

FRIGHTENINGLY ROMANTIC TOYS: ADOLESCENT FEMALE CREATIVITY IN
GOTHIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In light of Gothicism's burgeoning success in the field of children's literature, this study finds importance in examining where the Gothic and Romantic child intersect, but more specifically, where Gothicism and idyllic girlhood intersect in the children's texts of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, 20th Century Fox's 1997 film *Anastasia*, and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Game Series*. Acting as exemplars of Gothic children's literature, the three texts under study employ the female adolescent as a "toy," a concept historically traced to the Romantic tendency to elevate those of "lowly" means to tools of masculine transcendence. The female adolescent "toy" is particularly predominant in Gothic children's literature because the female child can embody all "lowly" populations (child, slave, and female) simultaneously on the premise that girls are inherently "slaves" to their male and adult-dominated culture. As a result, this essay argues that fusing romanticism's idyllic qualities, innocent and asexual childhood, with the Gothic's more perverted qualities, the uncanny and abject child, actually allow for the female to reclaim an

identity of her own, not plagued by the male (or adult's) problematically idyllic definition of childhood or girlhood. Although Romantic male artistry is the source of the Gothic plight in these narratives, all heroines studied actually combat a greater threat through the Gothic's heavy reliance on the phallic mother who paradoxically acts as both the Romantic male artist, a figure who dispels female creativity, and the fear of physical motherhood which likewise ensnares girls into participating in a patriarchal hierarchy where they must perpetually remain on the lower scale as male vessel. The only solution for females in these Gothic children's texts is to escape their role as "toy" by usurping the mother doppelganger's problematic role as both the male artist and his vessel. Instead, the Gothic in children's literature helps girls redefine their identity as one reflective of a metaphorical motherhood -- a liberating type of female artistry.

Introduction: Uniting Romanticism, Gothicism, and the Female Child

As a facet of the Romantic imagination, Gothic literature inherited a resistance to the more rational philosophies of the Enlightenment (science, law, and order) and, instead, featured imagination, dreams, and the sublime, a term used to articulate an overwhelming emotional and psychological response, often labeled as fear. The sublime and other Romantic paradigms, such as the supernatural and glorification of "lowly" subjects in poetry (mainly influenced by Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*), can be contrasted with the first "Gothic" novel that pre-dates the Romantic movement, *The Castle of Otranto*; albeit, originally, the novel was never referred to as "Gothic." Horace Walpole, the author of *The Castle of Otranto*, insisted that his work was a "romance," a blend of past and modern tales (Hogle 1). Although labeled a "romance," Walpole's 1764 *The Castle of Otranto* ultimately resulted in the Gothic genre, a consistently successful genre ever since Walpole outlined its conventions in 1764. Growing alongside the Gothic, the Romantics actively sought to distinguish themselves from the popular success of Gothicism, disliking the Gothic's tendency to interpret superfluously the Romantic imagination and the supernatural, which had taken root in the work of English writer Ann Radcliffe, German E.T.A. Hoffmann, and American Charles Brockton Brown. Gothicism's excessiveness made the genre a frequent victim of ridicule, which is most likely the reason it has been parodied -- for example, by Jane Austen -- since its heyday. Although Walpole's excessiveness started what is historically known as the "first" Gothic, his narrative is only one of the earliest versions of the Gothic novel, and is even classified as one of the few "originals" of the Gothic. Since Walpole, Gothicism evolved into different sub-genres and now exists in myriad

facets of literature and media (such as the Female Gothic, Post-Modern Gothic, Queer Gothic, and Film Gothic, to name a few). What it is important to take away from Walpole (and other "first" Gothic novelists such as Radcliffe, Hoffmann, and Brown) is that their "outrageous" and "absurd" tropes such as pursued female heroines, patriarchal tyrants, threats of rape, haunting specters, and labyrinth-like castles have a hold in the modern conception of the Gothic legacy today (Botting), a central concept when considering the Gothic's influence on the contemporary children's texts we will soon examine.

Originally, however, the Romantics did not just harangue the Gothic for its absurdity. Romanticism and Gothicism differed in their public reception. As opposed to the Romantics, a group known for their self-awareness as a movement, the Gothic disinherited the Romantics' prestige as a "high" status intellectual movement. Instead, Gothicism found a home in the newly burgeoning publishing industry that circulated "trash" novels to the middle class. Now existing on the threshold as both a "high" and "low" genre, the Romantics criticized the Gothic for its excessiveness -- its abundant images of outrageously caricatured villains and ridiculous plot devices (such as Walpole's oversized helmets falling from the sky) -- but also for its appeal to the middle class. Romantics dismissed the genre for its association with "female readers, circulating libraries, repetitive narratives, and mechanistic production" (Hogle 92). They desired not only to dissociate with the Gothic, but also with the "very readers and forms of publication that made Gothic a recognizably 'low' generic entity in the first place" (Hogle 92). Through the Romantics' rejection of the Gothic as a "lower" genre, we find that although the Romantics valued "lowly" subjects, they did not seek to grant them artistic agency. Dissociated from the masculine hype of romanticism, the Gothic became a type

of "abject" genre. Nonetheless it was a liberating genre particularly for the lowly, but glorified Romantic subjects who were forbidden to participate in romanticism's "brotherhood" of masculine transcendence -- a theory that envisioned Man as the emotional guardian between the threshold of reality and dreams. And so, whereas the Romantics sought to mold lowly subjects into tools of transcendence, the Gothic sought to uproot these restricting ideals by featuring the very same lowly subjects in dangerous terrains where their "inherent" innocence and heightened, but restricting, value could be re-imagined beyond mere tools.

The Gothic's Romantic roots and more significant role as harbor for lowly subjects historically tie the Gothic canon to childhood and thereafter children's literature. The very same Romantics who advocated for revolution and radical reordering of social hierarchies also advocated for the glorification of childhood, giving credence to children and allowing for children to possess a canon of their very own. For instance, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were highly influential in creating a distinction between the child's world "of innocence" and the disruption of childhood in the adult-driven world "of experience." But, just as Gothic grew alongside romanticism by ornately featuring, to the highest magnitude, Romantic imaginative planes, and by distinguishing the value of "lowly" subjects beyond tools of transcendence in Gothic landscapes, Gothic *children's* literature frees the child from Romantic paradigms of innocence and manifestations as a Romantic "tool." Once we understand that Gothic children's literature pushes against the same Romantic conception of "high" and "low" art (which relegated Gothic literature to a rejected creation of romanticism in the first place), we find that the Gothic canon becomes analogous to a safe haven for the same lowly

subjects which always and primarily included children. Perhaps the Gothic's unfaltering success is due to its ability to provide an outlet for these glorified subjects of romanticism, a space where they could exist beyond Romantic definition in a fairy tale-like world of abstract good and evil. Romantics defined childhood as it is nostalgically remembered today, an asexual time of delight and play. Wordsworth, especially, envisioned the child as a vessel for "special knowledge to teach their elders," a divine creation who "c[a]me to earth 'trailing clouds of glory from God" (McGavran xiii & xiv).

Although nostalgically titillating to remember a childhood that is as idyllic as Wordsworth's poetry, many critics recognize that these Romantic interpretations of childhood result in problematic constructions of the child (see Roni Natov's *The Poetics of Childhood* and James Holt McGavran's *Time of Beauty, Time of Fear*). While recounting her sexual awakening at the age of 13, Roni Natov describes the event as one that "plummeted [her] into darkness" -- an event that caused "a rupture from [her] family...[and] a rupture within [her]self," all because she shamefully could not live up to childhood asexuality (Natov 1). As Natov articulates from personal memories and eventually elaborates on academically, defining the child as innocent not only limits our understanding of the child to a stagnant and oversimplified one, but also hinders children from normal, psychological development. Once the child crosses the threshold of forbidden social taboos, usually around the time of adolescence, anxieties of becoming an "other," or being "different" from the larger community, surface and cause the child to guiltily repress what they perceive as "wrongs," as Natov experienced firsthand. Peter Hunt addresses similar issues of childhood when he questions adults "[whose] business with children's books involves meditating them to children (or policing a certain

construct of childhood)...[Adults] may regard...[certain] material as potentially frightening and inappropriate -- rather than an invitation to philosophical speculation" (Hunt 44). Hunt's worries entail a childhood mediated by adults through "sketchy" children's literature as a lost opportunity for "philosophical speculation," an opportunity that could potentially cultivate a child's identity outside of Romantically constructed ones. In his discussion of adult "policing" of children's literature, Hunt not only implies that there is a contemporary misconception that we know what is best for children, but also that we mistakenly believe we can define what *is* and what *is not* childhood without acknowledging "childhood" as a compilation of "moments" which can be traced historically.

Torn between the Wordsworthian, Romantic image of the child and constructions of the child that conflict with the child "innocence" paradigm, the Gothic in children's literature renegotiates the boundaries of the child in the same way the Gothic originally granted its lowly subjects of slaves, women, and children the means to "define" their own identity beyond masculine "tools." For example, Gothic conventions in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Jane Eyre* enabled women writers to express questions about female status and domestic roles such as wife and mother. Gothic conventions in children's literature enable a similar critique. When the contemporary children's canon enters the terrain of the Gothic and its attendant conventions, the partnership of the two results in a complex conception of the "child" and "adolescent." The darker side of the children's canon, which includes authors such as J.K. Rowling, Neil Gaiman, and Lemony Snicket, offers an open, liberating definition of childhood that challenges the tenuous Romantic construction of childhood innocence in contemporary culture by perverting the child and

its surrounding space. As a genre predicated upon identity crises and monstrous liminal "others," the Gothic challenges our understanding of children, but also adolescents -- the ultimate betwixts and between. Adolescents liminally exist on a transitional bridge, a plane between child and adult. They are the most affected by Romantic myths of childhood innocence and asexuality since they must concurrently harbor a Romantic childhood purported by adults and an adulthood that violates the very same Romantic childhood they struggle to preserve.

An exemplar of the misunderstood, queer, and eerie adolescent outcast is Tim Burton's Lydia from *Beetlejuice*. She is the child conceived within the Gothic domain. Her famous lines, "I, myself, am strange and unusual" place her within the ostracized paradigm that is the Gothic, but her physical and visual representation as misunderstood child makes Lydia a paradigm for the problems inherent in children's literature. Her most well-known lines mentioned here are actually in response to *The Handbook for the Recently Deceased*, which says, "Live people ignore the strange and unusual." This reference from the book (an unnecessarily complex and linguistically complicated manual that "reads like stereo instructions") frames Lydia's singular ability to see Adam and Barbara, the ghosts haunting her new house. The complicated wording of the death instructions actually reveals the complicated symbolism of Lydia herself. *The Handbook for the Recently Deceased* and its participation in the instruction genre reflects not only the inability to secure a set and simplified understanding of childhood, but in a larger context, reflects the adult's inability to write about the child itself. Although Lydia explicitly reveals her role as Gothic child in her "strange and unusual" line, this is not the first moment Lydia positions herself as Gothic adolescent.

Earlier, Lydia analogizes her life to "one big dark room." Upon moving into the house, her father and step-mother speak about Lydia "settling in." Her father tells Lydia, "As soon as we get settled, we'll build you a dark room in the basement, okay?" To which Lydia responds, "My whole life is a dark room. One big dark room." Like her assertion of being "strange and unusual," the "darkness" of the room is in all actuality the inability to see -- that is the inability to conceptualize clearly the paradoxes of the Gothic and child. Furthermore, the dark room itself is a developing space, a space where photographs must mature for the finished product, an analogy of the uncertainty and darkness of childhood itself, simply waiting for the child to mature to its finished product -- adulthood. The photo is the image frozen in time -- the child defined by a historical and social moment. The "room," on the other hand, is the confined space so commonly forced onto the Gothic genre, but also the child. The genre and child itself must fit within specific boundaries, here represented physically by the dimensions of the room. Paradoxically, the room that is meant to be freedom is simultaneously a prison. The child's space is compromised because it is mediated by the adult. Yes, the child has freedom, but that freedom is limited and censored by parental forces. Literally, the child cannot purchase his or her own real estate space, so they must settle with the marginalized and controlled dimensions of the "room" that the adult grants them. On a larger symbolic level, these dimensions speak to the inherent issues found within both the Gothic and children's texts and media. To speak to my larger significance of understanding the Gothic within children's culture, I closely examine Lydia and these scenes because they help approach the more significant question of where the cultural constructions of an imagined childhood and the Gothic "darkness" intersect.

Lydia helps us understand the marriage of the two genres, Gothic and children's literature, into one "strange and unusual" space. We find, through Lydia, that childhood is disillusioned in some sense, not just in her reluctance to be mediated through parental authority, but also in Beetlejuice's highly sexual pursuit of her. *Beetlejuice* is a particularly good example of the children's Gothic because the almost coerced marriage between Beetlejuice and the adolescent Lydia, the concupiscent Beetlejuice, and other sexual transgressions throughout Burton's film all work to expose and complicate how adults understand "childhood." Albeit, *Beetlejuice* is generally marketed as borderline family entertainment, it nonetheless operates within culture as a child-friendly film. In fact, one could argue that the literal representations, Beetlejuice's growth of "prickly," phallic-like extensions, for example, are actually meant to represent the physical and concrete reality of the child mind, guiding the child to see the larger symbolic ramifications of "horny," even developing the child's sexuality. By keeping Lydia within the pursued female Gothic tradition, Burton makes the Romantic child in direct tension with the Gothic child.

Like Burton's Lydia, there are similar female "Gothic" heroines who exist as a resistance to Romantic childhood, who advocate for a greater, more inclusive definition of childhood that exists beyond a construction popularly circulated in the eighteenth century and maintained in contemporary times when adults defend and seek to protect childhood "innocence." This study analyzes Gothic heroines who embody the offspring of the Gothic and children's literature's marriage. Coraline from Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* journeys to the underside of her own modern flat to battle the monstrous "other mother," which is really herself as she seeks to redefine the relationship between motherhood and

patriarchy. Anya (also known as Anastasia) from 20th Century Fox's film *Anastasia* encounters the aristocratic past in ghostly fragments, from which she has to assemble a self at once dependent on and freed from confining roles for women. Katniss from Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series fights to the death in an adult-defined ritual, but the ultimate Gothic villain is not the Capitol but the television. These Gothic adolescents all simultaneously operate in the Gothic and children's literature worlds. Like Lydia, they at once resist Romantic childhood and participate in it.

Because *Coraline*, *Anastasia*, and *The Hunger Games* simultaneously operate under the children's literature canon and the Gothic, and all are fairly popular works within the children's canon, I would like to offer these three texts as typical of the children's Gothic and its theme of child autonomy through defining the self. The three Gothic narratives in my study grapple with Gothic tropes and spaces in order to defy the problematic myths of childhood innocence, but, through their gender, the Gothic heroines add an additional resistance to romanticism by evoking the other populations romanticism prized as tools of transcendence but ignored as equals. The Romantics' elevation of children, women, and slaves threads a connective tissue through each of these groups, molding them into one victimized subject -- a child who is a female "slave" to Man. All are plagued by their idyllic and unrealistic Romantic constructions, and all must employ the Gothic to resist the definitions but also to repossess an identity of their own and prove their own worth in doing so. In comparison to Man, these disenfranchised populations all historically exist on a lower hierarchical scale and therefore enact the subordinate's struggle to balance reliance and dominance, even evoking a "dominant master" who seeks to control them often through naming them. For example, children are

named by adults, women given the name of either her father or husband, and slaves often remaining "nameless." Romanticism employs these groups and is able to elevate them as tools for this very reason; they lack agency. They are without a self-constructed name in a literal and metaphorical sense, and so a name, or cultural definition, can be assigned by the dominant population without the "lower" population's consent because, in a sense, they are "ghosts," fleeting images without physically defined boundaries, forced to exist as unrealistic ideals. Ghosts must be excised for the female adolescent self to emerge.

Although the female heroines enact the marginalized subject's equivalence to a Romantic "tool," their gender also explains the female heroine's ability to flourish in the Gothic domain as women who sought identity in uncanny spaces molded the Gothic into a feminine-dominated artistic venue. As previously mentioned, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a prime example of a Gothic tradition that is specifically female. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* features a heroine who exists independently, as a "bird" that cannot be "ensnared," with the assistance of Gothic tropes rooted in the "original" female Gothic writer, Ann Radcliffe. Like Radcliffe, Brontë employs "real" women hiding in pregnant spaces, such as Rochester's first wife, Bertha -- a "ghost" who frequently escapes her attic confines (a character akin to the mother in Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*). The female lineage of the Gothic tradition exists in both Radcliffe's and Brontë's narratives as well as many others (such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Wuthering Heights*), and for such reasons, is why the girls in these Gothic children's texts fluently operate within the Gothic terrain, a world of familiarity, to rival their dependent status as both female *and* child. The Gothic canon's many female writers and protagonists offers the girls in these texts a sense of belonging, but more so a sense of the problems inherent to their gender. From the beginning of the

Gothic genre, heroines like Radcliffe's trapped mother in *A Sicilian Romance*, for instance, literally sought to escape ghostly identifications as well as resurrect themselves from male domination as feminine "tools."

Theorizing Eerie Toys: Creation Myths and Female Gothic Adolescent Identity

The Gothic heroines in these tales rival their ghostly status as a culturally constructed "name," signifying their falsely and problematically adorned identities (female *and* child), by escaping the conditions of creation inherently found in a toy object. Because all the heroines in this study encounter toy objects in their quest for self-definition, toy theory helps us understand the toys as symbols for female adolescence—poised on the threshold of objectification or creativity. In her all-inclusive study of animate toys in children's literature, Lois Kuznets frames the toy's existential plight as one that oscillates between becoming an "independent subject...rather than an...other submitting to the gaze of a more powerfully real and potentially rejecting live beings" (Kuznets 2). Moreover, she argues that toys inherently embody a "secret," "sensual world" encompassed by the "uncanny...world of adult mysteries and domestic intrigue" and "embody the temptations and responsibilities of power" (Kuznets 2). After considering Kuznets's toy paradigms of independence versus reliance as well as responsibilities of power and "sensuality," one cannot help but think of the toy as the child herself for children must frequently struggle between envisioning themselves as an asexual or sexual being as well as negotiate their own autonomy with reliance on parental figures. This is especially poignant in adolescence. As glorified Romantic subjects, young women experience the internal conflicts foundational to toys and inanimate objects in literature, who, as Kuznets theorizes, come to life and struggle to self-actualize.

When the toy comes in contact with Gothic children's narratives, such as in *Coraline*, *Anastasia*, and *The Hunger Games* series, the Romantic ghost translates into abject Gothic "toy" -- a toy who must discover what it means to be "real" by exerting

agency in defining their own identity through uncanny alternative dimensions. In *Coraline*, for example, lost children become parallel to marbles, a toy "Other" Mother hoards in her uncanny mirror "Other" world. The uncanny threat becomes Coraline's own impending status as toy as she must escape Other Mother's button eyes and seemingly doll-like creation of a feminine home while also coping with her budding sexuality that does not fit with her role as Romantic female child. Anya, on the other hand, is threatened by her relation to a maternal music box which could either render her a lost, purgatorial orphan or a Russian grand duchess, a coveted title frequently fought for by a host of Anastasia "imposters" in 20th Century Fox's 1997 film. Her romantically titillating journey with Dimitri challenges her former "innocence," arousing Gothic consequences, such as the evil Rasputin who induces hallucinogenic monsters galore for Anya to physically and internally combat. The gravest challenge of all, however, is Katniss's in *The Hunger Games*. She faces a lethal refusal of her toy counterpart, the mockingjay pin -- a symbol of rebellion but adversely a symbol of the dire power found in media propaganda when a female president is the operator of it. Her Romantic asexuality is challenged by male suitors who rival for her affection and, as a result, conjure Gothic duels to the death with children as the primary participants.

Aware they are relegated to mere toys, the heroines see their fusion with toys as a concrete visual of their own vulnerable status and know they must reverse the traditional power structure inherent in the creator/creation relationship in order to exercise their own autonomy, but also to reclaim their identity from Romantic idyllic constructions. They must break from their toy status in order to reconcile problematic myths and restructure the power dynamic to be more inclusive and considerate of the child and her many

dimensions. Identifying with such traditions as Pinocchio or the Velveteen Rabbit, the children realize their plight is to become "real," and that their identity is at stake by their toy cohesion. In line with Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's highly influential and revolutionary *The Madwomen in the Attic*, becoming a toy leaves the Gothic heroines' identity open to Romantic definition just as "the ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel..." (Gilbert & Gubar 20). Whether "toy" or "angel," the type of "perfection" that accompanies both symbolic emblems render the girls' heightened existence as a problematically impossible state of being. Conversely, eradicating themselves from the toy would allow for the Gothic female to gradually transition to the role of the creator, eventually displacing her "master." Usurpation of the creator role gives autonomy to the Gothic female not just because now she has removed her "master" from the seat of power, but because now she can be a "creator" herself, consequently expanding the identity of the disenfranchised populations to include the role of artist -- a divine, autonomous figure who obtains power in the ability to create and define instead of relying on others to define them, a power equivalent to God and thus the ultimate recognition of the transition from lowly to elite being. The toy becomes equal to Man just as the dispossessed "ghost" of Romantic paradigms is defeated in the girls' quests. The three texts under study, in a Gilbert and Gubar-like fashion, use Gothic tropes to destroy Romantic toys and restore the female child's artistic agency. Their existence as child, however, is what particularly enacts a new dimension of forbidden artistry because the female child is a double-edge sword -- damned by its age and damned by its gender, unauthorized to artistically "create" in a patriarchal *and* adult-dominated culture.

Theorizing Creators: Monstrous Mothers and the Uncanny

The restoration of female adolescent creativity and self-determination is particularly vexed because agents of patriarchal socialization take the form of mothers as well as toys. Ghost objects and womb spaces embody threats of death because growing into womanhood is, in Gothic Literature, an inherently abject enterprise. Just as the marbles, music box, and mockingjay pin are linked to female power that has been flattened and needs to be reclaimed, monstrous and phallic mothers permeate Gothic spaces and communicate patriarchal limitations on women in intimate and personal ways for Coraline, Anastasia, and Katniss. *Coraline's* Other Mother is the clearest indication of the monstrous mother, but both *Anastasia* and *The Hunger Games* employ a type of "other mother" as well, a mother who drives the Gothic tropes in the children's setting. *Anastasia's* grandmother, for instance, begins with the loss of a maternal figure, but then reassures us of the mother's haunting presence by her grandmother, a pervading maternal figure who sings a lullaby that haunts Anya's accession to royalty. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss's silent and "useless" mother is not pervading per se, but nonetheless occupies the maternal role since Katniss frequently calls upon her in the narrative, even if only to mention her motherly incompetence. The three texts' use of the mother as a defining factor for the female protagonist is nothing novel, but the mothers' prevalence in these Gothic children's texts is. These children's texts actually veer from the Gothic tradition of the maternal figure - a tradition that stems from a long line of mothers whose "absence" enacts the Gothic female protagonists' accession to the matriarchal tone (Anolik 28). A "present" mother, consequently, is read as a threat in the Gothic narrative, erecting the

phallus of the Gothic mother. She hinders her daughter's agency, but, even more so, her identity.

The mother's existence (or non-existence) in her daughter's developmental narrative dates as far back as Greek mythology. As a cyclical reimagining of the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter, Holly Blackford envisions the mother/daughter paradigm in girl's fantasy literature as a repository of Hades who irrevocably abducts daughters from mothers (Blackford 2). Her work suggests that regardless of whether or not the Gothic consciously or unconsciously ascribes to the Greek myth, the ideas found in Demeter's reluctance to part with her child expound upon the idea that the mother/daughter relationship inherently revolves around a blurring of identities where we must consider what is Demeter when she can no longer be "mother" and, conversely, and more importantly, what is Persephone when she is no longer "child." Shifting identities of the child, and even mother once the child displaces her, brings us to Jerrold Hogle's point that the mother in the Gothic is supposed to represent a Kristevan theory of identity -- "the most primordial version of [the] in-between," a time, at birth, when we recall that "we were both inside and outside of the mother and thus both alive and not yet in existence (in that sense *dead*)" (Hogle 7). The mother's womb is what determines our "existence" (our identity) and thus the womb is a source of anxiety in the Gothic texts. The mother's ability to render us a betwixt and between represents the loss of "sense" for our Gothic heroine; she cannot distinguish herself from the maternal womb, or in other words from her mother. However, it is not just that the Gothic adolescent's autonomy is enveloped by the "darkness" of her mother's womb, evoking fear, but that the womb itself is a foreboding reminder of her "future" as a literal mother. The reminder of literal

motherhood compromises the Gothic heroine's desire to become metaphorical, artistic mother -- the needed occupation to release herself from Romantic identities, but also the only means of elevating herself beyond masculine vessel by conceiving a child that is all her own, an entirely feminine creation. The Gothic harbors her "queer" creation by its inherent resistance of Romantic masculine power, but also in the Gothic tradition of existing outside of culturally defined norms where a purely "feminine" creation can exist within the imaginative perimeters of the Gothic landscape.

As an extension of the Gothic's monster figure, the phallic mothers initially appear because our Gothic heroines project their shame of not conforming to the Romantic idyllic asexuality of children and females onto another being, or, in other words, an invocation of the Gothic theory of the abject. She is torn between ideals and her "real" self. Anxieties of identity outlined in Kristevan theory as well as daughterly resistance to the matriarchal role as literal creator of beings (including men), manifest the mother as the Gothic monster, or at the very least, the conjurer of Gothic tropes for the adolescent protagonist. This is because the othered phallic "mother" represents the child and mother's need for individual distinction, an understanding that the child must grow and eventually autonomously claim its self and its existence by no longer existing as a "toy." He or she will define their own identity beyond unrealistic Romantic concepts that start to dismantle around adolescence. At the same time, however, the "threatening" mother actually represents a "false" mother -- an imagined mother of the heroine's own mind, her fears and anxieties manifested as a doppelganger.

Her doppelganger is allowed to exist, without the male who hinders her, as "queer" creator -- the metaphorical role that the female adolescent so desperately seeks.

Although the female's creation is liberating, the path to creator is one full of self-doubt and shame, evoking the Gothic's heavy reliance on the Gothic figure as the monstrous "other." As Michael Howarth explains, the monster is "necessary to our mental and physical growth because as we grow older we discover that these strange shapes and intense situations often embody our own fear and anxieties" (Howarth 6). Fred Botting labels monsters as "aesthetically unappealing," but, in agreement with Howarth, as "vital": "They give shape, moreover, to obscure fears or anxieties, or contain an amorphous and unrepresentable threat in a single image" (Botting 8-9). What both Howarth and Botting agree on is that the monster is, in some way, ourselves. Whether it be individual or cultural hidden fears, the monster renders them visible to the conscious mind, but in a way that is safe and disguised. The Gothic adolescent must project fears of motherhood onto an "imposter" mother, a motherhood that does not truly exist, but nonetheless helps negotiate the guilt of disowning unwanted physical children for the more "safe" desire of metaphorical, purely feminine, creations who allow the female adolescent to escape Romantic traps of becoming masculine "tools." The goal of these narratives becomes to reconcile the monstrous "mother" to the self, only after the Gothic child has securely shed their "toy" shell.

As toys, the heroines already exist as Gothic, uncanny creations. In Kuznets's words, the toy evokes the *unheimlich* by concurrently holding adult "sensual" value (the unfamiliar) and "safely" existing as a familiar face of childhood (familiar). Usually defined as the distortion of the familiar, the uncanny in the Gothic allows one to rethink the boundaries of the "homely." Botting defines the uncanny as an opportunity to question the "normal," but more importantly a restructuring of the mirror worlds and

inner psychological self that the uncanny threatens to reveal: "When [the uncanny is present], the contours of the world in which one defines oneself seem to have changed radically to suggest that, in horror, reality's frames have ceded to desire. Strangeness lies within as much as without. (Botting 8). Uprooting a "secure anchor" allows for definitions once thought concrete to become intangible. Manipulating the known to unfamiliar dimensions gives power to the child who is restrained by "known" definitions. The shift from known to unknown also works in an almost carnival experience; the dimensions of traditional hierarchies and order shift to either favor or antagonize the child, but always to produce epiphanies of identity which challenge traditions of the past that define them, and, in some way, limit a harmonious construction of a progressing "self" that is capable of change. Because children, adolescents specifically, are most heavily influenced by Lacanian mirror moments and developmental periods of identity formation, it is no surprise that *Coraline*, *Anastasia*, and *Katniss* all navigate Gothic planes in quest for a "true" self, only to discover "other" selves, but selves that exist within a literal "home" or space. In a concrete way, the Gothic texts revolve around ideas of "home" because this is the very structure children (especially girls) are confined to, unable to participate in the larger cultural world of politics, media, and so forth. *Other Mother*, for example, has an unhealthy obsession with distorting the home, all to encourage *Coraline* to see the potential in making the "Other" world her permanent residence. The adult reigns in the home, but more specifically the mother, a figure whom the female heroines hope to destroy so as not to interfere with their newfound agency. The girls seek the role of metaphorical "creator" to escape becoming the patriarchal (pro)creator, equivalent to being a toy.

Being aligned with a toy can seem somewhat stifling for our female child protagonists, but because the toy is uncanny in nature, and because it serves as a greater purpose of rivaling divine power, its transitional existence as Romantic entity and Gothic vessel, again, relate its parameters to the female heroine who is also both of these conventions. Although sometimes frightening encounters, the Gothic ultimately allows Coraline, Anya, and Katniss to escape their stagnant definitions and to resist any patriarchal critiques of female creativity by making the toy vessel obtainable for girls too. Their Romantic nature, on the other hand, outlines the dimensions of how we define children and girls, but, in combination with the Gothic invites speculation on whether these definitions really should exist within the boundaries specified by the dominant patriarchal culture, just as we question if Lydia's "dark room" really reflects her own identity or her father's. We find through the exemplary Gothic females that they are romantically defined as "saviors," true "heroines" in that they must rectify their own identity and status as toy, but also must act on behalf of the other misinterpreted populations in righting wrongs circulated by the Romantic influence, while at the same time occupying the Romantic role as a "savior" -- a "tool." The question then becomes do these Gothic heroines ever escape their role as toys or must they perpetually exist as such in order to hold their newly gained elitist role as Romantic artist, the occupation closest to divine power? Ultimately this is also a question about whether they reject or redefine motherhood as not monstrous but a valuable communal role of rebirth, just as they redefine the toys that seek to reduce them to objects.

Losing One's Marbles: Other Mother's Queer Games in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

"Mirrors," she said, "are never to be trusted. Now, what game shall we play?"

-- Other Mother, *Coraline*

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* is first and foremost a girl's maturation tale -- a tale that predicated itself on the daughter's introduction into "womanhood." Because this is a daunting task for the young girl, it is easy to see why a mother doppelganger would dominate the novel. Mother figures in Gothic children's literature traditionally push heroines into a scary, but necessary developmental journey. While traditionally the "absent" mother executes the adolescent's developmental push, Gaiman employs the opposite and presents us with a very "present" and very "evil" maternal figure named "Other Mother." This name is well suited, since her role as monster calls upon themes of the "monstrous other." Other Mother enacts first, the budding pubescent Coraline's shame of existing outside of a romantically sanctioned childhood, shame specifically derived from ideals that have influenced mythic girlhood. Second, the "imposter" mother symbolizes an abhorring physical maternity which only allows girls to be defined by men in the cyclical trend of reproduction through which the child bears the father's name. Coraline's maturation tale is, then, more importantly an existential journey. Through Other Mother and her many uncanny dimensions Coraline grapples with not only the shame felt in defying ideals for her sex and gender, but also with developing her own "monstrous" mother status as queer since she, too, seeks to understand female identity apart from physical reproduction with a male. Coraline and Other Mother are ironically linked in that they eradicate the male from the enterprise of motherhood, but Other

Mother embodies the abject and Coraline transforms maternity to a communal feminine parenthood of the lost children trapped in marbles.

Gaiman's employment of Gothic's uncanny mirrors and doppelgangers further expounds upon Other Mother's (and thus Coraline's) obsession with toys and, thereafter, her role as divine creator. As a blatant defiance of the Romantic world of Man creators, Other Mother's world is one that is eerie and problematic, or so we are expected to think. Nevertheless, Coraline's developmental and existential plight is to escape the confines of Other Mother's highly feminized world by resisting her seducing offers of eternal childhood, but more importantly to recognize that Other Mother purports Romantic ideologies of girlhood through her button-eyed "toys." The toy's uncanny and eerie nature threatens the child identity as a type of plastic "perfection" -- the Romantic ideals previously discussed in detail. As an almost divine entity herself, Other Mother and her alternative world the toys inhabit consequently register as an uncanny site. Although the Gothic narrative is called *Coraline*, we can argue that there are actually two characters of significance in Gaiman's tale -- that being, of course, Coraline, but also her "Other" mother -- the Gothic villain she encounters in an alternative Gothic rendering of her "real" house. In her "Gothic house" reality is suspended long enough to renegotiate boundaries of identity originally posed as a problem for Coraline, but more importantly the literal interpretation of the uncanny, the "home" becoming "un-homely" sparks issues of Coraline's own identity crisis (Rudd).

Although Coraline navigates the uncanny narrative as a plight to regain her agency in defining herself, Coraline is also the "savior," as Mister Bobo, the old man, refers to her (Gaiman 160). She saves not only herself, but a host of ghost children whose

impending status is "forgotten" child and thus enacts her role as Romantic tool, or "toy." It is important that she saves the "ghost" children (or *unnamed* children) who reside in the dark corners of Other Mother's mirror world along with the button creatures Other Mother puppeteers. It is not a coincidence that names hold a firm grip over the Gothic work. Identity is at stake in this novel, not just Coraline's, but the forgotten children of the past who are cursed to reside perpetually in the Gothic mirror world. Instead of supposing that Coraline's feminine identity is at stake, I suppose, instead, Other Mother's world is. The "Other" World slowly dismantles itself as the narrative continues until we are left with a literal "flat" representation of the flats themselves. The tale is not about Coraline learning domesticity, but learning how to dismantle a specific kind of domesticity, the myths of feminine "perfect" households and "happy" families that the matriarch must maintain -- a way to reconcile her "name" and gender into one that is no longer idyllic. Dismantling the Gothic "Other" world, a world filled with frightening images of femininity and uncanny creations, also helps Coraline dismantle themes of female incompetence as creator. Once the nightmarish objects of femininity have dissipated, she can conceive of the female artist as one that is no longer problematic because its inherent "queerness" as pure feminine creation is no longer attached to Gothic perversion and is instead Christ-like in its ability to save "others."

Coraline's name alone enacts the many Gothic crises of "queer" identities found in *Coraline*. We are first introduced to Coraline as a misrepresented figure, a child without a "name." In the beginning of the narrative, before Coraline enters the Gothic terrain of the infamous "Other" World, Gaiman offers us a series of Coraline's interactions with adults in which all conversations involve a mispronunciation of Coraline's name as Caroline, an

issue of her "name" or identity in question. Coraline's identity is jeopardized by her age and gender, both being subordinate populations. The more dominant population, here adults, assign Coraline a "false" identity, a gratification based upon their ability to exercise power by dominating the figure reliant on them (the child) -- an issue we will find throughout the Gothic children's narratives at hand. Played out within multiple Gothic mirror planes, *Coraline's* adoption of the Gothic mirror advocates for a reading in which the mirrors and spaces act as a way for Coraline to regain her own identity outside of Other Mother's. Moreover, adults in *Coraline* choose not only to misrepresent her by compromising her "true" name, but also using a name that falls under a traditional lineage of girlhood (Caroline) instead of uniqueness (Coraline). Altering her unique name strips Coraline of her originality (an individuality that allows her to be distinctive from others), but the uniqueness of the name itself also situates Coraline as "other," a "different" and ostracized occupant of the larger community. Coraline's name alone evokes the "Other" world before she even encounters it. It will act as a world that essentially belongs to her, a plane that both frightens and entices her, but also a house for her "Other" self, her Gothic doppelganger -- Other Mother.

Coraline's Other Mother is in every way the "star of the show." In fact, most academics revolve their arguments around "Other" mother and her role as the "uncanny" host, an unmistakable connection as "Other" and her perversion of the house automatically invoke Freud's *unheimlich*, literally meaning "un-homely." Other Mother's domination of critical studies in *Coraline* reinforces the fact that unpacking Other Mother's Gothic role is key to understanding *Coraline*. For the purposes in my study, the paradoxes of Other Mother's character are paramount. She is a paradox because she is

simultaneously representative of two very different concepts: the male artist, the Romantic, who misrepresents "lesser" beings by heightening their value and the female artist, the creator who is not permitted to exist in the patriarchal world of Romantic ideals and values, a still very active concept among the middle class of today. She is dually gendered, both male and female in her essence, but also in her demeanor, which is why she is commonly cited as the "phallic" mother, even enacting fears of Vagina Dentata as David Rudd illuminates (Rudd 162). She is not just "othered" in her embodiment of the uncanny, but in her role as transgendered character. Although she reinforces Romantic paradigms of feminine and child "perfection," she is everything but "ideal." Her strides towards perfection, or more so, her "distortions" of it offer an alternative to "perfect" creations, as much as they hope to reinforce it. Her attempts at perfection recall a related Gothic children's text, Tim Burton's 1993 *Nightmare Before Christmas*, in which Jack striving towards creating a "perfect" Christmas in a Gothic world ultimately results in a rejection of such Romantic notions. Similarly, Gaiman's "Other" world is a sanctuary for daughters who are asked to participate in idyllic girlhood by inhabiting a liberating distortion of feminine gender stereotypes. These are daughters who are thus "queer," but are only safe in the Gothic plane of the uncanny, where denying the feminine gender stereotypes will not jeopardize their normative status in "real" life. The Other World is also an existential space where Other Mother (the Romantic male) who exists on top of the child/adult power structure, will be displaced by Coraline (a queer female) who does not have to possess Gothic traits in order to "create." Elizabeth Parsons, Naarah Sawers, and Kate McNally emphasize Coraline's experience as a developmental journey in gender norms. Although gender development is crucial for Coraline's maturation, the

experience, to me, is more grounded in Coraline's need to distinguish herself from male possessed toys and masculine driven games, which dismiss "metaphorical" motherhood (or a queer creator).

As soon as Coraline descends to the "Other" world, games and toys take center stage. Although in the "real" world, Coraline is "bored with her toys" (Gaiman 6), she is fascinated with the "wonderful toys" Other Mother offers her. Toys described as "things...she'd never seen before: windup angels that fluttered around the bedroom like startled sparrows; books with pictures that writhed and crawled and shimmered; little dinosaur skulls that chattered their teeth as she passed. A whole toy box filled with wonderful toys. (Gaiman 30). Although enticed by their fantastical nature, Coraline cannot pinpoint why, "she wouldn't want to have to sleep" in her other room, regardless of the fantastical treasures that await her there; it is "different from her bedroom at home" (Gaiman 30). Readers automatically devalue the toys' magical proprieties as everything other than "fantastic" because we are aware of Coraline's own discomfort within the room itself. And, again, speaking to the Lydia paradigm, Coraline's room evokes a constraining space, more than ever controlled by adults, as we find out later on Other Mother designs and maintains Coraline's space and "toys." However, this moment largely speaks to Coraline's realization that in order to defeat Other Mother, she must "play" -- turning her attention to "games," but more importantly that she is a "toy" herself. Coraline again interests herself with the infantilizing concept of "playing" only after she encounters the Other World's fantastical toys, Other Mother's "magical" toys -- a realization that toys hold value in adulthood. They are the cultural mirror, but depending on what toy it is, they can either push females further away from reclaiming their identity

or help them grasp it. The dolls Other Mother creates, for example, inflict internal fears of both feminine stereotypes and motherhood, dolls traditionally being used as a toy that introduces young girls into motherhood, learning to take care of another being. The toys Coraline seeks to possess, instead, are the marbles, the gender neutral toy (but also a toy that recalls images of identity with the colloquial saying "I've lost my *marbles*," hence *mind*). Marbles do not invoke gender stereotypes or false Romantic ideals. The toys become the point of struggle for between Coraline and Other Mother. If Coraline can possess them, then she will successfully escape the threat of the doll by becoming an artist herself —possessor of the less scripted toy. She must learn to maneuver around the other destructive, Gothic toys, Other Mother's button creations, in order to possess the marbles, thereafter possessing the child *mind*, identity itself, and also inching closer to agency herself as female artist.

The underlying problem becomes Other Mother's role as toy maker, meaning the female artist is the core issue here. Her toy creations become unnatural, eerie figures -- much akin to the Gothic genre's own *Frankenstein* creature. Other Mother creates dolls, presenting Coraline with her own literal fears of physical children, but also entices her with her display of power since she is feminine in appearance, but masculine in demeanor. Her masculine features are what allow her to create, but also what make her creations Gothic and uncanny. The Romantic male inherent in her form purposely distorts Other Mother's dolls, her metaphorical children in the realm of the Gothic. Castration is a pervading theme as clearly indicated by the pervading threat of eye removal, but unlike other critics suggest, I believe that the castration needed is Other Mother's not Coraline's. It is not a coincidence, then, that Coraline's Other Father is the first toy to "unravel." The

narrator describes him as having "twiglike hands" and a "mouthless face, strands of pale stuff sticking to his lips, and a voice that no longer even faintly resembled her father's whisper" (Gaiman 110). He elaborates to describe him as pushing about his "pale clay, making something like a nose," but "saying nothing" (Gaiman 111). Parsons, Sawers, and McNally recall this moment, indicating the clear phallic nature of Other Mother in that she is able to feminize the father, although they relate Other Father's relegation to a limp penis as a way for Coraline to see the destructive power in adopting a Feminist agenda. Although I agree that the moment is a clear indication of Other Mother's phallic nature and the downfall of the father, the moment in all actually foreshadows "other" mother's own castration with the dismemberment of her hand, a moment that they cite as well as "a warning of what might ensue if feminine bonds are not transcended in favor of deferral to the (patriarchal) laws of culture" (Parsons, Sawers, and McNally 380). To me, the dismemberment of Other Mother's hand is in all actuality the first step required of Coraline's doppelganger as the masculinity was what hindered Other Mother from endorsing "true" identities outside of dolls. The problematic, Gothic nature of the text derived from her phallic parts (the hand) that distorted a "true" identity.

Because Other Mother's button toys and Other World are so unnatural, existing within a whirling mist, and because Other Mother represents the "other," "queer" nature of Coraline herself, Other Mother ignites the many representations of eerie fetuses Coraline so commonly encounters. The most repulsive fetus is the creature merging Miss Forcible and Miss Spink; it embodies their young selves encased in a slimy, gooey womb "like two lumps of wax that had melted and melded together into one ghastly thing" (Gaiman 102). It is described as "something that looked like a person, but a person with

two heads, with twice as many arms and legs as it should have" (Gaiman 101), an unnatural creation. A clear reference to the womb, Other Mother's Gothic creature is "like a person," but mutated, "a person with two heads" and "twice as many arms and legs." The Gothic unnaturalness of the creature waiting to be conceived points to the Kristevan theory of identity; indistinguishable boundaries characterize mother and child, but the ultimate unnatural quality is the Romantic mythos the Other World endorses. The domesticity that Other Mother represents is what is unnatural, and this unnaturalness works through Coraline's fears associated with physical and metaphorical motherhood. It is a physical fear of motherhood because the overly masculine fetus which has "twice as many arms and legs," a creature with one too many phalluses, is a clear indicator of Coraline's fear of mating with a male and birthing his offspring, an offspring that is solely his because of his inherent dominance as "patriarch" and control over the naming process. However, it is also a way to negotiate fears of independence in becoming a metaphorical mother, usurping the artist role from the male, because, as Blackford notes, Miss Forcible and Miss Spink's relationship is clearly indicative of a Boston marriage (Blackford 215). Because the fetus is the product of two females, it enacts the idea of a "queer" creation, a creation made without the male, and thus a liberating one at the same time that it is an incarcerating one. Most importantly, Coraline takes a "soul" from inside this space as well as other uncanny wombs to remove the child from the mutated conception, instead, allowing their identity to freely exist outside of these problematic, restricting spaces of the mirror world. However, Coraline's ability to remove them is also an indication of her progression towards her own agency as female artist because she overcomes the fears inherent in the uncanny wombs, but also because she repossess the "toy," and by the end,

her collection of them and her "pretend" tea party, albeit a hoax, allow her to ascend to female creator by possessing toys and enacting "creative" play.

Moreover, Coraline cannot merely release the souls to the "real" world. She must dispose of the piece of Other Mother, or herself, that is masculine -- a piece that is otherwise equivalent to the male partner in procreation. Other Mother's phallic hand compromises Coraline's newly earned space and thus identity. Coraline has repossessed the toys that were stripped of identity in the Other World, but she has yet to maintain this newly found understanding of toys and the power they possess until she disposes of the "hand" for good, a symbolic reference to the male artists threatening presence in the creative role. Symbolically standing in for the masculine authority and myths that threaten the child and female's existence, the hand needs to be dropped down a "dark hole" to be "forgotten" -- the threat that previously loomed over Coraline and the ghost children. By the end Coraline reverses this motif by having the hand drop down the forbidden well. She defeats and reclaims her space by defying the "real" adults and their instructions not to go near the well, exercising her own agency and identity beyond parental control. Furthermore, the well hole as yet another symbolic womb relates to Coraline's ultimate victory over tyrannical male artists by having Other Mother's phallic extension, the threatening piece of Other Mother's existence become engulfed by maternity, another example of the Kristevan concept in which "the child establishes a physical boundary between its body and that of the mother but cannot make its own body impermeable...Hence the Kristevan abject is that instability of boundary that forever threatens human beings (whether as adult or child) with loss of their independent identity" (Mills 4). Because the abject creation is overthrown by the greater maternal

force that threatens masculine identity, the womb, child, and female identity, and thus agency, can be restored to Coraline who now has fulfilled her accession to the throne of divine-like creative artist and has succeeded in producing a feminine, "queer" creation -- the tea party -- outside of the Gothic terrain.

Once Upon a Death: Maternal Lullabies in *Anastasia* (1997)

"After all, the name Anastasia means she will rise again"

-- Vladimir, *Anastasia*

While Coraline finds her "marbles" in the Gothic terrain, Anya loses hers after tragically being torn from her grandmother and family. As a continuation of *Coraline*, *Anastasia* heightens the female adolescent's desire for self-agency to an even more daunting quest by no longer flaunting a mother that is simultaneously both male and female, as Gaiman's Other Mother is. Instead, *Anastasia* separates the patriarchal male (Rasputin) and threatening maternal figure (the grandmother) into two distinct bodies, but the identity crises nonetheless arises from their joint influence in Anastasia's separation and, thereafter, her identity crisis. Anya is responsible for reclaiming her identity, not just for herself, but for her Russian subjects. Just as Coraline must save the ghost children, Anya's "true" identity is royalty and thus her role as ruler aggrandizes this tale to reflect a desperate need for Anya to find herself to both avoid threatening definitions as a child and also "save" the Russian people who are shown as "lost" and in humble conditions after the Romanoff's (Anastasia's family) descent from the throne, an analogy of the Romantic "tools" who lost their identity in their elevation. The royal family's status as "tool" is most indicative by the portrait that hangs in their desolate castle. Reduced to an image, the royal family's portrait benevolently shows a "happy," idyllic family. The portrait is what first identifies Anya with the Grand Duchess Anastasia, the first Lacanian mirror moment Anya experiences in the film and ultimately the moment that triggers Anya's journey to her (grand)mother. Moreover, the portrait presents us with a child Anastasia as a way to eternally trap her in the idyllic realm of childhood, but also

femininity as she exists in this portrait as a highly feminized girl with a large bow and long luxurious locks. The portrait largely represents how Anastasia, and her royal idealized family are keys to a "greater" realm of Romantic existence, a "greater" but problematic one since it is impossible for Anya to obtain. However, it is also important that in this moment, we, the viewer, do not see the portrait in its entirety and are instead only given glimpses. From these brief sightings of the painting, we see the featured idyllic "happy" children, but also a slender, feminine hand that securely grasps Anastasia's. What we don't see, however, is the face of this figure and are instead asked to accept that the missing figure is in all actuality the mother.

Because the portrait shows idyllic children, but also a partial image of the mother (specifically, a partial image that blocks the face), the family painting not only reflects the royal family's reduction to an idealized image, but also the film's larger preoccupation with mothers and their identities. Like *Coraline*, Anastasia's relationship with the mother figure is the trigger for Gothic tropes that will infiltrate the narrative. As *Other Mother* sparks the problematic artistic female, so does Anastasia's grandmother, the royal duchess. Although not phallic in form like *Other Mother*, the grandmother's role as ruler identifies her as a female with masculine power. Unlike *Coraline*, however, *Anastasia* begins with a clear separation and thus distinction from the mother, a separation that occurs only after her grandmother presents her with a toy -- a music box that will eventually become associated with the grandmother's lullaby and even Anya herself. The lullaby she sings is an artistic creation of the grandmother's own accord. Like *Other Mother*, the grandmother "problematically" defies romanticism's exclusion of women in the artistic process. She creates the lullaby, enacting many of the same fears *Other*

Mother comes to represent. Albeit, in *Anastasia*, the grandmother does so in a seemingly absent way instead of an overbearingly present way. However, the grandmother's absence is truly only *seemingly*; the maternal lullaby she sings looms over Anya and her attempt to reclaim her identity.

The grandmother's lullaby is so potent in *Anastasia* that it even signals the Gothic's presence before it blatantly appears in the narrative. Her song reads:

*On the wind,
Across the sea
Hear this song and remember
Soon you'll be
Home with me
Once upon a December*

The first part of the song, "On the wind/Across the sea" foreshadows the many Gothic modes of transportation Anya will board in order to be reunited with her grandmother (an action that will also reclaim her identity as the royal Grand Duchess Anastasia). The "wind" is fleeting in nature, standing in for the ghost-like nature of Anastasia who lacks an identity. The lullaby enacts Anastasia's literal loss of self because she can no longer remember her identity after becoming violently torn from her grandmother. Almost analogous to the mist conjured by Other Mother in *Coraline*, the first part of the lullaby reveals the Kristevan mother through Anya's literal loss of self after she is no longer attached to her mother and consequently allows the many false Anastasias to "rise." Anya's former identity, an identity associated with the mother and thus motherhood, is now up for grabs.

The next part of the song, which emphasizes "remembering" and "home," employ the Gothic notion of the uncanny. The (grand)mother foreshadows Anastasia's tragic loss of "home" and gradual slippage into the Gothic underworld once she returns to her home,

her castle in Russia. It is only once Anastasia touches base with her past, the home itself, that ghostly memories surface and offer, in place, fragments of her past life as royalty. But, it is also at this moment that another toy, Rasputin's phallic talisman, comes to life and tries to both physically and mentally deter Anya from reuniting with her grandmother. His "toy" invites the Romantic ideal of male artistry as being a purely male venue. Rasputin disallows Anastasia to fulfill her task of "true" identity with a toy that is overly and problematically masculine because her role as adolescent and female allows for the male to complete his task as creator. Anastasia's identity, and thus the female child's identity at large, is in jeopardy because Rasputin needs her to remain a toy in order to fulfill her role as tool to reach the greater plane of divinity. The song's emphasis on remembering and home, and its uncanny nature itself as both a symbol of motherly presence, but also a reminder of its absence, leave Anya to grapple with images of "home" that are distorted by hallucinogens (a possible reference to the Opiate dreams of the Romantics) that undermine Anya's "true" identity. Most important to note is that the mother's lullaby inherently contains these notions of the uncanny, and thus it is the mother, or the grandmother who initiates the problem of self-realization and lack of agency as "lost" child.

The final lines, "Once upon a December" can be translated to "Once upon a *death*" once we account for December as a winter month, the symbolic season of death. Therefore, the final lines of the song are the most important as they signify the metaphorical death of Anastasia and her rebirth as Anya, the orphan who forgets all past memories after she loses her grandmother, the mother figure. Anastasia's death and rebirth makes sense when we analyze my opening quotation, a quotation the film meta-

consciously offers of itself -- the fact that Anastasia means "to rise again." This reference not only applies to Anastasia, but to Rasputin, her doppelganger, as he too must "rise again." When he fails at assassinating Anastasia, Rasputin becomes confined to a limbo plane, the plane that houses the Gothic tropes and frightening encounters that will be unleashed on Anastasia, but also his phallic toy. We find, through his parallel nature with Anastasia, who is associated with the music box, that Anastasia must learn to exist on a spectrum of artistry that is neither too maternal (the music box) or too paternal (the hallucinogenic talisman). The story of *Anastasia* then enacts a competition between the male's artistry and the female's. Just as Coraline must escape Other mother's uncanny construction of toys, there is an emphasis on Anastasia escaping both toys which threaten to define her, one being representative of the Romantic male and one being representative of the mother who likewise limits her by defining her as a male reproductive tool, a figure that lacks creative identity.

Anastasia also features desolate rooms and spaces, much like its *Coraline* counterpart. Anastasia must revisit these womb-like spaces to recall her memory and return to her (grand)mother. Like Coraline, Anastasia cannot ignore the calling. The task is necessary for releasing herself from both toys which threaten her identity. Anastasia sings of her destiny as "a journey to the past," gesturing to past Romantic myths as the haunting and Gothic substance here. Although the journey is in some sense to reclaim Anastasia's identity from these past Romantic myths, only the destruction of Anastasia's evil Gothic doppelganger, Rasputin, can complete Anastasia's recovery. With his evil talisman, he attempts to prevail over Anastasia's desired autonomy, an autonomy wrapped up in her desire to find her "past." Rasputin's toy haunts Anastasia's space,

especially when she returns to her desolated castle -- perhaps, the biggest surge of past knowledge Anastasia receives. She dances with ghostly memories, seemingly realizing the detrimental nature of losing agency through usurped space, and from there her plight becomes to reclaim. But, she must wrestle Rasputin for the very same spaces, just as Coraline must wrestle Other Mother. Her foil cannot be harbored by the structure. After Anastasia's exploration in her family's dilapidated castle, the film concerns itself with transportation space specifically, signaling a type of moveable progression but also realizing that space does not have to be confined to a family's abode, or generational space, but, instead, a constantly changing entity that either removes us from familial ties or reunites us. Realizing that transportation has this duality to it, Rasputin haunts every vehicle Anastasia attempts to board, tainting the transportation with his Gothicism, only while she is traveling towards her grandmother. It is not until the protagonist defeats Rasputin that transportation becomes safe again, an open venue, with no Gothic force threatening its progressive path.

Anastasia advocates for transportation as a means of powerfully possessing one's own space, but what the travel space really develops is Anastasia's guilt-filled transition from child to adolescent with the introduction of her traveling companion, and future lover, Dimitri. Anastasia must now exist outside of Romantic notions of asexual child when the arousing suitor appears, another invocation of the lullaby and hallucinations that will haunt her on these transportation sites, which are derived from the shame of her newly developing sexual appetite. However, first introduced as a conman, Dimitri also evokes the many "false" Anastasias with his hoax of dressing women to look the part of the royal duchess. The audience enters on his "failure" to produce the perfect Anastasia,

until he finds Anya, who meets the physical description of the duchess, but more importantly, has no recollection of the past; what he essentially finds is an empty vessel to mold to his liking. Dimitri's hoax teaches Anastasia to "play the part" with dresses and etiquette, making Anastasia into a toy, explicitly, adorning her as if a doll. While accompanying her on mass transit vehicles, Dimitri finds that his doll quickly comes to life. He realizes that the "false" Anastasia is in fact the "real" Anastasia, and it is at that moment he frowns upon his Galatea. Ironically, Dimitri's doll, with its consumerist teachings and accoutrements, does not make Anastasia any more believable as her "self." Paradoxically, the story that has revolved around making a doll, must now revolve around proving that it is *not* a doll, but that it is "real" -- the test Anastasia must pass in order to finally vanquish her doppelganger. What distinguishes Anastasia's "true" self from the doll is a unique adornment that cannot be mass produced, Anastasia's necklace her grandmother gave her, a key which unlocks the music box of Anya's authentic past. Dimitri's masculine presence does not ultimately undermine the maternal story that was initially established with a lullaby. He merely gives Anastasia the means to define what she was not -- a toy that socializes and circulates myths.

Like Coraline's rock with a hole and her key that allows her to transcend the boundaries of the "real" world and "other" world, in *Anastasia*, we find toys that are symbolic of the womb (the music box) and the phallus (the necklace that acts as key). The music box, or womb, starts out as an empty vehicle, an unfertilized womb, but by the end has been injected by the masculine presence. However, the injection of the key here should not be understood as masculine, but instead a strictly feminine union as the necklace's role as feminine accoutrement undermines its more phallic shape as key.

Because the "key" is in a way a false phallus, Anastasia succeeds in obtaining a metaphorical motherhood as at the same moment the key enters the womb (the music box), her memory returns and thus her royal identity as Anastasia. Instead of the phallic shape of the necklace being destructive, Anastasia sees Rasputin's more harmful phallic-shaped relic, a device that "spits" green substances (indicative of the male's bodily fluids) in order to "create," as the more harmful entity; its artistry is that of the Romantic male. Its sperm-like nature threatens the female's identity the entire film. Thus, after Anastasia embraces the music box as herself, unifying it with the necklace key, she successfully destroys Rasputin's more problematic masculine talisman by crushing it, but only after she escapes his male-infused labyrinth.

However, that is not to say that Anastasia's grandmother and her haunting lullaby are free of blame for the identity crises of the female. Her role as matriarch, the lullaby that belongs to her, and even the labyrinth that leads to Rasputin is what provoked Anastasia's uncanny identity crisis in the first place. Ultimately, however, symbols of the matriarch provide Anastasia with the power and means to establish an alternative identity outside of either masculine or feminine toys. By the end, Anastasia leaves behind her music box and refuses to stay reunited with her grandmother. Once the Gothic doppelganger threat is gone, Anastasia can progress and possess space as a matured individual who refuses idealized definitions of female or child. She escapes with Dimitri, a male who is more associated with the matriarch than patriarch, especially since he helps Anastasia escape through a womb-like passageway and even allows for Anastasia to become "artist" by encouraging her to unite both her necklace (the key) and the music box. However, he is only truly safe after Anastasia saves him, emasculating him in his

role as patriarchal protector. In this way, Dimitri is now the reversal of what Anastasia was; he serves as Anastasia's queer partner, a cultivated Galatea she has brought to life with her new autonomy as female artist.

Propaganda Toys in Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games Trilogy*

"But there are much worse games to play."

-- Katniss, *Mockingjay*

Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series remains one of the most controversial novels for young adolescents. Some adults, whom Peter Hunt would describe as adults whose "business" with children's literature is to police it, passionately fight for their child not to be exposed to Collins's "dark" content. With the onset of the films and their visuals taking on a stronger potency (although still a diluted version of the text), and the thematic concept of "children killing children" provoking outrage, specific parental groups claim that the content is beyond children's mentality. Very possibly, what provokes most concern might be the way Collins depicts the parents as helpless victims who watch their children choose between becoming a weapon or prey of the Capital. Ironically, Collins's series seems addresses the Romantic equation of childhood with innocence by inciting fears that the child needs to be protected and preserved, a trope that always served adults more than children. Steven Bruhum similarly argues that the Romantic child is still at bay in modern horror films -- an "innocent" child who cannot, even in fiction, become a murderer. I believe Collins's work is the "darkest" of all three texts, and thus the most valuable for my investigation. Games and play examined in *Coraline* reappear in *The Hunger Games*, but they are much more intense. Of course, we can say the intensity comes from the series' preoccupation with death, but I would argue the intensity actually derives from fates worse than death. When engaging with the *Hunger Games* novels, readers witness lives lost, realize that relationships are irreversibly destroyed, and leave the novel with a bitter taste for the world at large.

Unlike *Coraline* and *Anastasia*, *The Hunger Games* series is neither certain that the female truly escapes her role as "toy" nor that she can obtain agency by defining herself as female artist. Collins's series also differs in featuring a mother who is threatening because she is present and "useless," like much of the adults in the novel.

The Hunger Games consists of literal children offerings, a Darwinian game in which only the most aggressive child will survive. The first novel, *The Hunger Games*, initiates the series into a world of dilapidation and missing "adult" protection, enacting the Gothic dismissal of Romantic notions of childhood, but also the Gothic's "missing" mother motif. Likewise, femininity in Collins's dystopian world is irrelevant, with the exception of the coquettish phenomenon of securing "sponsors." On the whole, however, Katniss outperforms males and rarely leads us to believe she is highly feminine in her first-person narrative. And, like in the other Gothic works under study, *Mockingjay*, specifically, plays with "toys," space, and mirrors, but unlike *Coraline* and *Anastasia*, Collins's series features the television as a Gothic space. The series even adopts its name from the narrative's TV show, the infamous and widely popular Capitol reality series in which District children fight to the death for their victor title and a little slice of Capitol life. Oddly enough, our protagonist is the victor of this game; we, the reader, value her prowess and resourcefulness, just as the Capitol viewers admire her for the same traits. Although both the reader and the Capitol are awed by her dexterity with arrows, her aptitude is simultaneously unsettling.

As a female adolescent, her independence and resourcefulness elevate Katniss beyond idyllic childhood and femininity. Katniss also accomplishes her high competence without the assistance of adults, perhaps her most unsettling trait for adult readers. Adults

and traditional authority figures, such as the patriarch, are overturned by a figure who should exist lower on the hierarchical scale, instantly uprooting the reader's preconceived stereotypes about female adolescents. The world of the *Hunger Games* is clearly one ruled by children, the underdogs, or more appropriate for the argument at hand, the Romantic "tools." Part of children's independence in Collins's world seems to derive from its makeup as a media and gaming culture with its television and videogame-like atmosphere of the Hunger Games arena where lost "players" are shown in an almost aviator-like fashion by being projected in the arena sky. Furthermore, the game takes place within a dome that is secluded from the greater adult civilization. Children race for the best weapons and the greatest technological advances, a common feature found in most war-like videogames (perhaps the most popular videogame genre today). The "players" all have one singular and innate, but caricatured, skill and are even rated on "levels" of expertise. In combination with the series preoccupation with television and its reality game-like atmosphere, the almost virtual, but Gothic world of the Hunger Games provides a landscape in which children, and thus "tools" inherently have an advantage over the older generation who are secluded from "games" and even technology as children and adolescents almost always have an upper hand in the fast-paced world of technological advancements.

Regardless of the advantages found in the *Hunger Games'* Gothic and media-like setting, adults desperately try to trap children in "toy" roles by investing in marketing and propaganda schemes -- a vulnerability inherent to media-run worlds. Like Coraline and Anastasia, Katniss is aligned with a toy, but not just any toy, a toy symbolic of revolution, an emblem that is also heightened beyond Coraline and Anastasia's

associations since it is marketed through the vehicle of television, a mass media device. Thus, the television comes to represent the artistic space that is compromised by the patriarchal artist. He will not allow the female to define herself outside of "toy," and, instead relies on the artistic venue of propaganda to market the female, Katniss, as a "savior," just as Coraline and Anastasia's larger identity crises represent. Furthermore, *The Hunger Games* series, specifically the last novel, *Mockingjay*, features a terrifying matriarch, the president of District 13 -- a ruler who remained "underground," a character in line with *Coraline's* Other Mother and *Anastasia's* haunting grandmother. The president of District 13 is also a phallic matriarch. Her "masculine" career choice and cold, calculating nature removes her from the feminine sphere, although her physical description disallows her to claim any other gender but female. And so, what we find is that Katniss is close in nature to District 13's president as Katniss herself is often described without any feminine attributes, at least emotionally. Like the District 13 ruler, Katniss describes herself as "cold" and "calculating" -- incapable of love.

Nevertheless we, the reader, admire Katniss, our adolescent protagonist, more so than we do her District 13 doppelganger. Katniss's ability to see through commercialistic devices and Capitol-istic ploys makes her a most original character, but also the first character who is fully aware of her role as toy from the start. Realizing what little strength she has against the Capitol, Katniss quickly concludes she must quietly manipulate *The Hunger Game* show. She crafts a love story in order to save her friend (her first attempt to reach artistic status and thus escape demands of patriarchal definition), and it is for this "mistake" that the Capitol (President Snow, specifically)

repeatedly seeks to punish her. Unintentionally starting a revolution, *Mockingjay* leaves us with Katniss, who now must grudgingly fully embody her role as toy:

What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn't enough, what I've done in the past, defying the Capitol in the Games, providing a rallying point. I must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution. The person who the districts -- most of which are now openly at war with the Capitol -- can count on to blaze the path to victory. I won't have to do it alone. They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances -- as if *that* doesn't sound horribly familiar -- and all I have to do is play my part. Sometimes I listen to them and sometimes I just watch the perfect line of Coin's hair and try to decide if it's a wig. Eventually, I leave the room because my head starts to ache or it's time to eat or if I don't go aboveground I might start screaming. I don't bother to say anything. I simply get up and walk out. (Collins 12-14)

The horror in Collins's book is that Katniss cannot escape the very male artistry that imprisons her identity. She "defied" the patriarchal rule of the Capitol only to become entangled by another marketing scheme; she must be "the face, the voice, the embodiment" of the Mockingjay. Even the pin in which she once found a sense of hope has become distorted under the governing and "protecting" powers of the 13th District, a district formally held as benevolent. However, once Katniss sarcastically describes the powers that "make her over, dress her, write her speeches and orchestrate her appearances," we realize Katniss is reduced to a mere toy in a similar fashion as Anya. The district equates Katniss with the pin itself. Like the other Gothic heroines, Katniss becomes parallel to her toy, but unlike them, Katniss is plagued with a new artistic venue that we have not encountered in the other texts, the cyclical trend of marketing. The District 13, a supposed place of refuge, now circulates the same stifling definitions of child and females as "toy" -- a problematic concept common to the Gothic works in this study.

Both the Capitol and District 13 make adolescent "toys" -- Peeta is designed as the face of the Capitol while Katniss fulfills her role as revolutionary emblem. But the key to dismantling the "toys" lies in the fight for airtime, the space of artistry. The Capitol and the Districts constantly compete for broadcasting time, often knocking each other off the air to prioritize their own endorsement of adolescent toy over the other. The constant shifting ideals and sharp contrasts, however, undermine their authority and commercial power. And, although Katniss must become the toy equivalent of her emblem, like her relationship with the Capitol, she does it on her own terms. Her type of marketing is of an essential identity that cannot be rehearsed. They must film only Katniss's "true" moments using the cameras when Katniss acts naturally, capturing an image without ever fully possessing it. Although she does not escape her role as Mockingjay toy until she assassinates the District 13 leader, Katniss nonetheless utilizes the television to stretch her boundary as toy, complicating her identity and the adolescent's identity on a larger scale, but also giving voice to a female artist that can "naturally" embody creativity without crafting it -- a Romantic notion that both confines and liberates.

Like *Coraline* and *Anastasia*, in *The Hunger Games*, the struggle to exist as two conflicting ideals represses the female's identity problems below the surface. There are many underground layers in *The Hunger Games*, but none are as potent and filled with Gothic terror than the Capitol sewers. Besides the tech-based pests we witnessed in the Hunger Game arena, this is the first time the reader encounters a monster to the highest caliber. When Katniss and her crew travel to the Capitol sewers, they describe an uncanny creature, much like Miss Forcible's and Miss Spink's repulsive embryo:

They are white, four-limbed, about the size of a full-grown human, but that's where the comparison stops. Naked, with long reptilian tails, arched backs, and heads that jut forward. They swarm over the Peacekeepers, living and dead, clamp on to their necks with their mouths and rip off the helmeted heads...The mutts fall to their bellies and skitter towards us on all fours. (Collins 361)

It is no coincidence that this creepy monstrosity resides under the Capitol, the rotting core of *The Hunger Games* world. Although Katniss deters the reader from comparing the creature to a human, the mention of a human comparison makes it impossible not to see the resemblance. Evoking the uncanny, the creatures' naked deformity, "long reptile tail," and movement make these monsters the offspring of the serpent and Adam. Its reference to the creation myth also call upon Eve, the female who seduces man to take a "bite" from the forbidden tree of knowledge. The story of female disobedience, and through disobedience rivalry with the divine creator, represents the forbidden artistic identity Katniss is seeking. She cannot define herself, without the heavy influence of toys and television until she destroys these underworld monsters. More specifically, she must fight in the underworld space because the monster is her own unconscious realization of her own "queerness" in desiring an identity outside of traditional femininity as was the embryo in *Coraline*.

Not just in the sewers, but in many others places, Katniss literally struggles for space -- in the arena, in television airings, in the District, in the Capitol, and so forth. *The Hunger Games* offers our most fluid understanding of "space," as Katniss must fight across a broad spectrum of planes. However, like our other adolescent protagonists, Katniss mainly yearns for her home and familial space:

I stare down at my shoes, watching as a fine layer of ash settles on the worn leather. This is where the bed I shared with my sister, Prim, stood. Over there was the kitchen table. The bricks of the chimney, which

collapsed in a charred heap, provide a point of reference for the rest of the house. How else could I orient myself in this sea of gray? Almost nothing remains of District 12. A month ago, the Capitol's firebombs obliterated the poor coal miners' houses in the Seam, the shops in the town, even the Justice Building. The only area that escaped incineration was the Victor's Village. I don't know why exactly. Perhaps so anyone forced to come here on Capitol business would have somewhere decent to stay. (Collins 3)

Katniss imagines such trivialities as "her bed, her sister, Prim, and the kitchen table." In juxtaposition to the luxury we have seen Katniss offered in the Victor's Village and as a Capitol celebrity, her yearning for her rundown home asks the reader to question what kind of space we value. Collins argues that possessing actual substance, as opposed to the metaphorical Gothic space of television and the underworld, is actually a more enriching experience. This solidifies the novel's critique of television as a problematic space, controlled by domineering rulers and creating problematic images for young women.

Similarly, *The Hunger Games* paradoxically juxtaposes the more liberating commercialist space with the Romantic woods to which Katniss so frequently retreats. Nature's maternal presence gives Katniss her "true" identity, like in moments where the "real" Mockingjay sings Rue's lullaby, a song that has a similar haunting presence as Anastasia's grandmother's lullaby. Katniss endorses Romantic ideals, but at the same time rejects them in her role as killer and as camera-savvy only when she feels "natural." We suspect that this has something to do with her ghostly shell of a mother who is frequently mentioned, but only to note her motherly incompetence. We are told that Katniss's mother becomes catatonic after her father's tragic death. Initially a figure of repulsion for Katniss, she vows never to embody her mother's "incompetence." As the series evolves, however, Katniss's perception of her mother shifts from "useless" to Romantic mother of "nature" as she comes to occupy the role of healer with her reliance on "natural" remedies

and cures. Although Katniss's mother is never fully fleshed out as "mother," her gradual association with Romantic nature relates to Katniss's own Romantic retreat into the woods and constant longing for her dead father. Katniss's own embodiment of romanticism suggests that she balances the threshold of two worlds, one in which she is the Romantic child, idyllic in her role as savior, and the other in which she is the female artist, a disruption in masculine values of creativity. However, Katniss cannot realize her role as bridge between the Romantic and the Gothic until she enacts her own "motherly" duties. These duties are more metaphorical in nature as Katniss does not become physical mother until the end of the novel. For example, she mothers her sister, Prim, and her opponent in the first Hunger Games, Pru. Her mourning of Pru is one of the first moments in which we align Katniss with the Mockingjay, although she does not get to reclaim the mockingjay after this moment. Its figure is forever distorted by the power of problematic artistry through marketing, the death of Pru is the very moment when Katniss gets to express an artistic agency in defining herself through television, temporarily escaping her "killer" definition maintained by the television series.

However, Katniss detrimentally loses one of her "metaphorical" creations, her sister Prim. The horrifying and violent destruction of her artistry makes Katniss the only Gothic heroine to create physical children with a physical male, superseding her role as artistic female. However, her suitor, Peeta, is forever haunted by his time as propagandist toy. Katniss somewhat reclaims him, but can never have him the way he was before; his nightmares perpetually return. As a result, like *Anastasia's* Dimitri, Peeta is a somewhat de-masculinized figure, even occupying the more feminine stereotypical role as "baker." Certainly not the hyper-masculine suitor Gale represents, Peeta's special skill of

camouflage is a type of delicate artistry in itself. Usually recreations of nature (rocks and branches, for example), Peeta's art embodies the same type of feminine artistry as Katniss's mother and sister, Pru -- that of Romantic, maternal "nature." Since Katniss's male partner is non-threatening, her child is a hybrid between the Romantic and the more safely constructed, feminine metaphoric child, like Katniss herself. Nonetheless, because the *Hunger Game* series forever distorts the female creation process through media interference, we can only say that *Hunger Games* is a much different Gothic work than its predecessors. Collins's novel challenges the problematic myths circulated by these consumerist venues, but she does not manipulate them in a way that permanently resolves the myths as *Coraline* and *Anastasia* do. Instead, *Hunger Games* embodies a much more deadly and irreversible play, emphasizing that once the vehicle for agency has been threatened by Gothic operators, they have irrevocably altered the definition of the Romantic tools, no matter how hard we try to recover it.

Conclusion: Christ-Like Female Artists & their Fatherly Obsessions

Gothic children's literature uses childhood "transgressions" and "adult topics" to complicate the ideals of childhood tied to romanticism, exposing these ideals as myths that disempower children. The Gothic, a genre used to expose repressed and ignored cultural (as well as individual) truths, works within the children's genre to unbury the realities of childhood that have been suppressed due to the shifting ideals of what adults want childhood to be. Because ideals of childhood divinity took root in the period that elevated the artistic imagination, it is no surprise that the struggle for artistry and creation comprises the main struggle for Gothic heroines such as Coraline, Anya, and Katniss. They seek agency through artistry, like many women writers before them who used Gothic conventions, even as they were equated with "low" art forms, to express questions about patriarchy and the past (see Ellen Moers's *Literary Women*). The recurrence of abject yet productive womblike, underground spaces in *Coraline*, *Anastasia*, and *The Hunger Games* suggests a need to come to terms with female creation as both a problem and a generative potential. Coraline, Anya, and Katniss advocate for a type of female agency that exists in "creations" and thereby reclaim womb-like "spaces."

However, they do so while reviling actual mother figures. This creates tension in their narratives and demands explanation. For the adolescent girl of the Gothic text, "space" functions in dual ways that simultaneously suggest fear and desire:

- 1) the "space" of the womb reflects and challenges its physical dimensions that restrict it
- 2) the "space" of the womb metaphorically equates to the conception that takes place within the "space" of the Gothic female's mind, her "brain child" to quote Gilbert and Gubar

Discoveries of embryonic creatures and monsters in the underground enable the girls to encounter Gothic creations that reflect upon the self. Paradoxically, abject fetus imagery enables the girls to challenge Romantic myths of childhood and girlhood, rejecting femininity and innocence, while also embracing a more problematic rejection of actual mothers and reproductive pathways. This symbolizes the way in which monstrous creations of women writing Gothic novels for a popular marketplace disapproved of their creations—Louisa May Alcott was a case in point—but have also found in the Gothic generative potential to challenge patriarchy. Gothic writing has been reclaimed as a mode of female agency (Female Gothic); in the adolescent texts under study the ability for girls to "conceive" in Gothic "spaces" reconciles feelings of shame associated with existing outside of the cultural "myths" of femininity and childhood.

The disturbing element of patriarchal paradigms, however, persists in the fact that the girls value not their mothers, who are presented as threatening, phallic mothers, but their fathers, who embody artistry that disallows female creativity. Coraline, for example, mentions her father more so her mother, and when she does mention him, she longs for him in an Oedipal manner, as other critics have also noted (see Parsons, Sawers, and McNally's "The Other Mother"). And, although Anastasia longs to be reunited with her grandmother, the flashbacks she entertains dwell on her father; in flashes of memory she dances with him and he coquettishly coaxes her into the water. Katniss, as mentioned above, longs for her father and constantly mourns his death, linking the very existence of the Gothic world of the Hunger Games to his tragic death. The question becomes why these heroines who all seek to create, and all seek to escape the lower hierarchy on the toy power scale, would long for their fathers, in an Oedipal-like fashion?

First, the case can be made that Oedipal desire actually allows for female maturation. But, second, and more important for our study here, is that Oedipal longing for the father expresses a symbolic longing for the phallus, also associated with the pen, (again harking back to Gilbert and Gilbar's *The Madwomen in the Attic*). The girls desire the male's traditional role as creator and artist. By obsessing over dead or missing fathers, the female heroines in this study can feel inspired by male artistry but distance themselves from a tyrannical father figure that could potentially limit their efforts. Paternal absence distills the internal struggle of each heroine to self-create and metaphorically mother herself and others. Patriarchal figures continue to have meaning as autonomous subjects neither threatened as "toys" nor demolished with lost identities. Their existences as "names" signify their cultural legitimacy, and the girls' sexual longings for fathers reinforce my reading that an intuited queerness resides in each heroine as she seeks to escape being defined as a toy or image.

However, queerness and father-longing are not just limited to the image of Man who freely operates in his patriarchal world. The "father" can also represent the "Father," the ultimate patriarch that is God. We find relevance in associating Coraline, Anya, and Katniss's Oedipal-like desires not just with their actual father or Man at large, but with the divine Father because, as a symbol of Christ, each of the Gothic heroines paradoxically occupy the role of "savior" (Romantic tool) and female artist. Even if their female artistry is realized by the end of their Gothic narrative, the female adolescents still exist as liminal beings as their Romantic and sentimentalized time as Christ-like "savior" is irrevocable. There is no *humanly* way possible to reconcile their paradoxical extremes. Therefore, the longing of the father that persists throughout these Gothic children's

narratives enacts the above notions of Oedipal-like desires, jealousy of the father's phallic "pen," but also registers on a higher level as a longing for the ultimate "queer" family, the holy trinity (God, Virgin Mary, and Christ).

The Gothic female adolescent fuses with the Christ figure who is aligned with the emblem of the "crucifix," just as the girls are aligned with their Gothic toys. In their ultimate divine accession as "true" artist, or divine artist, the females harmoniously exist as an "unearthly" creator, superseding the more earthly role of Romantic artist. After all, the Romantic artist *seeks* divinity in his artistry; he can only mirror God in the creation process through a more "pure" entity that often took form in marginalized subjects. Females who are embodiments of Christ enact a higher, more legitimate status of artist than the Romantic Man could ever possess because they are capable of embodying the divine directly; they are the vessel itself. Once they grip and redefine their status as toy, both children and females alike now possess the power to access God without male interference -- a concept seen in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where both Christ figures, little Eva and Uncle Tom, reach divine transcendence without the assistance of a masculine mediator.

The female and children inherit not just Christ's abilities, but the holy family in its entirety (often recognized and honored as one divine entity in Christianity). The holy trinity represents the divine power the girls sought through artistry, but, more importantly, the family as a whole acts as a safe construction of the metaphorical family, only child and parents of the *mind*. As a result, the heroines also succeed in aligning themselves with the Virgin Mary, the ultimate figure of "metaphorical" motherhood as her immaculate conception is what allows her to maintain her paradoxical role as both

mother and virgin, a problem the Gothic adolescents grappled with all along. Ascending to this Christian version of a "queer" family allows the females to participate in such a Christian phenomena that grants women agency through allowing them to mother "queer" creations such as Christ himself who is, like the females at hand, another paradox in form. He too is known for his dual role as savior and prophet "story-teller" -- an occupation graciously granted to the Gothic female adolescents just by embodying Christ's nature as "savior." The savior role is the perfect unison of Romantic and Gothic values, Romantic tool and metaphorical artist -- the only way the females can participate in a culturally-sanctioned identity and still be "queer" in nature. The holy Father is the only father who can truly grant her divinity in creativity.

As "invisible" as the girls' fathers are in these Gothic tales, God/Christ is a benign father because he is beyond earthly spatial dimensions -- the "dark rooms" Lydia so clearly outlined for us at the beginning of this study. Moreover, his symbolic association with his "toy," the crucifix, recalls Julie Clague's argument that Christ's gender has been desensitized by the overwhelmingly frequent depictions of his nakedness (his phallus) on the cross: "A lifetime of seeing his male form on the cross has inoculated us against its sexual impact. The male Jesus on the cross is gendered but not sexual, because the viewer has unwittingly castrated the Christ" (Clague 58). She goes on to say that his association with the crucifix has actually rendered the crucifix more phallic than Christ himself, engendering Christ, but also pointing to the cross as the embodiment of "the masculine paradigm of power, domination and aggression that is represented in Freudian terms by the phallic symbol" (58 Clague). Moreover, she expounds upon how the female's

embodiment in the form of Christ advocates for a new reading of God outside of his patriarchal-defined dimensions:

The depiction of a female Christ crucified challenges theological orthodoxies and upsets the gender symbolism ingrained upon the Christian cross. As such, the image of a female-Christ figure can form a tactic in a broader feminist strategy of representation (including the device of calling God 'Mother') employed by women who have found themselves. (Clague 60)

If we adopt Clague's discussion of the female Christ and God in art (the medium for which the Gothic heroines long), what these Gothic works are then subversively arguing are that the foundations of patriarchal culture, and thus the Romantic influence in artistry, are actually founded on a false interpretation of God, the "father" Christ. Recognizing the paradox inherent to Man's hierarchical claims of being "closer to God" than their female counterparts, the Gothic and the children's literature that adopts its conventions advocates for a more neutral construction of gender -- a "queer" existence as the more harmonious ideal. The Gothic is not only a creative expression of cultural dissatisfactions, but it is also a "strange and unusual" liberation for the powerless traditionally trapped by the patriarch's "false" claims of elitism. Because the medium of Gothic children's literature and film poses the heroines Coraline, Anya, and Katniss as sacrificial mothers that transcend mortal conditions of creationism, the merger of the two genres not only liberates girls from marginalized roots, but powerfully immortalizes them through "queer" creations.

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