Coraline has a moment of realisation and decides to run away from the Other Mother for her own self-preservation. Coraline’s frustration leads to her being physical by throwing the black cat onto her Other Mother’s face. Coraline’s action is considered as positive aggression because it aims for survival and self-protection as stated by Ellis (1976):

“Positive aggression takes many forms, including self-protection, standing up in the face of negation, pushing for new possibilities, and defending against harm.” (200)

The two events highlighted in the novel depict Coraline’s aggressive behaviors in terms of verbal and physical aggression caused by frustration in her unconscious mind. Coraline’s resistance and rejection towards her Other Mother depict her disapproval of the Other Mother as her real mother and, for Coraline, no one else could replace her real mother.

CONCLUSION
To sum up, Coraline’s denial towards the Other Mother has been analysed through the Freudian notion of defense mechanism. Coraline’s being in the state of denial depicts her rejection towards reality. Other than that, Coraline’s disapproval of her Other Mother’s existence also leads to her aggression that results in her aggressive behavior. In addition, the application of Bowlby’s theory of attachment illustrates Coraline’s relationship with her real parents and her Other Parents. According to Bowlby, the mother plays the most important role and should act as the primary attachment figure to the child. Children attain security and attachment when they are in close relationship with their mothers. However, in this study, Coraline rejects the secure attachment with her Other Mother and, instead, chooses her real mother who does not play a significant role as a mother figure and as her primary attachment figure. This opposes Bowlby’s attachment theory and raises further questions as to its relevance in understanding contemporary personality developments of children. Subsequently, Coraline’s denial towards her Other Mother shows her anxiety over her position as the child of a detached family, and Coraline’s aggression towards her Other Mother) emphasises Coraline’s growth through confident decision-making in rejecting her Other Mother to find her way back to her real world. In the end, Coraline chooses “reality” over a “fantasy” of an ideal secure attachment bonding with her parents, symbolising her growth into young adulthood.

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