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**A Psychological Approach to the  
Wicked Women in Lewis Carroll's  
*Alice in Wonderland* and Neil  
Gaiman's *Coraline***

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## Introduction

“It is astonishing just how much of what we are can be tied to the beds we wake up in in the morning, and it is astonishing how fragile that can be” (Gaiman, 65)

This quote is taken from a moment of reflection by Coraline, the heroine in the award winning novella of the same name, *Coraline*, written by Neil Gaiman in 2002, who finds herself in a parallel universe, later explained as a form of dream, which is controlled by a vicious creature called the other mother. Coraline is reflecting on how vulnerable we are when we begin to fall asleep and dream, since what appears may be far more dangerous than we could possibly imagine. Similar to Coraline’s journey through a parallel universe and her encounter with a strange and violent woman, Alice descends into the fantastical and dream-like realm of Wonderland in Lewis Carroll’s famous novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). She falls into a rabbit hole which sends her into the mysterious land of Wonderland, and whilst exploring its depths, she meets the Queen of Hearts and the Duchess, two loud and violent women showing little or no affection.

The aim of this essay is to explore the nature of these women and try to answer the question of *why* they show such cruel and violent tendencies towards the young girls. There are certain similarities between the two texts which suggest that the violent women might be part of a larger theme: both the Duchess and the other mother are, for example, associated with motherhood, and both Alice and Coraline encounter them in fantasy worlds. Additionally, males are either absent or passive in both stories, as opposed to the authoritative females. This essay will try to show from where this theme might have originated and will bring up three fairy tales with similar stories: Snow White, Cinderella, and Rapunzel. Even though these were written down and published long before *Alice in Wonderland* and *Coraline*, they are interestingly enough strikingly similar when it comes to the violent women depicted.

I will also look at the theme of the young girl battling an unkind and violent female by using theories put forth by psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Freud’s thoughts about the unconscious, dreams and the uncanny, as well as Carl Jung’s terms of archetypes and the collective unconsciousness will be used to try and

interpret the stories. The theory of the mother-archetypes will be further explored as it explains the theme which connects *Alice in Wonderland* and *Coraline* together with the fairytales. I will argue that the violent women are a type of negative mother-archetype, which could be explained as an image of a volatile female which has rooted itself deep within the unconscious of society. This part of the unconscious was thought of and called the *collective unconsciousness* by Jung. By then applying Freud's theory of the unconscious being explored through the act of dreaming, it can be argued that the odd worlds of Wonderland and the other world should be seen as dreams. Though Freud's and Jung's respective works may differ in theory, combined they can help decipher the brutal nature of the wicked women in Alice's and Coraline's stories and explain their fantastical worlds.

The characters and events in these novels have nonetheless been explored through the scope of Freud and Jung by other authors previously. Coraline has most notably been analyzed by Vivienne Muller in her essay *Same old 'Other' mother?: Neil Gaiman's Coraline*, where she also brings up Freud's concept of the uncanny and the Oedipus complex; and Lois Rauch Gibson has discussed the matter of archetypes in Alice in Wonderland in her article *Beyond the Apron: Archetypes, Stereotypes, and Alternative portrayals of Mothers in Children's Literature*. This essay will differ from these articles in that I will combine Freud's ideas and Jung's theories in my analysis of the evil women, and then apply them to both novels respectively.

I will initially try to show why the theories of Freud and Jung are important in connection with the novels and fairy tales mentioned, and also discuss briefly why Freud and Jung thought fairy tales might be important, especially in connection with the theory of the mother-archetypes. I will then use Freud's theory of the unconscious within dreams to look at Wonderland and the other world and essentially explaining them both as dreams. In conclusion, I will explain what the violent women might mean to Alice and Coraline and what problems might arise by encountering them. The argument of this essay is thus that the wicked women which Alice and Coraline face are figures of their imagination and stem from the image of the mother-archetype, which they reach by exploring their unconscious through the dream worlds of Wonderland and the other world, respectively. By doing so, they successfully manage to resolve their issues concerning other dominant female influences.

### **The Unconscious and Dreams**

Since the wicked women in the stories can be seen as being figures of Alice's and Coraline's imagination, one essential aspect to explore is the theory of the unconscious, which was one of Sigmund Freud's most famous contributions in the field of psychology. The unconscious part of the mind, Freud argued, is hidden beneath our conscious mind and consists of things we are not immediately aware of, such as unprocessed thoughts, impressions and feelings. Whatever lies within our unconsciousness would thus not be naturally accessible to us. However, exploring this part of the mind could be highly beneficial according to Freud - for example, in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, he claimed that becoming aware of the unconscious could help an individual overcome certain mental issues such as anxiety or phobias. Exploring this concealed depth of the mind with the aid of a physician could make the person see the issue differently in an awakened state, and the patient would ultimately overcome the problem (5). The unconscious is thus explained as containing concealed data, such as feelings and thoughts, which are unknown to us but can still be reached with proper guidance. By applying Freud's theory of the unconscious to the novels, the women which Alice and Coraline face could be thought of as part of their unconscious, which will be explored later in this essay.

Freud also believed that the unconscious was an aspect which could control most of the content of dreams. Whatever lay hidden there surfaces during sleep because the conscious, which controls our mind, shuts down to heal itself, leaving the unconscious to be freely expressed through the process of dreaming. Freud further explained the numbing of the conscious mind, which would otherwise impact the dream sequence, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

...on falling asleep the 'undesired ideas' emerge, owing to the slackening of a certain arbitrary (and, of course, also critical) action, which is allowed to influence the trend of ideas; we are accustomed to speak of fatigue as the reason of this slackening; the merging undesired ideas are changed into visual and auditory images. (16)

Only by numbing the consciousness could thoughts and feelings which lay suppressed in the depths of the mind thus come to the surface, such as when one begins to fall

asleep. To answer the question of whether or not dreams had any significance, Freud posed the theory that dreams could actually be a way to fulfill wishes and yearnings – so called “wish-fulfillments” (179). The essential argument was thus that the unconscious could manifest itself in dreams because of the absence of the conscious mind, and whatever had previously been unknown would be brought to the surface in forms of images. The strange events in *Wonderland* and the *Other World* could be assumed to be conjured from Alice’s and Coraline’s unconscious, and by further applying the idea of dreams being particularly important outlets, the fantasy realms could thus be claimed to be part of an illusion, or specifically, a dream.

Within these dream-like stories, the absence of males shows the emphasis on the struggle between female characters. Freud suggested that children would sometimes act out a strong affection for the parent of the opposite sex to deal with issues concerning their own sexuality, a theory which Carl Jung would later develop into his own concept of the Elektra complex. Freud called his theory “the Oedipus Complex” after the ancient play of *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles where Oedipus Rex, the king of Thebes, murders his father in order to marry his mother, believing that it is his destiny to defeat him. The love for the parent of the opposite gender was something which Freud assumed to be of an innate sexual nature in the child, and since the child would naturally see the parent of the same sex as an enemy in the quest for the other parent’s love, a violent struggle with the contender for that love could potentially take place. Freud’s theory was met with some opposition, however, most notably from one of his former students, the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. Jung believed that the relationship between a daughter and a mother was more complex than the general assumption of the child’s instinctive sexual possessiveness and devised his theory of the Electra complex as a response to Freud. Since Alice’s and Coraline’s stories essentially culminate in a confrontation between the female child and a violent woman, with men and father-figures being noticeably absent, it could be argued that the stories portray a form of female oedipal complex, which will be discussed later in this essay.

### **Archetypes, Fairy Tales and the Uncanny**

Jung also contradicted Freud in his own theory of a collective unconscious in various essays collected in the book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, in which he also introduced the notion of the archetype. Though he was very much aware of the

personal aspect of the unconscious mind that Freud spoke about, which Jung dubbed the personal unconscious, he believed it to be “a more or less superficial layer” in comparison to the collective unconscious (3). He further explained this phenomenon as a deeper part of the human mind, present amongst all of mankind, and a place where unconscious thoughts, feelings and instincts had gathered as part of ancestry as opposed to individual experience (42-43). Instincts were especially connected to the collective unconscious because they were “impersonal, universally distributed, hereditary factors of a dynamic or motivating character”, and thus not connected to an individual person (43). These instincts, combined with other unconscious reflections and feelings, formed images which Jung described as archetypes. These archetypal images were prevalent since ancient times and could be something as common as the image of the hero, or that of the trickster or joker character. Another important archetype suggested by Jung, which is represented in fairy tales as well as in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Coraline*, was that of the mother.

The archetype consisting of the image of the mother is known as the mother-archetype, which is considered to be good-natured, sympathetic and nurturing. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconsciousness*, Jung explored where the initial notion of the nature of the mother-archetype might have been conceived. He noted that a major influence came from the real mother with whom a relationship exists, as well as ancient women who have become symbols of femininity within religion, such as the Virgin Mary, and figures in mythology. As with many female influences from ancient times, such as the goddesses of Aphrodite, Venus and Gaia, the archetype of the mother is attached to symbols relating to fertility and nature, such as a garden, trees and flowers, hollow objects (alluding to the uterus) and animals (81). These symbols highlight the essence of the mother-archetype, which is the feminine qualities of nurturing, procreation and fertility, as well as what Jung described as “maternal solicitude and sympathy” (81). Within the collective unconscious, which would then be a deeper side of the unconscious in both *Alice* and *Coraline*, the image of the friendly and nurturing female would be represented by a mother-archetype relating to everything good and stable.

However, Jung also noted that the good nature of the mother-archetype could be reversed and show itself as a negative influence through symbols such as that

of a witch or a cold-blooded reptile, and the looming feeling of fear and death. These images can be found both in the Duchess, the Queen of Hearts and the other mother, as well as in a selection of fairy tales collected and edited by the Grimm brothers. Jung further explained the mother-archetype as possibly being the opposite of the warmth of a mother:

...the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like death. (82)

The mother-archetype, according to Jung's theory, could thus also become negative and a symbol of fear and death rather than comfort and life. In fairy tales depicting similar scenarios to that of the confrontation with the harsh females in Alice's and Coraline's stories, such as in the Grimm brothers' Snow White, Cinderella and Rapunzel, the depiction of the women show them as similar to Carl Jung's description of the negative mother-archetype. In *The Complete Fairy Tales of The Brothers Grimm*, which was originally compiled by the Grimm Brothers and in this version edited by Jack Zipes, Snow White's stepmother wants not only to dispose of her, but to kill her and eat her organs as well; Cinderella's evil stepmother forces her stepsisters to cut off parts of their feet to fit the golden shoe; and the witch which raises Rapunzel in the tower sends her out to die in a forest after discovering her meeting a boy, whom she later pushes out of a window which leaves him blinded by having his eyes pierced by the thorns of rose bushes. Despite the fact that these stories were originally compiled by the Grimm brothers years before *Alice in Wonderland* and *Coraline* were written and published, they contain both negative mother-archetypes and young female protagonists, a fact which hints at the idea that the evil women in Alice's and Coraline's stories might have originated from the collective unconscious and archetypes.

Freud and Jung further spoke about the significance of fairy tales in connection to their theories because they both believed that these had a strong influence in literature. Jung claimed that mothers depicted in literature were in fact channeling traits which made them archetypal:

That is to say, all those influences which the literature describes as being exerted on the children do not come from the mother herself, but rather

from the archetype projected upon her, which gives her a mythological background and invests her with authority and numinosity. (83)

The female image that is portrayed in literature can thus be thought of as based on Jung's idea of the archetypal, deeply rooted image of the mother in the collective consciousness of society, rather than being an individual representation. This archetype, in particular the negative mother-archetype, can as previously stated be clearly discerned in fairy tales. The symbols connected to nature which Jung claimed were related to womanhood and femininity are also seen in all three previously mentioned fairy tales: Snow White is given a poisoned apple by her step-mother; Cinderella plants a tree by her mother's grave; and Rapunzel is in fact named after the plant which became the catalyst for the events in the story. Even though the fairy tales are obviously fictional, the issues they portray are closely related to real life. As Marina Warner states, fairy tales are more closely linked to reality than one might think: "The more one knows fairytales the less fantastical they appear; they are vehicles of the most grim realism, expressing hope against all the odds with gritted teeth" (27). The influence which fairy tales have had on literature was thus emphasized by both Freud and Jung because they could see an essential connection regarding the issues portrayed.

For a child, the ambiguous state of the mother-archetype can cause what Jung described as a "mother-complex". The mother-complex occurs when something disrupts the child's view of the mother to the point of it affecting the child's behavior and its perception of its own sexuality. For a daughter, a mother-complex can lead to issues which are hard to solve because of the mother's and daughter's shared femininity and the mother's innate influence over the daughter. The mother-complex either heightens the feminine urges of the daughter or lowers them, in the latter case making her either incapable of acting on her feminine impulses or relying on her mother to do so in her place (85-86). Though Jung described the struggle between the mother and the daughter as dangerous, he also noted that it could be beneficial:

When she fights against the mother she may, at the risk of injury to her instincts, attain to greater consciousness, because in repudiating the mother she repudiates all that is obscure, instinctive, ambiguous and unconscious in her own nature. (99)

A daughter in conflict with her mother would then be able to balance her feminine side in such a way that it would make it easier for her to deal with underlying issues. The distressing feeling of somebody as close and comforting as a mother being wicked and evil could thus cause significant issues for the daughter, though they could essentially be solved and yield positive outcomes.

A similar theory to that of the mother-complex is Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny, which is a notion linked to the other mother in Coraline's story. In his essay *The Uncanny* from 1919, Freud based the definition of his theory on the German word "unheimlich", meaning unfamiliar or unknown, and described the uncanny as essentially belonging to whatever evoked a sense of terror or lingering fear (122). The fear could be an impending anxiety over the loss of a limb or a response to a rising threat, which would be most apparent when faced in a new situation previously unknown to the individual, or when something once familiar becomes strange and obscure. An example of something evoking an uncanny feeling is the other mother who at first looks, talks and acts just like Coraline's own mother, but is in fact a distorted character trying to trap her inside the other world. A theme further associated with both the feeling of the uncanny and the other mother is "the double", the thought of a doppelganger somehow acquiring similar traits, manners and thoughts as oneself (141). The doppelganger could be created as a way to ensure immortality, because the self would have an indestructible counterpart which would survive even though the body and its ego would one day die. Freud further stated that this character could be found in dreams, and linked the creation of a doppelganger to narcissism and how it could potentially become a "ghastly harbinger of death" (141). This is similar to how the other mother is a doppelganger of Coraline's mother, and how she is connected to both the uncanny and the looming feeling of darkness and destruction.

### **The Dreams of Wonderland and the Other World**

The use of Sigmund Freud's ideas regarding the unconscious within dreams and the uncanny, and Carl Jung's theories about collective unconscious and archetypes, make Louis Carroll's story of a journey into Wonderland and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* both captivating and complex. As previously mentioned, Alice and Coraline delve into worlds which can be likened to dreams where contents from their unconscious surfaces. The women they encounter could thus be thought of as stemming from something

within the girls, specifically an underlying issue, which the women portray through their violent ways.

The introductory chapter in Carroll's text, which explains Alice's descent into Wonderland, shows how her initial depiction of the events is connected to contents stored in her unconsciousness. The talking White Rabbit, the first character from Wonderland whom Alice encounters, spawns moments after she has begun feeling drowsy by warm weather as she and her sister sit by a bank near a forest (Carroll, 17). Since a place like a forest would naturally contain various wild animals such as rabbits, it is not surprising that Alice would subconsciously begin to think about them and conjure the image of the talking White Rabbit, since the sight of the animals around her has manifested itself in her unconscious. Additionally, it furthermore appears to Alice as if the speaking rabbit is a natural occurrence as she states that "at the time it all seemed quite natural", highlighting how close she is to a dreaming state (18). However, Alice's conscious mind soon notes that the White Rabbit is wearing a watch and a waistcoat, and she sets chase after it only to tremble down the rabbit hole. Alice's consciousness has begun to numb and her unconscious is beginning to take over, much like it does when initiating the act of sleep as Freud stated.

Further adding to the claim that Alice has begun to dream the contents of Wonderland, is the fact that the notion of time is heavily distorted and the lines between reality and fiction thus become blurred when she falls down the rabbit hole. As she tumbles down into Wonderland, Alice realizes that the hole is in fact a strange tunnel with shelves, bookcases and jars lining the walls. In a wakened state, these things would be bizarre to find in a rabbit hole and yet Alice does not reflect on this but keeps descending further down. During her plunge through the tunnel she also notes that everything seems to be slowing down – in fact, she has enough time to pick up one of the jars, examine it, and put it back in its place while still falling down (Carroll, 18-19). Because of the strangeness surrounding the descent, these objects could be argued as figures of Alice's imagination just like the White Rabbit, and the descent along with the warping of time only highlights how quickly she is beginning to enter the dream-world of Wonderland. The connection between The White Rabbit and her dream-state is further shown as she hits ground, only to find the animal scurrying away around a corner (20). Since the discovery of the animal was the first sign that she was in fact

beginning to fall asleep, the tumble down the rabbit hole and the sight of the rabbit indicates that she has finally entered a dreaming state.

One of the most essential things connecting Alice and Coraline is the possibility that the strange worlds they encounter are in fact their unconscious represented by dreams. Just as Alice could be argued to enter Wonderland, and thus her dream, by falling asleep and discovering the White Rabbit, Coraline is also introduced to her dream world through an encounter with animals. After having met the other residents in the house, who are Miss Spink and Miss Forcible and their highland terriers in the basement and the old man upstairs training his circus mice, Coraline's mother one day shows her a door which used to lead into an empty apartment connected to their own. She explains that the gateway has since been sealed by a brick wall and closes the door, but Coraline notes that her mother proceeds to leave it unlocked (Gaiman, 7). This moment seems to stick with Coraline as she falls asleep the following night. Awoken by a sound from the hallway below, she goes down to investigate it and finds a small shadow scurrying across the drawing room where the door in the corner is now slightly opened, yet still sealed by bricks (8-9). The creatures later turn out to be black rats, and could be seen as an eerier version of the mice from the old man upstairs. Coraline, on having visited the old man and speaking about his mice the previous day, as well as noticing her mother leaving the door open, has stored this information in her unconscious and begun to conjure them as she dreams.

Another argument for Coraline having entered a dream is when she soon discovers yet other versions of things connected to reality, which are the other mother and the other father. Having managed to find the key by which her mother opened the door, Coraline discovers that the brick wall beyond the door has now been replaced by a dark passage leading into another version of her own house. As she enters the other world, it appears as if it contains everything she could have ever wished for: the old, dark house is now bright, warm and filled with all sorts of food which she loves, as opposed to her father's recipes which she refuses to eat (Gaiman, 8). Her mother and father, who Coraline felt were ignoring her in the real world, have been replaced by characters who are loving and attentive. Here it can be argued that Coraline during her dreaming process has begun to imagine other versions of the house as well as her parents as a way to fulfill some of her deeper, unconscious desires, which relates to

Freud's theory of dreams being possible wish-fulfillments. In this case, it reflects her deep desire that her parents should pay more attention to her. Similar to how Alice could be said to be in a dream because of the strange contents and the distortion of time during her journey towards Wonderland, Coraline can be claimed to be in a dream as well because of her unconscious desires being shown as wish-fulfilling contents in the story.

Coraline soon discovers that the world which she has entered and the animals in the house are in fact much more distorted than they initially appeared, which yet again proves how she is in the process of dreaming. Similar to how the talking White Rabbit followed Alice into her dream, the black, red-eyed rats which Coraline previously encountered make a second appearance after Coraline enters the other world. They are now clearly shown as being connected to the old man's white circus mice as they begin to jump in a circle and bounce around in various formations, as if performing a circus number (Gaiman, 29). Another indication that Coraline is dreaming and things have been altered is when she goes to explore the rest of the other world, and meets altered versions of the other tenants in the house. She enters Miss Spunk and Miss Forcible's apartment downstairs, and discovers that it has turned into a theatre with a non-stop show performed by younger versions of the two of them, with an audience consisting of talking, chocolate-eating Highland terriers (41-42). The fact that the women previously mentioned to Coraline that they were retired actresses seems to have become exaggerated in her unconscious. In a brief conversation with one of the terriers, Coraline comments on the fact that the dogs are eating chocolate even though she knows they are not supposed to. The dog whispers that this may be the case "maybe where you come from", but that it is the only thing they eat in the other world (41). Not only is the dog talking, just like the White Rabbit does in Alice's story, but it does in fact make an important point: Coraline is not in the real world where she belongs, but in a strange dream where things are altered and odd.

### **The Duchess, the Queen of Hearts, and the Other Mother**

Having gone deeper through their dream-like worlds, the wicked women who they then encounter could be argued to be a reflection of something within the unconscious of the girls. Since the image which the women portray is so closely linked to Jung's description of the mother-archetype, one possibility is that the women are in fact part of

the *collective* unconscious of Alice and Coraline. This is especially noticeable in Alice, who must try to push away the negative motherly influence which the Duchess and the Queen of Hearts later have on her. For Coraline, on the other hand, her battle with the other mother is also connected to a personal issue with her own mother.

The chaotic scene in which Alice meets the Duchess is crucial to understanding the way Alice perceives the relationship between women and their children within her subconscious, and how the lack of maternal instinct in the Duchess connects to a negative archetypal image. Entering the kitchen where the Duchess lives, she discovers the Duchess herself nursing her crying baby in a cloud of smoke billowing from a cauldron on a fire (Carroll, 61). The Duchess is, however, far from a loving and caring mother, and it is apparent to a startled Alice that she has close to no love for her child, as the first thing she hears her say to it is “Pig!” (62). The Duchess then not only orders Alice’s head to be chopped off, but begins to sing an eerie version of a lullaby to the baby, shaking it violently only to suddenly throw it at Alice as she goes to play croquet with the Queen of Hearts (64). The qualities which the Duchess as a mother should possess, such as warmth, love and care, are non-existent, and compared to Jung’s definition of the mother-archetype, the Duchess is rather more closely linked to a cunning and violent female than a mother. This affects Alice to the extent that she begins to feel maternal regarding the child herself, saying: “If I don’t take this child away with me, they’re sure to kill it in a day or two: wouldn’t it be murder to leave it behind?” (65). This hints towards Jung’s theory of the mother-complex, since Alice realizes that the Duchess’ lack of maternal love will destroy the child, whom she must therefore care for and protect as a mother herself, which thus heightens her own motherly instincts.

However, as the Duchess returns after her game with the Queen of Hearts, she is kind and warm towards Alice which creates confusion between the mother-archetypes for Alice, and further connects to Jung’s theory of the mother-complex. The negative mother-archetype was previously established when Alice met the Duchess in the kitchen, but much to Alice’s confusion, the previously violent mother is now cheerful and keeping close to her side as they meet. Alice dislikes this as it confuses her, but she chooses to be nice in order to not be perceived as rude:

Alice did not much like her keeping so close to her: first, because the Duchess was very ugly; and secondly, because she was exactly the right height to rest her chin upon Alice's shoulder. (89-90)

The encounter between them could be interpreted as a sign that Alice feels as if the Duchess, and thus her violent mother-persona, is keeping too close to her own nurturing, feminine side, which she feels she must protect. Lois Rauch Gibson further explains how the Duchess' character might be intimidating Alice by also alluding to Jung, for "[n]ot only are the Duchess' actions the very epitome of the non-maternal, but they are threatening and perhaps terrifying, like those of Jung's "terrible mother" (178). Thus, Alice is uncomfortable with the Duchess looking to her for a "place of comfort" when resting her head (which Alice thinks is hideous) on her shoulder, because she is perceived as a threat to Alice's female identity. Since the Duchess at first rejected the positive archetypical traits of female kindness and nurturing, after which Alice was left to care for her child which thus enhanced her own female instincts, Alice feels intimidated by her and seeks to remove herself from her presence and her influence upon her.

After meeting the Duchess and establishing the mother-complex, Alice is introduced to the Queen of Hearts whose character is a continuation of the portrayal of a negative female image within Alice's mind. As Alice reaches the garden where the Queen resides, she soon discovers just how brutal the Queen is when a group of soldiers tell her of the threats she has made to chop off her servants' heads (Carroll, 79-80). The risk of being beheaded is then put upon Alice as she first encounters the Queen, who upon being insulted by Alice yells for her head to be chopped off. However, Alice is beginning to show resilience towards the women she meets and the influence they have upon her, and defies the Queen of Hearts by shouting "Nonsense!" (82). The looming threat of being beheaded, seemingly the only threat the Queen of Hearts is capable of making, is then greatly exaggerated and almost turned into a farce during the croquet-game as she orders everyone to have their heads chopped off (84-85). Alice has nonetheless begun to realize what an empty intimidation this is, and how it is made by someone who is not to be feared. Alice has begun to deal with the overbearing negative mother-archetype within her collective unconscious, which has yielded positive results close to what Freud described could happen when issues within the unconscious were dealt with.

The mother-complex established is then resolved towards the end when Alice dares to defy the Queen of Hearts one last time, and so ultimately conquers the negative female influence which the women have had over her. The influence, however, is not interrupted by a deadly struggle or clash as in the fairy tales, but rather by the simple realization that she is in a dream, and that she has in fact conjured the characters from her imagination herself:

'Let the Jury consider their verdict,' the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.

'No, no!' said the Queen. 'Sentence first – verdict afterwards.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Alice loudly. 'The idea of having the sentence first!'

'Hold your tongue!' said the Queen, turning purple.

'I won't!' said Alice.

'Off with her head!' the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

'Who cares for you?' said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time.) 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!' (121)

Alice then wakes up to find that the events taking place in Wonderland were but a dream. Thus, the journey through Wonderland could be seen as a venture through her unconscious as her wakened mind shut down itself, which is similar to what Freud claimed would happen when one begins to dream. Alice has thus successfully managed to find a solution to the negative influence of the wicked women by defying them within her unconscious.

Interestingly enough, during the altercations with the women in Alice's story as well as within the fairy tales mentioned, any male influence is noticeably absent. The King, who in theory would be controlling Wonderland together with the Queen of Hearts, can be seen as almost completely devoid of power and is in fact weak compared to the strong-willed Queen of Hearts. In the croquet-playing scene where the Cheshire Cat appears, the King hides behind Alice upon speaking to it. His reaction then shows just how little power he has as he tells the Queen of Hearts to do something about the defiant animal, rather than taking care of matters himself (Carroll, 86). Being the only male character acting as a counterpart to a female in Wonderland, the image he portrays is one of passivity and submergence. This reflects the deeper impressions and feelings Alice may have considering authoritative females stored in her unconscious,

and highlights how if they had the chance they would not only control her but also the men. It is interesting to note that in Cinderella's and Snow White's stories, men are also absent from the main events even though they would normally have the power to prevent the women from being wicked towards the female child. Despite this, they are shown as remaining passive. In the mentioned fairy tales, the man is in fact the father of the child and thus even closer to her, and the wicked woman is someone who has taken the real mother's place and wishes to annihilate the threat of the female child. Since the events and characters in Wonderland have been established as a depiction of Alice's unconscious through a dream, and because there are striking similarities between her story and the fairy tales, the struggle could be argued as being established in the collective unconscious of Alice, from where the archetype of the wicked woman has been conjured.

As opposed to the Duchess' absolute lack of motherly instincts, the Queen of Hearts' traits and the wicked women in the fairy tales, the other mother in Gaiman's text on the other hand is a representation of the uncanny and a motherly instinct which has become dangerously overbearing and possessive. In fact, her love is so strong that it is not the act of *possessing* Coraline that is the driving force behind her actions, but rather the *murdering* of her body and *total devouring* of her soul once she has managed to trap her. The black cat warns Coraline of this as she decides to spend the night in the other world:

”Why does she want me?” Coraline asked the cat. “Why does she want me to stay with her?”

“She wants something to love, I think,” said the cat. “Something that isn't her. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that.” (63)

The violent possessiveness of the other mother reflects Coraline's unconscious thoughts regarding her own mother who she feels is trying to control her. The name “the other mother” could also be seen as not only a reflection of another version of her mother, but also as the creature being the “other woman” in Coraline's quest to attain her father's love when using the theory of Freud's Oedipus complex. She is someone who has the power to alter Coraline's world and control the subconscious image of her father, “the

other father”, and becomes a female influence who threatens to destroy and devour the young girl’s own femininity.

Despite the influence the other mother has over Coraline, the young girl manages to solve the Oedipal complex which exists in her mind when she meets the other father in the basement for the final time. The object which symbolizes the other mother’s control over others is the buttons which every character in the other world has instead of eyes, including the other father, and which the other mother also wishes to attach to Coraline as a way of establishing power over her. During Coraline’s search for the marbles containing the souls of the children previous trapped in the world, she discovers a latch in the floor of the empty apartment next to her own which leads to the other father’s hideout in the basement. She there discovers the other father, who has now had his identity removed and is seemingly characterless, with “almost no features on its face” (Gaiman, 108). Just as the other mother has made the other father into a character without expression, she wishes to consume Coraline’s female integrity and remove her identity by replacing it with her own, as well. David Rudd further explains this in his article *An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman’s Coraline and Questions of Identity*:

Coraline is being offered 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.” (163)

Coraline, however, defies the other mother and establishes her own identity by ripping the final button off from the other father. By doing this, she has shown that she is capable of removing the control which her mother has established over her father within her mind. Coraline thus manages to establish her own power by removing the other mother’s influence over her love for her father.

Additionally, Coraline’s final battle with the other mother shows how the female creature connects with the negative mother-archetype. The other mother cannot only control the contents within the imaginary world, but she is in a sense also what the whole world consists of and thus *the world itself*. The world, which could be seen as simply an exploration of things which have gathered in Coraline’s unconscious, consists of the other mother’s omniscient presence because Coraline feels as if she is overwhelmed by her mother’s influence in real life. Coraline reflects on this presence as she is getting ready to explore the other world one final time and save the other children

who are trapped there: “She preferred the other mother to have a location: if she were nowhere, then she could be anywhere. And, after all, it is always easier to be afraid of something you cannot see“ (Gaiman, 93). The notion of being surrounded by the other mother’s eerie and pernicious presence relates closely to what Jung previously mentioned as a typical trait of a negative mother-archetype, which is the feeling of being surrounded by fear and death.

The other mother is also connected to Coraline by her true form of a spider, which happens to be one of Coraline’s deepest fears. In the scene where Coraline wakes up to the black rats in the beginning of the novel, she is described as being scared at the thought of them being spiders because “[s]piders made Coraline intensely uncomfortable” (Gaiman, 8). Not surprisingly, the one creature that is created within Coraline’s unconscious where all of her deeper fears reside is the other mother, who is connected to the notion of a spider throughout the novel. One such example is when Coraline is sitting in the kitchen in the other world and tells the other mother that she wishes to go home, after which “[h]er other mother’s hand scuttled off Coraline’s shoulder like a frightened spider” (44). Additionally, as Coraline manages to flee from the other world and shut the door leading into the real world behind her, the other mother’s hand is severed and subsequently caught in the real world. The hand is then capable of roaming around on the basis of its fingers, similar to how a spider would travel by its thin legs. The fact that the spider-like hand has been able to travel from the other world, which could be claimed as being one of Coraline’s dreams, and into real life shows how deeply rooted this fear is in Coraline. Not only does Coraline then manage to defy the other mother when she tricks the hand into the well behind her house, but she also tries to conquer her deepest fear and anxiety, which Freud said could be resolved by exploring one’s unconscious.

The issue regarding the other mother’s attempt to bury Coraline in motherly love is thus resolved when Coraline disposes of the hand in the well, which is the last reminder she has of the negative mother-archetype. Coraline has, by this stage, dealt with the other mother’s overbearing influence by being brave enough to question her motives. This is, for example, seen when she nods that she knows the other mother loves her, yet she is aware of the fact that it is a hollow form of love: “[S]he loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold. In the other mother’s button

eyes, Coraline knew that she was a possession, nothing more.” (Gaiman, 104). Furthermore, the other mother could also be argued to be a form of doppelganger who seeks to create a replica of Coraline’s real mother in order to establish immortality, which was previously mentioned in connection with Freud’s theory of the uncanny. But this doppelganger, however, fails in her attempts when Coraline realizes that the image of the evil other mother, which she had subconsciously created, is nothing like her true mother and thus not a doppelganger at all. Coraline expresses this during the final battle with the other mother:

It was funny, Coraline thought. The other mother did not look anything at all like her own mother. She wondered how she had ever been deceived into imagining a resemblance. The other mother was huge—her head almost brushed the ceiling—and very pale, the color of a spider’s belly. Her hair writhed and twined about her head, and her teeth were sharp as knives. (126)

Her real mother, Coraline reckons, is thus not evil and threatening at all, as was first indicated by her resemblance to the image of the other mother. The other mother is by then simply an evil creature representing the fears kept deep inside Coraline which must be battled and overcome. In the end, Coraline removes the last traces of the presence and influence of the other mother, and successfully deals with the issues concerning her real mother.

What essentially connects Coraline and Alice in the end is the fact that they manage to defy the wicked women in their stories, and ultimately resolve the issues which have taken place in their unconscious dreaming state. It is only after Coraline has fought the other mother and rid herself of the hand, which is the last memory of her fears of the overbearing mother and spiders that she is able to wake up from her fantasy world. In Alice’s case, it is because she dares to stand up against the woman possessing power and authority that her mother-complex is resolved and the dream ceases.

### **Conclusion**

There is much more to gather from these seemingly simple yet complex stories other than their representation of mother-archetypes, and there are many other possible approaches to the stories than the psychological one. However, the questions this essay initially put forth of why the women showed such odd and violent behavior, and how

this was met by the protagonists, have been answered by using the methods established by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. These theories explain the stories as outlets of unconscious thoughts and feelings, including a mother-archetype residing in the deeper, collective unconscious of the girls. It is quite fascinating that this archetype can also be found in fairy tales which were written long before these novels and long before Freud and Jung, something which would thus only show what an essential and significant theme this is within literary history.

There is much to learn from the way Alice and Coraline deal with the evil women they encounter as well. Even though the young girls are confused and afraid, they still manage to find the courage to rebel against these women, even without the aid of others, such as a father-figure. Perhaps the stories and sometimes frightening altercations can teach us as readers that even in our most fragile and vulnerable moments, even when we face issues and threatening characters whose actions reach deep within our very mind and are as close to us as ever, we are able to overcome these difficulties if we can find the strength to be brave.

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