

**MATERIAL GIRLS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF SUBJECT/OBJECT
RELATIONSHIPS ON THE PROTAGONISTS OF NEIL GAIMAN'S *CORALINE*
AND HIROMI GOTO'S *HALF WORLD***

by

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Abstract

This study uses thing theory as a focal lens to examine the way subject/object relationships are portrayed within two fantasy novels— Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline* and Hiromi Goto’s *Half World*— that have elements of horror in them. It takes into consideration the tropes and stereotypes present within dark stories for children and uses thing theory to look at how subjects and objects are introduced to one another within a horror setting and, consequently, how they transform each other through either use or misuse. This allows for a fuller understanding of how subjects and objects transgress and mutate within the horror genre. It provides an alternative direction from which to approach the analysis of character development by understanding the ways in which child protagonists are transformed by objects and how they, in turn, can manipulate things and situations to shift the balance of power in their favour. The findings provide an alternative approach to the further study of gender representations and cultural identities in horror fiction for children and young adults.

Preface

This thesis on the analysis of subject/object relationships in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and Hiromi Goto's *Half World* is the original, unpublished, independent work by the author Yashaswi Kesanakurthy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study stems from my interest in adaptations. Initially, I had wanted to examine how older, classic literature was being transformed into modern classics for children. My first idea was to look at the ways in which Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* paralleled and modernized Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The books were similar in that they both followed the stories of orphaned boys who were raised well outside the confines of normal society. In the case of Kipling's Mowgli, the Indian jungle was to be his home and the space within which he comes of age. For Gaiman's *Nobody*, the ghosts of an English cemetery were to be his caretakers and guides. In this case, it is the graveyard and the otherworldly entities that nurture *Nobody* and help him come into his own. My second plan was to look at how Neil Gaiman conserved as well as subverted fairy tale tropes in *Coraline*, his other book for children. While the focus of the study shifted, it seemed that the common denominator was Neil Gaiman. This led to a careful consideration of why I liked his stories so much. I concluded that I appreciated the way he built dark fantasies into everyday life; common objects are transformed in his hands, and yet the nature of their transformations is decidedly childlike. For example, in *Coraline*, the souls of dead children manifest themselves as marbles that can be collected. In another instance, a simple circular stone with a hole in the middle reveals the true nature of other objects when one peers through it.

As I read other literature for children as well as young adults, I observed that the transformation of commonplace things was a prevalent idea in most stories, fantasy or not, be it the holy grail or the pursuit of one's mundane ambitions. The aim then was to figure out how fantasy stories that intersected with the horror genre have utilized this feature of storytelling. It was important to me that the books I study have an element of horror in addition to fantasy. This

is because fantasy stories tend to exaggerate the importance of things that are not very commonplace to begin with. For example, a wand is essentially a wooden stick, but calling it a “wand” instead of “wooden stick” invites readers to a particular kind of affectation from the very start. Horror, on the other hand, can take a harmless object, such as a button or a fortune cookie, and mutate its representation to evoke a very different kind of awe. This, in turn, led to my noting that different kinds of stimuli cause different kinds of reactions. A character acts and reacts in accordance to the environment that they are surrounded by. In other words, it could be possible to study the way a character has changed or evolved over the course of their story by observing the way in which they relate to the objects around them. This led to my researching theories on subject/object relationships. While in the planning stages of my thesis, I had intended to take into account both protagonists’ age, gender, and race as significant identity markers. To this end, I have looked at the works of several intersectional gender theorists including bell hooks, Judith Butler, as well as children’s literature theorists who explore gender identity including Jack Zipes, and Perry Nodelman. However, due to the constraints of this study, I have narrowed down my criteria to studying the nature of the horror genre and the representation of subject/object relationships within it. I will examine, in the Discussions and Conclusions chapter, if this approach may have any implications to the study of gender and culture within horror fiction for children and young adults.

Since the genre of dark fantasy has played a big role in narrowing down my list of primary sources, I have looked at academic texts dealing with issues of agency in fantasy and horror for children and young adults. In order to study the objects of significance in each text, I decided to focus on Bill Brown’s thing theory, which draws from post-structural philosophy, as well as literary and cultural theories. I was introduced to this concept by a fellow student who

had been using it as a lens through which to study Kyo Maclear's *The Letter Opener*, a novel about a Canadian woman of Japanese and Scottish descent who works at an Undeliverable Mail Office in Toronto and tries to piece together the stories of strangers from their mail. The theory has not yet, to my knowledge, been applied to the study of the fantasy genre and more particularly, the children's fantasy genre.

1.1 Rationale for Text Selection

The first text that I was drawn to was Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Indeed, it was only after I had read *Coraline* that I had been inspired to pursue the topic of subject/object relationships in fantasy stories that included an element of the uncanny. Despite having read and enjoyed Neil Gaiman's books for adults while still in my teens, I came to read his children's books only a couple of years ago. *Coraline* had been especially captivating and it stayed with me for months after I had read it. Coraline Jones is a young girl in the throes of boredom as her family has moved into one section of an old manor. School is set to start up soon and Coraline is determined to explore as much of her surroundings as she can before it does. Everything seems dull and ordinary, until Coraline discovers a door that opens up into an intriguing new world. The space and its players appear to be the same, and yet not quite so- Coraline's batty neighbours are transformed into performers and sinister beings, the stray cat can talk, and her parents are no longer busy and unconcerned, instead they play "house" to perfection and even have buttons for eyes, like actual dolls. When Coraline goes back to her real home, she finds that her parents have been taken hostage by the other mother. And so she must pluck up the courage to go back into the strange mirror world and rescue her parents. Armed with her wits, a cat, and an odd stone, Coraline goes exploring once more. Given the scale of the fantasy, it would be difficult to classify *Coraline* as high fantasy but it is "epic" in the sense that it successfully merges quite a

few genres together in the name of fantasy- fairy tales, heroic legends, and horror. It is important to note however, that not unlike many epic fantasies, *Coraline* does involve a secondary world structure.

Once I had decided on my theoretical approach to reading *Coraline*, I wanted to widen my scope to include a study of how subject/object relationships functioned in a fantasy book that did not necessarily come from the European tradition of fairytales or to find one that used elements of horror in much the same way as Gaiman did in *Coraline*. In either case, I wanted to ensure that my second choice in text would have a protagonist who was not white. My rationale was strengthened by the fact that Bill Brown's thing theory draws from and works well with the issues taken up in cultural studies, such as cultural ideologies and discourses related to social class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality/gender, etc. This is particularly evident in Brown's article "Others, Objects, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)" in which he talks about "object culture" and how it is represented in postmodern art:

By *object culture* I mean to designate the objects through which a culture constitutes itself, which is to say, too, culture as it is objectified in material forms. A given object culture entails the practical and symbolic use of objects, It thus entails both the ways that inanimate objects mediate human relations and the ways that humans mediate object relations (generating differences of value, significance, and permanence among them), thus the systems (material, economic, symbolic) through which objects become meaningful or fail to. ("Others, Objects, and Us" 188)

It was difficult to narrow down fantasy books with protagonists of colour who interact with a world that is entwined with their (or their parents') ethnic background. These kinds of books were few and far between and often excluded any gothic or macabre element in the story.

It was also difficult to narrow my search down to a single book that had been published in the last ten years, rather than a book that was part of a series or was published before 2004. Thus, despite the fact that Katherine Applegate's *Animorph* series for example, takes a darker turn in the later books and does have characters of colour, it would not have worked well with *Coraline* because of the varying styles of fantasy, the date of publishing, and the fact that it is a rather long series of books, which would not allow for a detailed analysis that suits the scope of this study. It is important to note as well that the characters mainly interact with hidden talents within themselves, rather than objects or tokens from their outside world. Eventually, I broadened my search to books that were not just catering to middle grade readers. The intention was less about finding a book that catered to the same audiences as *Coraline*, and more to do with finding a book that embodied similar themes while creating quite a remarkable story of its own. This is when I came across Hiromi Goto's *Half World* at a bookstore, and there on the front cover was printed a review from Gaiman himself. Words like "mad funhouse of horrors" and "wonderfully odd" jumped out at me; they were words that I would probably have used to describe *Coraline*.

My reading of *Half World* also parallels my venture into *Coraline*. I had previously read Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child* for a contemporary Japanese literature class. Despite being completely taken with her work for adults, I had not thought to explore her works for young adults. The more I read of *Half World*, the more convinced I was that it would work with *Coraline*. *Half World* is a novel about fifteen-year-old Melanie Tamaki. Plus-sized, friendless, and of Asian ethnicity, Melanie thinks she knows what to expect from her broken family and her predictable school life in Vancouver. Of course, what she does not know can indeed hurt her. When her mother is kidnapped by the strange Mr. Glueskin, Melanie finds out that her parents were originally from a limbo realm called half world. Her mother had been allowed to leave the

realm for fifteen years but now her time was up. And so, in order to rescue her mother, Melanie must find the strength in herself to journey into a secondary world with only a jade rat and a Magic 8 Ball for company.

The scale of the fantasy is somewhat larger in Goto's novel than in Gaiman's. This can, in part, be attributed to the fact that each novel occupies a different section of the children's literature spectrum, with *Coraline Jones* representing the audience that ranges from pre-teens to young adults, while *Melanie Tamaki* bridges a young adult readership with an adult one. And yet, the similarities in the structure and style of each are striking. Mainly, it is the rescue of family that drives both protagonists to explore these secondary worlds. The only difference is the consequences of their actions or inactions. With *Coraline*, her refusal to confront the other mother would result in her own capture as well as the deaths of her parents and possibly, the deaths of those who move into the manor after the Joneses. With *Melanie*, her singular intent to rescue her mother is enmeshed in a larger struggle that she is, for the most part, unaware of—the fact that she has the ability to save the three realms from collapsing. In both their journeys, I realised that much of the protagonists' exterior worlds are set up to reflect their internal struggles and growth. While this was the deciding factor for including *Half World* in my research, I also noticed that several other details of *Half World* paralleled *Coraline* in interesting ways. Toys and miscellany, for instance, would quicken in some cases and often they did not function in the way readers (and the protagonists) would expect them to. Additionally, both protagonists are emotionally distant with their respective families. They find, instead, that their neighbours are their most useful adult allies. It is the neighbours in both books who provide the protagonists with certain defences and tools to help them in their journeys. In fact, the aforementioned differences— such as the books' respective audiences and their mixed storytelling traditions—

could be useful in ensuring that Bill Brown's thing theory provides an efficient lens through which various kinds of children's literature could be analyzed, perhaps even uniting the books through some significant common threads.

1.2 Introduction to Primary Texts

Coraline by Neil Gaiman and *Half World* by Hiromi Goto, cater to two different age groups of readers and employ different levels of dark fantasy i.e. low and high, respectively. However, the essential quest narrative remains the same: both girls are separated from parent figures who have been whisked away to a secondary world. The protagonists begin personal collections of objects that will help them find their way back to their families. With the help of these objects, the protagonists undergo several, minor transformations that allow them to manoeuvre their respective worlds.

Coraline

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, as mentioned previously, is the story of a young girl in her pre-teen years whose family has moved into one section of an old manor. The parents are trying to settle into a new place while simultaneously working. This allows Coraline to go "exploring" by herself. As she explores her house and the grounds, Coraline meets her odd neighbours— a couple of retired actresses named Miss Spink and Miss Forcible who own two Scottie dogs, and Mr. Bobo, an odd old man who lived upstairs and claimed his pet mice could speak to him. In their own eccentric ways each of them try to warn Coraline of the danger in her future. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible also gift her with a small, hoop-like stone that may help her. Coraline pays no heed to these warnings and continues her exploration of the manor and the grounds. It is at this point that she discovers a door in the living room that has been left locked. Her mother

consents to open the door and shows Coraline that the passageway has been bricked over. Coraline, however, is not to be deterred. As soon as her mother has left to get groceries, Coraline steals the black iron key and opens the door once more. Only this time, it is not bricked up. She goes through the passageway and finds herself in a mirror world that exudes a sinister feel. There she encounters the button-eyed counterparts of all the residents of the old manor- including her other mother and her other father. Unlike her real parents, these parent-like figures dote on her and give her whatever she likes— her favourite food, her desired toys, and even free reign to explore the secondary world. By the end of the night, Coraline is invited to remain in this secondary world forever, under one condition— that she allow the other mother to sew buttons onto her eyes. Coraline declines this invitation and goes back through the passage to her real home, only to realise that her parents are being held captive by the other mother. She then goes back through the passageway in order to rescue her parents.

As a self-declared explorer, Coraline is already actively interacting with the world around her, but when she finds it to be somewhat lacking, she chooses to look further than usual. The first instance of thingness is demonstrated by the house itself. A previously blocked doorway has been transformed into a portal that leads to a mirror world. The secondary world becomes a space within which Coraline loses herself but also regains her courage and finds herself. Within the confines of this space, Coraline is allowed to have the food, toys, and the leisure of her choosing, but outside of it she is disappointed by the food her parents make, the toys that she has, and the unexciting residence. Food and toys, especially, are changed in form, meaning, and purpose at the hands of the other mother. It must be noted that it is Coraline's declining of the other mother's offers and the acceptance of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's token that helps Coraline complete her quest. Incidentally, as she spends more time in this secondary world that

looks like hers but is not hers, it becomes evident to the readers that the counterparts she encounters, though humanoid in appearance, are not quite human. It begins with the hiding of human eyes. In the case of this book, the eyes are either concealed or replaced by button eyes of the kinds one would see in vintage dolls. Once Coraline find that the other mother has recreated her home space and the people inhabiting it, the mirror house and its inhabitants begin to lose shape and sense. Eventually, the other mother's hand separates itself from her body and moves of its own accord, indicating that Coraline's antagonist herself is a non-human, object-like entity.

This study will focus on the various ways in which Coraline transforms from a child who reacts, to a child who acts with decisiveness because of the way she is thwarted by her own perfect world. In the case of *Coraline*, I would argue that her assertion that life is not merely about getting the things you want (Gaiman 118), is a direct result of her actually getting exactly what she wants. I believe it is the gifting and divesting of objects rather than the taking and claiming of objects that dictate how Coraline transforms at certain points of the story.

Half World

Hiromi Goto's novel *Half World* follows a similar quest of a girl trying to reclaim her family. Compared to *Coraline*, the scope of the fantasy is much larger. It is interesting then that Melanie's perspectives on her life and her own purposes are so mundane. Goto begins the story with some background on her secondary world and a prophecy about a child born in purgatory who would reinstate balance between the Three Realms: The Realm of Flesh, The Realm of Spirit, and the Half World. It is explained that there was once a cyclical connection between the three worlds. The story begins, however, with this connection being broken. The half world, a world resembling purgatory, has begun trapping those who have left the mortal world and does

not allow them to pass on to the spirit world. Melanie who is fat, Asian-Canadian, and ostracised by her peers, believes herself to be nothing special. This is a belief that stays with her for most of her journey— from the moment her mother is kidnapped, to when she finds out there are other realms, and even when she learns that she may be the child the prophecy spoke of. Thus, even though the book may be considered high fantasy, Melanie’s own journey is dictated by a single purpose— to rescue her mother and go back to the realm she came from. Parallel to *Coraline*, it is Melanie’s neighbour Ms. Wei that provides her with the tools to rescue her mother from Mr. Glueskin. And even when, like Coraline, Melanie no longer has use for the transformed objects, she is able to make some allies in the secondary world. It is the combined effort of these people that enables Melanie to defeat Mr. Glueskin and restore the three realms to their original states.

It should be noted that Mr. Glueskin, like the other mother in *Coraline*, is only humanoid in appearance. A foul-smelling man with an elastic body that stretches and oozes like glue, Mr. Glueskin has taken possession of the half world, enforcing upon it his own whims and twisted fantasies. He is the reason that the half world is now disconnected from the other two realms and is turning into a kind of hell where deceased people are forced to relive their worst and most terrifying memories of their lives. Like the dead children in *Coraline*, these entities begin to lose sense of themselves and the people that they used to be. They are now only shells of people, bearing a loose resemblance to human beings. It is the same concept with which this realm is created— it bears a passing resemblance to the real world, but only enough to disconcert readers by making objects and objectified people malfunction. There are residences, bars, and even libraries, but they are twisted in a way that keeps Melanie guessing at will find next and how she can use this knowledge to her advantage.

This thesis will argue that Melanie's experiences of the realm of the flesh and of the half world are dictated by the quickening of the objects around her. Her own identity parallels the transformation of her environment and results in an identity that she may either choose to engage with or ignore outright. I believe that the consequence of Melanie's decision to accept or reject her transformations will, in turn, affect the surroundings that once disturbed her mundane existence.

1.3 Research Question and Focus of Study

The purpose of my study is to examine how subject/object relationships are formed within the scope of two fantasy books for children, *Coraline* and *Half World*. My primary research question is: how do two female protagonists, within a horror setting, engage with the material world around them in order to make sense of themselves as well as their respective situations? It is beneficial then that the constructions of worlds are rather similar in both these novels. Coraline has a "real world" that she dwells in with her parents, but her explorations carry her to a secondary world that is a mirror image of the one she knows. Melanie too has a "real world" that she knows intimately, but the kidnapping of her mother forces her to acknowledge the half world which is a grotesque version of her world. It is not quite the mirror image of the primary world, but the half world has elements that refer to aspects of the "real world". This makes some objects instantly recognizable and other things seem that much more twisted.

My secondary question is: how do certain objects in both my chosen texts interact with the respective subjects and vice-versa? Specifically, I am looking at how the transformation of these objects into things parallels or triggers the transformation of the protagonists themselves. The intent here is to analyze these transformations within the context of horror, with a focus on thing theory. I do not intend to gauge the maturation of the protagonists in terms of their ages at

the end of the novel, or to analyze their emotional development. Rather, my study observes several small moments of transition wherein Melanie and Coraline display a shift in perspective or a moment of clarity, as well as a movement from passive to more active beings. These are moments when they can see the true nature of the world around them and react accordingly— be it with fear or bravery or intelligence. In both cases, I would define the “true nature” of the worlds as the lifting of a veil of illusion. For example, in *Coraline* it is the illusion of the other mother’s kindness that is lifted. When Coraline is able to see the other mother’s sinister motives, it transforms the world into something sinister as well, thereby putting Coraline on her guard.

As mentioned previously, there is a lack of scholarship on children’s literature that uses thing theory as a critical lens. The most popular use of Brown’s theory has been in relation to fine arts and contemporary literature that does not target young readers as the audience, such as Breitbach’s work on thing theory and modern photography or John Plotz’ work on material culture in Victorian culture and literature. This study endeavours to apply thing theory to children’s fantasy literature in order to explore how material culture shapes characters, and conversely, how characters shape their own tangible universe. It is also worth noting that while *Coraline* has been discussed through various critical lenses, be it through Karen Coats and David Rudd’s psychoanalytic approaches or through the feminist lens used by Kimberley Reynolds, it has not been viewed through this particular lens of thing theory. Furthermore, while there is a growing body of scholarship on the adult fictions of Hiromi Goto, there is very little in the way of academic writing on her books for teens. By using Goto’s *Half World* alongside Gaiman’s *Coraline*, I would like to add a new perspective to ongoing discussions about agency in children’s literature.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The exploration of subject/object relationships in two books written for different age groups, both of which work with elements of horror, implies the need for a blend of critical theories. The parameters that have helped me narrow down my choice of primary texts have also informed the manner in which I intend to analyse *Coraline* and *Half World*, resulting in a two-part framework. The first part of my framework deals with the genre itself and considers how defined (or undefined) the genre of horror fiction is within children's literature as well as literature for young adults. This framework sheds light on the various characteristics and tropes of the genre, allowing for an informed analysis of the primary texts for evidence of transgressions and transformations. This leads into the second element of my framework—the one that deals with subject/object relationship. While, the first element of my framework would have been useful in exploring moments of metamorphosis within the subject alone, the second element aids in the combined study of both subjects and objects. The issue of subject/object relationships comes from a philosophical branch of studies that has, until recently, been largely applied to theoretical sciences. However, with the careful adaptation of works from this particular stream of ontology, the various facets of subject/object relationships have been opened up for application within a literary context.

2.1 Horror in Children's Literature

Horror was once a genre that seemed to exist almost exclusively in the realm of literary fiction starting with Horace Walpole's gothic classic *Castle of Otranto* which is considered to mark the birth of the horror genre (Spratford et. al 2). Until then, mainly with writers like Charles Perrault who adapted the Grimm's fairytales, the element of horror was used to educate younger readers more often than for the purpose of entertainment or contemplation. However, some of these

literary works in the horror genre written for adults were also read by adolescents and young adults, which served to create a space for writers to explore horror in a new space and for a new audience. Since the 20th century, with the wide reach of motion pictures, genres like horror became much more accessible and prominent despite the brief lull in written horror fiction in the 1950s (Spratford et. al 5). Since the early 2000s, with writers like Darren Shan, Neil Gaiman, Holly Black, and Stephanie Meyers gaining popularity, horror and gothic fiction exclusively for kids and teenagers has been on the rise— although, it should be noted that sometimes these works are coupled with other genres such as romance.

2.1.1 Horror and Humour in Gothic Children’s Literature

As the 19th century drew to a close, philosophers like Rousseau resisted the notion that children were meant to be protected from objects of terror. Instead, Rousseau had “advocated the child’s gradual and deliberate exposure to all objects of fear” (Jackson et al 29). The nature and purpose of dark stories for children, the kinds of objects in question, the fears that they play upon, and the manner in which the child is liberated from fear (if at all) are all aspects that are important to the analysis of my primary texts. Apart from pushing the boundaries of what kind of fiction can be considered “children’s” literature, the involvement of tropes from the horror genre have also added a sense of ambiguity to the texts. In other words, traditional gothic texts for children clearly demarcate the line between good and evil, with evil being forcefully and permanently defeated but— unlike contemporary texts— “(n)owhere is there any suggestion that evil might simply be misunderstood, or forgivable, or in any way assimilable to everyday life as a positive force” (Jackson et al. 8).

Several articles from *The Gothic in Children’s Literature: Haunting the Borders* edited and compiled by Anna Jackson, Karen Coats, and Roderick McGillis, serve to illustrate how

horror and humour work together within the context of gothic children's literature, in order to sort through certain issues or traumas that have been represented within the characters and the worlds they inhabit. For instance, in her article "Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic" Karen Coats engages with the possible purpose behind the reading of such kinds of literature. By working with texts by Neil Gaiman, Coats makes an argument about the manner in which Gothic literature may "help children cope with [certain] traumas in an indirect fashion" (Jackson et al. 77). She makes this case by mainly using a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, underlined by humour theory. She argues that "sanitizations" of traditional fairy tales is counter-productive to the purpose of reading a scary story, especially since the reader's "unconscious is as murky and the outside world as dangerous as ever they were" (Jackson et al. 79). Coats writes with particular interest to the issue of trauma within a gothic setting and how humour may help characters recognize and deal with said trauma. She posits that humour brings the trauma into sharp relief, allowing a reprieve from terror, and prompting characters into analyzing their fears instead of fleeing from them. Her point about horror connecting the characters' interiority to their external surroundings is, however, especially relevant to my study. Thus, she is arguing that gothic settings provide a tangible way for child characters like Coraline to deal with her problems. Applying Coats' understanding of how treating "a horrible situation with a humorous twist" (Jackson et. al 82) could be empowering, my question in terms of *Coraline* is: why does this dangerous, murky world so resembles the protagonist's own mundane home? In the case of *Half World*, my question is: which of the horrors of the half world mirror Melanie's own unconscious, and to what end?

Similarly, Julie Cross' article "The Frightening and Funny: Humour in Children's Gothic Fiction" presents the case that Gothic literature for children contains several narrative misdirections with the intention of creating humour: "In addition to the parody of melodrama in the use of foreshadowing, there is also the strong parody of the overt, intrusive, opinionated and often ironic narrator of melodrama; such parody can be useful in providing comic distance from the horrors of Gothic" (Jackson et al.70). Cross' rigorous analysis of how humour functions within the horror genre is drawn from a diverse list of texts, from Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Scooby Doo*. This idea of humour providing relief and subverting narrative norms is beneficial to understanding how the unstable nature of subject/object relationships varied between my two primary texts, especially when *Coraline* tends toward a wry humour while *Half World* does not rely quite so heavily on humour as a tool of transgression.

2.1.2 Transitions and the Desire for Transitions

The articles by Coats and Cross in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* provide insight into how the horror genre may be a mediator of sorts between subject/object relationships. Coats' article in particular provides the necessary background information to shape my approach to the genre as a whole, while providing examples as to how horror can encourage change within characters and their surroundings. For example, Coats discusses how writers like Gaiman play with older Gothic fairy tales in order to tell stories that are just as frightening but more in touch with child psychology. Unlike the girls in Lucy Lane Clifford's short story "The New Mother", Coraline is not a naughty child- she is just a bored child who invited trouble.

It is interesting then that Coats argues that a child who is bored is merely in "a transitional state, a state where he or she is developing a separate sense of self" (Jackson et al.

86). Boredom, as she states in her article, can be described as a “wish for a desire” (Jackson et al. 86). It is almost counterintuitive to note how inaction could be the catalyst for the subject and object coming together. In other words, Coats is making the point that the intent for transformation itself sets into motion a series of events that brings subject and object together. Thus, in a way, the child’s unconscious desires are directly responsible for the horrific aspects of their respective surroundings coming to life. This is significant to my reading of my primary texts because boredom is a peculiarity of Coraline’s age and, consequently, could point to the reason she interacts with certain objects in her environment and deems them important. This, in turn, is valuable for my reading of *Half World* and how differently Hiromi Goto explores the ideas of “transition” and “desire” with Melanie’s character. In Coraline’s case, her boredom brought the house to life. In Melanie’s case, her deep-seated fear of inadequacy is linked to the circumstances that force her to take charge of not just her own life, but the lives of many others.

2.1.3 The Gothic Family and the Abandoned Child

In both cases, however, the novels present the protagonists as isolated from the people and the world they know. Thus, another impetus for interaction with objects is related to how the subjects chose to explore and understand the world around them. Anna Smith in her article “The Scary Tales Looks for a Family” reveals the peculiarities of how these themes are presented in the horror genre. Smith examines the way Gary Crew and Sonya Hartnett deal with the motif of the family in relation to the theme of isolation in their books. She notes that the ostracised child typically attracts the attention of evil figures. She offers the perspective that:

[If] there is a struggle between good and evil being explicated here, it is seen not as a set of inherited literary tropes, but in the infinite permeability between the vulnerable human

skin of the child, and the potent adult will to power that can emerge unbridled, destructive, and inventively cruel. (Jackson et al 139)

This notion of the isolated child puts Coraline and Melanie in a new light. While they have not been abandoned by their families, as Smith puts it, they are separated from adults they trust and instead are put in the care of adults who may use their power for “destructive” and “cruel” purposes. It becomes more important than ever, for the child protagonists to move from a place of isolation to a place of companionship, therefore, prompting them to transform objects into weapons and quasi-objects into allies. Thus, the theme of isolation is deeply linked with how the ostracized children’s “canniness” is manifested through their relationship with objects. Anna Jackson’s analysis in “Uncanny Hauntings, Canny Children” mentions that gothic stories tend to have heroines who are “canny” and argues that “canniness” or cleverness is very effective at drawing attention to the Gothic. Furthermore, she hypothesizes that if “canniness depends on a sense of identity, so that it can be understood as a kind of self-possession, identity in turn is shown to depend very much on other people, and their recognition” (Jackson et al. 168). Reading Jackson’s exploration of the canny child alongside Smith’s idea of the abandoned child becomes very useful in exploring the divergent character development in *Coraline* and *Half World*, since it is the isolation that leads to canny interactions with objects. Coraline, despite her age, is not the abandoned child but she is forced to be more self-reliant in the way she constructs her identity. Melanie, though older than Coraline, must similarly use her isolation as an opportunity to learn and grow in order to tip the balance of power in her favour.

It must be noted that both protagonists are quite isolated in the face of deception by adult authority figure. While the heroines’ *raison d’être* is their respective families, their parents also tend to be part of the problem not unlike Smith’s analysis of parents in Gary Crew and Sonya

Hartnett's stories. Furthermore, the "biggest risk to children is in the home" (Drillsma-Milgrom et al. 168). Although Victoria de Rijke is specifically looking at instances of abuse at the hands of family members in her article "Not Playing It Safe: Horror and the Ludic in Children's Picture Books", the idea that children can be harmed by loved ones holds true even in fantastical cases like *Coraline* and *Half World*. In the first book, the child is trapped by a beldam who can take the form of Coraline's mother. In the second one, the child returns to the place of her birth i.e. the half world, while her mother (as well as her unexpected father) prove to be almost antagonistic in their stupors. Given that the subjects' respective families in the two works I am examining are partially, if inadvertently, the cause of their isolation and their consequent reliance on foreign objects for survival, this perspective on family provides a window into understanding subject/object relationships within these gothic settings.

2.2 Subject/Object Relationships

While the previous section of my theoretical framework focuses on the horror genre for children and the tropes that often manifest in notable subject/object relationships, this section examines subject/object relationships in a micro level. I intend to focus on the physical and emotional transitions that occur within the subjects and objects of my primary texts, rather than solely observing the representations of certain tropes within the genre, such as, isolation, irony, humour, and transgression. Looking at the conservation and the transgression of tropes within a genre sets broad parameters for approaching the critical reading of my texts, but the work on subject/object relations, particularly the application of Bill Brown's Things Theory, is what will drive my analysis of *Coraline* and *Half World*.

2.2.1 Thing Theory

Thing theory is based on the notion that “things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project” (“Others, Objects, and Us” 3). It draws from various literary, philosophical, and cultural sources, including, “Dream Kitsch” by Walter Benjamin. Although thing theory is derived from Benjamin’s work, his and Brown’s approaches are quite different. Benjamin observes in his essay that the material world contains within itself the unconscious (A. E. Benjamin 155). As noted by Andrew E. Benjamin’s book *Walter Benjamin and Art*, Walter Benjamin argued that in the world as well as in art, truth was only open to the critical mind:

He considered it the task of criticism, like the task of history, to make fragments of truth visible and dominant. Regardless of medium, he considered criticism an activity of stripping its objects bare, mortifying them, dragging the truth content of what is depicted in the image out before it, not as ‘an unveiling that destroys the mystery but a revelation that does it justice’ (A. E. Benjamin 155-6).

Contrasting with Benjamin’s idea of using criticism to discover the prehistory within the artefact, Brown is interested in the idea that “history can unabashedly begin with things and with the sense by which we apprehend them” (“Thing Theory” 2). Unlike Walter Benjamin, Brown’s purpose behind the “unveiling” of an object is not to reveal the justice of truth, but rather a facet of the truth.

Brown’s perspective on objects is based on their functionality. For the most part, he argues that we perceive objects by what they signify to us in terms of personal history, social history, or culture. When objects break down, we perceive them for their “thingness”. As he states: “The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than

a particular subject/object relation” (“Thing Theory” 4). In other words, thingness is the first symptom of a change in the subject/object relationship. Applying this idea within the context of my chosen primary texts, I would consider the instances of thingness as a kind of transgression within the genre or the stories themselves. For instance, the horror genre would typically require that animate objects display thingness to favour the adult villain, but in the case of *Coraline* and *Half World* there are objects that display thingness to favour the child protagonists as well. These artefacts interact with the child subjects in a way that enables them to tip the balance of power in their favour. These moments of thingness are part of what this study engages with.

This relationship between the subject and the object begs the question of whether it is the subject that is dependent on the object, or the object that is able to quicken only in the hands of the subject. In this case, Brown is attuned with Baudrillard’s line of thinking. He argues that subjects have a certain dominance over objects due to the fact that subjects always have the last say as writers of history (“Thing Theory” 8). In “The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)” Brown notes that the denouncement of objects as “passive” only occurs before the object displays its thingness. It is “only in the subject/object nexus ... where (objects) can be *narrated* as the *effect* (not the ground) of an interaction at once physical and psychological, at once intimate and alienating” (“The Secret Life of Things” 2). Brown looks at Virginia Woolf’s short story “Solid Objects” and argues that it is a story about the constant transformations of objects (“The Secret Life of Things” 3). He notes that the story is “about the materials that make up the material object world, about the transvaluation of those materials into less and more than their familiar properties” (“The Secret Life of Things” 3). This act of transvaluation is exemplified and encouraged by fantasy novels like *Half World*, where the

Magic 8 Ball answers questions with yet more questions: it is not merely an “effect” but instead it is a thing that creates the space that allows Melanie to probe the world around her.

2.2.2 Learning Things and Collecting People

It must be taken into consideration that not all subjects and objects fit quite as neatly within their allotted categories of “subject” or “object”. The shells of the children in *Coraline* and the inhabitants of the half world are subjects who have long lost their subjectivity and their humanity. They are an example of subjects that move between the subject/object binary, thus making it difficult to gauge the phenomenon of thingness. W. David Kingery in his article “Learning from Things” draws on Bruno Latour’s notion that “things do not exist without being full of people” and that “the world is full of ‘quasi-objects’ and ‘quasi-subjects’” (Kingery 12). The more the characters learn about the world around them, the more they are able to contextualize the artefacts they are interacting with as objects or “quasi-objects”. Kingery, like Benjamin, agrees that objects hide behind the unconscious and that if objects can be read as texts, they “must also be read as myth and as poetry” (Kingery 6). Kingery recognizes that no object or text exists in vacuum. Thus, he proceeds to examine the way in objects and texts are formed and how these formative histories can be accounted for while analyzing why certain objects move from a passive state to an active one:

Formation processes are defined as the ways in which evidence of past behavior, beliefs, cultures, and organizations can be addressed by us in the here and now. Formation processes are the ways by which material entities- documents, artifacts, monuments, oral histories, geographical features- are able to survive the ravages of time and become evidence. Historians and archaeologists alike need to find and validate their evidence before the process of analysis and explanation can commence. (Kingery 6-7)

Kingery is primarily talking about objects within the context of cultural history, but formation processes play a major role in the way that I intend to analyse subject/object relations in *Coraline* and *Half World*. For example, in *Half World* an object that displays thingness is an ancient book of prophecies called The Book of Realms. Its prophecy contextualizes the protagonist's life but it is not just a page with words on it. Melanie must look at the history from which the prophecy was born and attempt to decipher the prophecy. In other words, she must look at "past behaviors" and "beliefs" of the half world in order to understand how the prophecy can be fulfilled and guess her own relationship to it. Depending on how she deciphers its formation process, the prophecy may yield different meanings. It is an object that does not change form, but instead changes meaning— much like the seeing stone in *Coraline*, which literally allows Coraline to see the world in a different way, prompting her to see through the lies woven by the other mother.

Kingery's work is not only also central to my understanding of how subject/object relationships are formed in the first place, but also how they are subsequently preserved or severed. This is where the process of collection and what the collection may say about the collector is relevant to my critical analysis of subject/object relationships: "The study of humankind through what they collect and how they use it, the associations and transformations involved, offers a new and fascinating perspective" (Kingery 9). The study of characters, their histories, and their character developments through their respective collections of objects— whether these objects are bestowed or found— will serve as the basis for exploring how subjects affect the way that objects are represented and transformed over the course of the stories. For example, when Melanie first begins her journey, she is given a jade rat from her neighbour Mrs. Wei. For the most part, Melanie sees the animate object as Mrs. Wei's, but as they begin to learn

about each other's past, Melanie sees the jade rat as her own, a friend. Interestingly, the jade rat too begins to shift in her attitude towards Melanie, becoming less sardonic and more friendly. Thus, I will use Kingery's work alongside Bill Brown's works on the act of accepting or rejecting objects in order to study how the subjects, i.e. the heroines, utilize objects from other characters' collections in order to adapt to their trying circumstances. In particular, Bill Brown's "How to do Things with Things (A Toy Story)" approaches the history of things by attempting to understand "the crystallization of the anxieties and aspirations that linger there in the material object" ("A Toy Story" 935). Thus, by combining Kingery and Brown's respective works with the rest of my framework, I can gain an understanding of the history behind both subject and object in any particular subject/object relationships in my primary texts.

2.2.3 Adapting Thing Theory to Fantastical Children's Literature

Like Kingery, other academics have adapted Brown's theory to take it in new directions. Steven Connor, for example, looks at human cognition as part "thing" and part "thinker", thereby blurring the lines between subject and object. Connor's idea of how objects can reflect the subjects' cognitive ability is one that can be applied to both my primary texts. In his article, "Thinking Things", Connor states that his interest lies not in "how life and thought get into things", but "how things get into life and thought ... (and) the thought of life" (Connor 3). He makes the argument that the important thing about words "is not their capacity to impersonate objecthood or cloak themselves in mystery, but rather ... the fact that 'works of art both are themselves things and may at the same time represent things'" (Connor 17). In works of fantasy such as *Coraline* and *Half World* this notion that things may represent people through the ideas that they symbolise is an especially prevalent one. It is especially evident in the way the antagonists are portrayed in both texts. Both the other mother and Mr. Glueskin are humanoid

characters who are quasi-subjects, or rather “thinking things”. While they have a human shape, they are also otherworldly in their appearance. The other mother is similar to an arachnid, while Mr. Glueskin can stretch himself and capture other things or people through his sticky skin. Connor’s work allows for thing theory to be applied to my texts that insist on the utilization of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects to antagonize as well as aid the protagonists. For the sake of my study, Connor provides clarity on how the using or discarding of these objects could imply a kind of transgression, separate from the idea of thingness, which leads to the transformation of the characters and their worlds.

2.3 Summary

In summary, my theoretical framework has two sections that work together in order to analyze subject/object relationships in *Coraline* and *Half World*. The first section focuses on elements of horror within a gothic or dark fantasy setting. As Karen Coats argues, gothic settings are useful in providing a physical manifestation that parallels a child’s interiority and allows her to work through her problems in a tangible manner. Coats also refers briefly to how irony and humour may be tools that help protagonists make sense of their setting and context, while Julie Cross provides a more detailed exploration of how humour can be a way of subverting horrific situations within a gothic setting and may be able to suspend the terror briefly in order to provide clarity of thought. Part of the connection between the setting and the subject’s psyche is, as Coats argues, dependent on a latent desire for transition. In other words, boredom is a catalyst for change, and is inadvertently linked to the creation of an exciting, if horrific, space within which the protagonists of my chosen texts are required to grow and develop as people. Once in these spaces, they are isolated. Anna Smith explains that isolation and abandonment of the child character may suit the purposes of a maleficent adult figure who seeks to gain power. It can,

however, be yet another catalyst for change with isolation requiring the child characters to display a canny attitude towards the obstacle they face. This display of canniness or cleverness is, according to Smith, an indication of a new development in their identities. While their fear of their obstacles and their setting drew attention to the elements of horror and gothic, their ability to cleverly subvert these elements draws attention to their character development.

The second section focuses more on the object side of the subject/object relationships. Thing theory helps in the analysis of several transformative aspects of objects in the hands of subjects and vice versa in my primary texts. The starting point of applying Brown's thing theory to fantastical children's literature is the idea that subjects typically try to either reveal the meaning behind objects or attribute meaning if none can be found, when in reality objects are, in essence, about functionality. Thus, when an object's "malfunctioning" transforms it into a foreign thing that bears only a vague resemblance to the object that we, as subjects, are familiar to, it is said to have displayed "thingness". This links directly to the way in which the horror genre twists commonplace objects to disconcertingly familiar things, as Coats has discussed. "Thingness" is a sign of transformation in an object. This, in turn, leads to Brown's questions of whether objects are passive only because their associated subjects interact with them in a certain manner. He argues that objects are typically "narrated as effect", but in fiction like *Coraline* and *Half World*, the objects may be agents that affect the subjects as well. This is the case, not only with magical artefacts, but also with the antagonists as well as certain allies in the novels that do not belong to just one category of "subject" or "object". While these quasi-objects are briefly discussed by Kingery, his primary focus is on formation process that draw on the human histories behind the objects in question to better understand subject/object relationships in the material world. Kingery and Brown further explore what formation processes may imply about

an object from a person's private collection. This idea is applicable to both my primary texts, since both Coraline and Melanie are presented with tools and allies from the personal collections of another person. The final aspect of my framework uses the notion of thought as a thing itself while simultaneously presenting an idea of a thing, described by Connor, refers back to the idea of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. Connor argues that even works of art, whether visual or literary, can be discussed in terms of effect and affect and how this defines the objects as well as the subjects they come into contact with, and this is especially useful when looking at the transformation of artefacts and characters that do not adhere to the subject/object binary.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology for this study is to undertake several close readings that are informed by the various elements of my theoretical framework. The first reading of my primary texts involves selecting instances in which subjects and objects transform each other. This reading drew on the first element of my framework, which deals with the parameters of the horror genre. The challenge was to narrow down the analysis to only include those moments that best represented a transformative subject/object experience— one that allows and encourages a change within the characters’ respective identities or changes the nature of the object in relation to the subject— within the setting of the horror genre. I took into account the tropes that are typical to this genre— such as humour derived from irony, isolation of the child protagonist, and the desire for transition and transformation— and selected those metamorphoses that best reflected ways in which horror and gothic tropes were either conserved or subverted. For instance, in *Coraline*, the fact that Coraline is left to her own devices by her parents feeds into her desire for a more exciting summer. Here, Coraline plays the part of an isolated child protagonist which is linked to the trope of the desire for transition. The unusual result of this desire is that the house reacts to Coraline’s wish for excitement and opens up a new world for her to explore. The house, then, becomes my first object of interest because of the manner in which Coraline reacts to it and because of the way it reacts to her.

My second reading of the primary texts draws from the second element of my theoretical framework which focuses on subject/object relationships in order to analyse how objects and subjects transform over the course of the story as well as affect each others’ transformations. Drawing from thing theory, I will also look at how objects display thingness within a dark fantasy setting, how the protagonists’ character development is encouraged by thingness, how

characters in turn affect object-to-thing transformation, as well as analyze how certain characters shuttle between the category of subject and object. For example, referring back to the house in *Coraline*, I will note how the house's nature changes over the course of the story while interacting with Coraline, and how it, in turn, interacts with and changes her. Thus, my theoretical framework has been constructed around the proposition of studying the subject/object dynamics within fantasy novels that carry elements of horror. A second reading revealed that the moments of transformations, both for objects and subjects, occurred in clusters— some that have to do with objects specifically and some that were relevant to the transformation of subjects. Thus, the house as an object is part of the cluster that has to do with the surroundings that Coraline dwells in and interacts with.

The task then was to do a third close reading of the texts in order to collect evidence of major moments of transformation and note which of these changes and movements occur within the same context. As mentioned above, a context may include a certain environment, or a theme, or even an object. For example, the relationship between the external environment and character's interiority is one context. A second context is the dynamics between characters. A third context is collections of objects and quasi-subjects. All of these contexts are present in both *Coraline* and *Half World*. For each context, I will cite significant moments of transformation that include the object's display of thingness, the blurring of lines between object and subject, and the metamorphosis of the subject or a revelation that relates to the subject's true identity. The major contexts are presented below, along with a cursory exploration of how the literary evidence prompts the prioritization of said contexts.

3.1 Subject/Environment Relationships

This context deals with the relationship between external environments and character interiority. In *Coraline*, most of the significant moments of transformation occur within the context of the house. The house is one of the first objects to display thingness when the bricked up door in her living room turns into a portal that leads Coraline to the mirror world. Since it is the space that contains a myriad of subject/object relationships, the house is the most significant object that Coraline interacts with. I will primarily be analysing the house for evidence of how its transformation from a place of safety to a place of horror may correspond to notions of home and hearth prevalent in gothic and horror literature. This analysis will lead to an understanding of how Coraline's movement between the two spaces encourages her own awareness of what it is that makes a home i.e. the place where she feels she belongs instead of the place she wished she belonged to. In the beginning of the story, Coraline is a child who dreams of excitement, but when excitement comes in the form of the other mother Coraline is lost within the turmoil of changes. While in the other mother's house, Coraline realizes what she truly wants is her old house and family back. The moment she has this epiphany, Coraline becomes a child who can affect change instead of being affected by it. This movement of Coraline's from a place of passivity to a place of agency while immersed in her changing environment is the part of how I understand and analyse transformation within a subject.

In *Half World*, the issue of house and home is more complicated. Melanie spends very little time in the space that she calls her home. As an outcast, her home is not the only place she finds refuge at. Instead, Melanie roams the city of Vancouver in the realm of flesh to find her quiet spots. As a girl whose parents are from the half world, however, Melanie's place is not just in the realm of the living but in the half world as well. We learn that she was conceived in the

half world and was born in the realm of flesh. The half world is also the space that needs her and prophesizes about her, though this is not known to her. When Melanie travels to the half world, it is not a journey she would have made if not for her mother's kidnapping. *Half World* juxtaposes Melanie's search for the place where she belongs, with her quest to find her mother in a different realm. As she spends a substantial amount of time in the half world, it is the environment that encompasses most of the significant subject/object relationships. The half world functions very differently from the world that Melanie is accustomed to. These jarring differences allow Melanie to recognize how twisted the half world is. She realizes— with the help of certain connecting figures and motifs, such as crows that double as bridges, gatekeepers that are unchanging, and prophecies that are always changing— that in order to save her mother and the lost souls of the half world, she must take on the role of a hero. In this case, the transformation of her external environment is dependent on her own ability to change; to move from a place of fear to a place of self-confidence. These are the subject/object transformations I will study under this context.

3.2 Antagonists as Quasi-Subjects

Both secondary worlds in my chosen texts present challenges for the protagonists with the most important hurdles being the antagonists. This context takes note of the manner in which the antagonists of both primary texts often function as subjects as well as objects, especially when interacting with the protagonists. The other mother, who likes the idea of playing house, is a shadow of a human when confronted with the sheer vitality of Coraline and, presumably, the children she had once consumed. The beldam is further objectified when she is able to detach her hand to follow Coraline through the portal. The other mother is also enmeshed in the environment that Coraline is in, since the secondary world is of her own construction and

consequently, an extension of herself. This leads to the discussion of how the other mother— a “quasi object” as Kingery has noted— carries within her certain kinds of human knowledge. In this case, I examine how the other mother is a creature of the macabre as well as the perpetrator of certain kinds of human societal norms. I intend to analyse how Coraline is able to navigate not just the other mother’s menacing presence but also the rules enforced by her. Without the other mother, Coraline would have no incentive to change. It is the other mother’s act of kidnapping of Coraline’s parents and her consumption of other children that pushes Coraline to make a choice. Coraline, who is firmly placed in the position of a subject, may choose to give up her subjectivity in order to give the other mother a brief taste of humanity. Or she may choose to transform into a heroine who stands up to authority figures and monsters alike— both of which are represented by the other mother. These moments of transformations that enforce and navigate power structures are the instances I will focus on under this particular context.

In *Half World*, Mr. Glueskin, as a tyrant who thrives on the unfortunate circumstances of the half world, certainly has a hand in the perpetuation of that world’s social norms. Thus, like the other mother and the mirror world, he and the half world are very nearly seamless in their connection. Furthermore, Mr. Glueskin and the other mother provide evidence of transformative subject/object relationships because of the fact that these characters function as subjects as well as objects in addition to triggering a set of physical, emotional, and cognitive changes within the protagonists. As characters that control the transformation of other objects to achieve a certain social order, they become holders of power. The intention here is to analyse how the antagonists are presented as thinking creatures like subjects, but their unyielding nature resembles the static qualities of objects. It implies that the strength of the protagonist lies in her ability to adapt and transform, while retaining her title as a subject. The transformative moments I have chosen to

focus on for *Half World* under this context are similar to the ones in *Coraline*. Under this context, I intend to look at how the protagonist, Melanie, is pushed to choose between being objectified and consumed, and transforming into a saviour in order to retain her subjectivity.

3.3 Weapons and Tools as Quasi-Objects

The final context of the primary texts that is vital to my analysis of subject/object relationships in both *Coraline* and *Half World* is the collecting and divesting of weaponry or tools. In both books, neither protagonist leaves her home without something that might aid in her rescue mission. For *Coraline*, it is the circular stone bestowed to her by Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. Before she receives this seeing stone, Miss Spink carefully picks through her collection of odd objects and the readers get a glimpse of her private collection. It is open for consideration what these objects mean to Miss Spink, what they mean about her, and what it means about *Coraline* that out of all the objects, she received a stone that would reveal the true nature of the objects in her environment. It is also interesting to note that *Melanie* received her tools in a similar fashion. She receives a Jade Rat from her neighbour Ms. Wei, who also sorts through her personal collection to find something suitable for *Melanie*. She also receives a Magic 8 Ball from a raccoon. Both the Jade Rat and the Magic 8 Ball prove challenging for *Melanie* to use or understand. The Magic 8 Ball, unlike its real life counterpart, does not provide answers or revelations. Instead, it asks questions of *Melanie* and tried to prompt her to find her own answers. Jade Rat on the other hand is sometimes animate and often, *Melanie* does not know whose side the rat is on. In both texts, however, the act of bestowing or passing on certain objects from collector to consumer implies a defiance of the way subject/object relationships are built within a consumeristic setting. The objects are not chosen by the consumers, but rather they are chosen for the consumers. The consumers pay, in this context, with a lack of agency as they

do not know which of the objects in the collection could help them in their quest. It is also a transference of personal histories as the objects are, as Brown has noted, “what we know” and “are things that know their place, and whose place we know” (Connor 1).

For this context, I will draw from Kingery’s work on personal collections, to observe how objects are often passive things until they encounter an active subject. In the hands of the protagonists, these objects are transformed and display thingness. In Coraline’s case, the stone is not just a plaything but a tool that allows her to truly see the world that the other mother has built— it is drab, lifeless, and most certainly a trap for young children. It is then that Coraline comes to understand the other mother’s motives much more clearly. This insight, in turn, transforms Coraline in a clever and canny child who is able to play the other mother’s game and win. In Melanie’s case, the Magic 8 Ball, takes a more direct approach in transforming the way she thinks. For most of the novel, she is asking all the wrong questions because of her singular obsession with saving her mother. The Magic 8 Ball’s questions prompts Melanie to broaden her mind and understand that her quest is much larger than her mother’s rescue. This knowledge is directly responsible for Melanie’s decision to become a hero instead of a victim. These moments when the quasi-objects prompt cognitive transformations within the subjects are what I will focus on in this section.

3.3.1 Animal Allies as Fluid Characters

The animal guides and companions are a subset of the “Weapons and Tools” context. It takes into account moments when animal allies shuttle between the categories of subject and object. Melanie’s Jade Rat functions much like the way the cat in Coraline behaves. The animals only display the human ability of speech at certain times and, initially, neither one of them truly belongs to the protagonists. They alternate between guide and ally. The main difference,

however, is that the cat is of flesh and blood while the Jade Rat is an inanimate object springing into life. Once more, the question of “quasi objects” and “quasi subjects” is raised and leads to the discussion of what it means for Melanie that she feels sorrow and pain for a creature that is often an inanimate object, as well as what it means for Coraline who feels an affinity for a creature that rejects the notion of belonging and acceptance when she is so earnestly looking for an ally.

In this context, I explore how the transformation of these objects and quasi-objects into weapons in turn affects the character development of the subjects. Melanie, for instance, begins her journey by viewing Jade Rat as a guide that existed to serve her purposes. As they progress on their quest, she comes to respect Jade Rat as a companion and an individual who bears her own burdens and motives. This paradigm shift parallels her shift in understanding what she means to the people of half world. The moment Melanie is able to see the Jade Rat as a friend, is also the moment she begins to understand the residents of the half world as individuals to be helped rather than creatures to be feared. A similar transformation occurs in Coraline as she interacts with the cat. The cat’s firm belief in its own individuality prompts Coraline to hold on to her own sense of self. The cat’s knowledge of the other mother allows Coraline a new perspective on how to trick the other mother into releasing her parents and the souls of the dead children. Coraline, in turn, is able to coax the cat to be her reluctant ally. She makes the shift from being someone who is tricked by the other mother, to someone who is able to be a trickster as well. Thus, alongside the cognitive transformations prompted by the weapons and tools, I examined those moments of change within subjects and fluid animal allies during their interactions.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Subject/Object Relationships in *Coraline* and *Half*

World

This chapter of findings analyses subject/object relationships in *Coraline* and *Half World* by focusing on three major contexts. The first context refers to the subject's relationship with the external environment and will study on how the environment prompts certain transformations within the subject and vice versa. The second context focuses on the dynamics between subjects and quasi-subjects. In this context I will analyse, in particular, how the antagonist's status as both object and subject affects the way they interact with the protagonist, thus causing a change in the protagonist's perception of the antagonist as well as her own sense of self. The final context deals with the relationship between subjects and certain collections of objects and quasi-objects. I will take into consideration how the relationship between a collector and a collection is formed and transformed. This context will also focus on how subjects transform the collection's histories and natures and vice versa.

4.1 *Coraline*

4.1.1 Of House and Home: The Context of Subject/Environment Relationship

“For a moment she felt utterly dislocated. She did not know where she was; she was not entirely sure *who* she was” (Gaiman 65).

The story of *Coraline* is, like most stories, a journey of self-discovery. It is also a journey that closely resembles the one in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Coraline, like Alice, is an explorer. She strays away from the confines of what is familiar. The new world that Coraline must deal with is built with some semblance of normality but soon this remaining shred of familiarity is revealed to be façade. By making the secondary world a mirror image of Coraline's own home, Gaiman ensures that Coraline's sense of discomfort and confusion is

acute, leading to the moment of displacement that is mentioned in the quote above. It is of particular interest here how the change in environment can bring about such evocative questions of identity within *Coraline*. Thus, the house becomes an important starting point to consider when analysing subject/object relations within *Coraline*.

4.1.1.1 The House

In this section, I study how Coraline's own home is the first to respond to her desire for transition, thus prompting a relationship with the external environment and setting a series of transformations off within itself and the subject. The first line of the book itself is an invitation for us to read into Coraline's personality by observing the way she interacts with the house: "Coraline discovered the door a little while after they moved into the house" (Gaiman 1). The house's oddities and Coraline's natural curiosity seem to feed off of each other here. At once, a connection is formed and even though it is the house that allows Coraline in, it is Coraline's desire for transition that transforms the house from an object that one can depend on to a thing of fantasy. From the very beginning, Coraline is convinced that the doorway has to "go somewhere" (Gaiman 6). Despite her mother's reassurances that the doorway has been in a state of disuse for years, Coraline's disappointment is only temporary. As soon as her parents have left the house, Coraline cannot resist exploring the doorway once more. The act of reaching up to grab the keys of the mantelpiece is a deliberate transgression— yet another act that displays the desire for transition— especially when her mother was careful to keep them out of Coraline's reach. Once Coraline has the key to the doorway in hand, she notes that it "felt colder than any of the others" (Gaiman 24).

It is of little surprise to the readers (and to Coraline) that the once sealed doorway now opens into a dark tunnel. The house is, once more, alive thanks to Coraline's expectations. Coats

draws a parallel between Coraline's murky unconscious and the dangers of the outside world (Jackson et al. 79). It is significant, according to this parallel, that Coraline's secondary world is such a mirror image of her own. It adds a gothic touch to the setting with its "overturning of normalcy" (Jackson et al. 11). This is the call to adventure for Coraline. The similarity also prompts an implicit understanding of her environment. While it allows Coraline to travel into the kind of home she desires, her surroundings also allow for her to notice when certain objects are transformed. For instance, the first thing Coraline notices as she reaches the other side is a painting she has often seen in her own home:

She stared at the picture hanging on the wall: no, it wasn't exactly the same. The picture they had in their own hallways showed a boy in old-fashioned clothes staring at some bubbles. But now the expression on his face was different—he was looking at the bubbles as if he was planning to do something nasty indeed to them. And there was something peculiar about his eyes (Gaiman 25).

At this point the house is shifting into something real and alive without the provocation of Coraline's mind. It is, however, significant that Coraline is as observant as she is. This gothic manifestation of her home sharpens her senses and immediately she is able to pick out the subtle differences between her world and the world beyond the passageway. The nature of the house itself follows Brown's theory that objects belong in the realm of the understood and the contextualised, unless they are displaying thingness. It also serves to highlight the undertones of horror in this fantasy text for children: "It was so familiar—that was what made it so truly strange. Everything was exactly the same as she remembered ..." (Gaiman 69). The nature of the other mother's reality is fabricated to match Coraline's expectations and sometimes exceed them in order to entice the girl into remaining in the mirror world forever. A black cat that Coraline

encounters in the mirror world explains that, “There isn’t anywhere but here. This is all she made: the house, the grounds, and the people in the house. She made it and waited” (Gaiman 69). Furthermore, it is precisely because the house is so familiar that Coraline is quick to spot any anomalies. Later in the story, at a crucial part of Coraline’s rescue mission, she is able to notice even tiny details, such as “something she did not remember seeing before. A ball of glass up on the mantelpiece ... It was a snow globe, with two little people in it.” (Gaiman 69-70). The other house, though it may have been created and controlled by the other mother, is conditioning Coraline to become a more attentive child.

In the case of the unsettling painting that Coraline first encounters upon entering the mirror house, the malevolent eyes of the painted child works as foreshadowing on a couple of levels. For one thing, it indicates that Coraline’s other family can be distinguished from her real family by the eyes. For another, it implies that she may become the child in the poster— reduced to something less human. The latter implication materialises as a real possibility, at the end of Coraline’s exploration of this mirror house, when her other parents inform her that she could stay with them forever if only she would sacrifice her eyes. It is at this moment that the uncanny familiarity of the other mother’s house begins to feel overtly sinister to Coraline. This unsettling request, coupled with her odd surroundings, brings about a transformation in Coraline. She begins to see the mirror house for what it is not— it is not home. Her real parents were waiting for her on the other side. And while she did not enjoy the old manor that was meant to be her new home, she starts to understand that it was where she belonged. Thus, Coraline declines this offer and moves decisively towards the doorway which once more comes alive during her time of need: “She turned and hurried into the drawing room and pulled open the door in the corner. There was no brick wall there now—just darkness, a night-black underground darkness that

seemed as if things in it might be moving” (Gaiman 44). When she turns around at the other end, the doorway is walled up once more. The house lead her to an important realisation: “She was home” (Gaiman 45).

4.1.1.2 The Mirror

Despite there being a reliable connection between Coraline and the house, this relationship begins to deteriorate as the story progress. This transformation of the relationship between Coraline and her environment serves the purpose of further revealing the connection between the other mother and the other house, and hinting to Coraline, the other mother’s true nature. This change in relationship is best demonstrated by the nature of mirrors. When Coraline has returned home and is waiting for her parents, she peers into the mirror only to be presented with a vision that did not reflect her. Instead, “reflected in the mirror were her parents. They stood awkwardly in the reflection of the hall. They seemed sad and alone. As Coraline watched, they waved to her slowly, with limp hands ...” (Gaiman 51). Her parents, too, seem to understand the thingness of the mirror and use its malfunction to their advantage as Coraline’s mother leaves a message on the inside of the mirror glass. The mirror inverts the message but Coraline can make out the words “HELP US” (Gaiman 51).

Breitbach, drawing on Brown’s work, notes that objects are “meaning transparent” and things are “meaning opaque” (Breitbach 34). Artefacts like this mirror, touched by fantasy, function as photography does in Breitbach’s work. The mirror is both object and thing, as it portrays reality, as well as the meaning that viewers project onto it. This moment is significant because the object that should have shown Coraline herself instead shows her the next step of her journey. It juxtaposes Coraline’s need to find herself with her need to find her parents. Once more, the transformation is a psychological one. It moves Coraline from being a child who was

concerned with her own entertainment to a child who must deal with the consequences of transgressing the boundaries between the two houses. By showing Coraline her imprisoned parents, the mirror is giving her the incentive to challenge the other mother.

Coraline's connection with the house and all the transformed objects it contains does, however, begin to unravel when she travels back to the other mother's mirror house. In a way, as Coraline and the other mother are vying for the possession of Coraline's real parents, the house begins to sporadically display other instances of transgression. In the other mother's realm, mirrors no longer reveal truths. Instead, they betray Coraline and work to the other mother's will. What the other mother tells Coraline is a kind of untruth- "Mirrors ... are never to be trusted" (Gaiman 75). It is an untruth because the mirror did in fact present Coraline with the knowledge that the other mother was holding them captive, but it also kept the other mother's secrets. At first, it allows the other mother to weave her lies about Coraline's parents enjoying themselves without their daughter (Gaiman 60). Later, it is seen to be a doorway that conceals the other mother's prison: "Then she pushed the tiny key into the fabric of the mirror, and she twisted it. It opened like a door, revealing a dark space behind it" (Gaiman 77).

While in her prison, Coraline encounters the souls of children who have allowed themselves to be consumed by the other mother. Once more, inadvertently, the landscape that is under the other mother's control begins to give more incentive to Coraline to take charge of the situation that has spun out of her control. Connor, in his article, "Thinking Things" understands that whenever subjects attempt to distance themselves from objects, they inadvertently leave parts of themselves in the objects that they perceive or imagine. If we consider the other mother as a quasi-human subject, then despite trying to "drain herself" from the landscape by creating a thing that Coraline would relate to instead, the other mother has left a part of herself in the object

(Connor 1). As Connor observes, the object (i.e. the landscape of the mirror world) resembles the subject (i.e. the other mother) “not in sharing its particular powers or capacities, but in exhibiting the power of resistance or reserve, the power to withdraw or withhold itself from being known, that the subject secretly, stubbornly, assumes as its own alone” (Connor 2). The mirror, though it has been transformed several times to suit the other mother’s purposes, has been consistent in showing Coraline what she must do next. She is transformed from a girl who feels abandoned by her parents to a girl who finds the truth about her missing parents and decides to do something about it. She is transformed from an imprisoned girl who does not fully understand the other mother’s powers to a girl who is willing to challenge her anyway. From the dead children trapped behind the mirror, Coraline learns that the heart of the landscape, though it may sometimes transform at her touch or perception, is primarily an interpretation of the real world by the other mother. Negotiating this landscape that is inextricably linked to the other mother’s consuming power becomes Coraline’s primary objective. As David Rudd notes in his article “Metamorphic, Metaphoric and the Metanarrative of Childhood”, Coraline is faced with a choice: “negotiating a place for oneself in the world, such that one is recognised in one’s own right by others, rather than being either ignored on the one hand, or stifled on the other” (Drillsma-Milgrom et al. 19). Coraline, spurred by the need to rescue her parents and the souls of the children, makes the choice to negotiate her place in the world. Thus far, the transformations of the house and the mirror have pushed Coraline into her own transformation; she is shifting from a girl who is powerless in the face of change, to a girl is willing to affect change.

4.1.1.3 The Button/Eyes

As mentioned briefly under the section “The House”, buttons are an important indicator of thingness in *Coraline*. After the other parents allow Coraline to have the kind of magical life she

has been yearning for, they tell her that it would only take one simple change for her to continue living a fantastical life. The change she must undergo is to give up her human eyes and have button eyes sewn in, just like her other parents have. Bill Brown, in his seminal work for the *Critical Inquiry* “Thing Theory”, notes that people tend to look through objects and see their history or culture instead of seeing a thing (“Thing Theory” 4). It is only when the object malfunctions that they begin to see the thing itself. Here, Coraline observes a smaller instance of thingness when compared to the house, but one that is much more impactful. It is no longer possible to see a button as something that holds clothing together. It has displayed a kind of malfunction by replacing a person’s eyes. Thus, buttons in *Coraline* have a “changed relationship to the human subject”. By Bill Brown’s definition, it is an object that is asserting itself as a thing.

It is not, however, completely transformed into a thing since the object has shrugged off its mundane properties and donned new qualities. According to Cross, the purpose behind such a change would be to reduce something frightening to something absurd:

The humour of this sort of parody for young readers ... is in the story turning ‘things upside down’ ... In doing this, such texts are actually self-reflexive and foreground their own textuality, and this can, at least in theory, provide young readers with a subconscious awareness of deliberately constructed literary devices. (Jackson et al. 71)

This act of “turning things upside down” certainly does not go unnoticed by Coraline. She is further aware that while objects are transforming into things, certain subjects such as the other mother, are slowly turning into objects. By wearing buttons for eyes the other mother draws Coraline’s attention to the intention behind the odd proposition. It is a proposition that encourages Coraline to give up a part of her humanity in favour of becoming a subject-thing

hybrid. While the house and the mirror elicit cognitive transformations within Coraline, the thingness of the buttons brings about an external manifestation of Coraline's power. When she declines the proposition, she is displaying agency— agency being a quality only attributed to subjects. Coraline moves from being a child who is under the other other's thrall, to a child who is assertive about her individuality.

4.1.2 The Other Mother: The Context of Antagonist as Quasi-Subject

This sections looks at instances that indicate the other mother's status as both subject and object, and how this fluidity affects change within Coraline as she interacts with the other mother. It is worth noting that while Coraline is moving through the passageway it reveals something important about the other mother. Coraline notices "that there was something in the dark behind her: something very old and very slow" (Gaiman 45). Bruno Latour, whose work heavily influences Bill Brown's thing theory, rejects the subject/object dichotomy, claiming that "modernity artificially made an ontological distinction between inanimate objects and human subjects, whereas in fact the world is full of 'quasi-objects' and 'quasi-subjects'" (Kingery 12). While this blurring of lines is not applicable to characters like Coraline, it is certainly the case with the other mother. It confirms what Coraline seemed to have suspected since the moment she set eyes on the other mother. The other mother is not quite human. She is "*something*" that defies the nature of being a subject and that of being an object. The other mother is somewhere in between.

4.1.2.1 The Other Mother as Object

It is a point of interest that the other mother is a rather de-humanised antagonist. Her arrival is foreshadowed in the very beginning by way of shadow play: "The only light came from the hall, and Coraline, who was standing onto the drawing room carpet- she looked like a thin giant

woman” (Gaiman 9). Coraline could well have imagined this strange vision. When the other mother does make her first appearance, one of the first things that Coraline notices is that “(her) eyes were big black buttons” (Gaiman 26). As noted above, human eyes have several connotations attached to them, not only in terms of eyes being instrumental to the way we as a species display emotion, but also in terms of the more divine notion of eyes being the window to one’s soul. Eyes that are no more than bits of bone or plastic rejects either its own humanity or the way in which we imagine humanity. It is not only a parody of humanity that Gaiman is conveying, it is also an element of uncanny that is so typical to Gothic literature. As Rudd notes:

[A] major feature of the uncanny is the breaching of the divide between the animate and the inanimate: either seeing the inanimate coming to life (as dolls might do), or seeing life turning inanimate ... Giving each of these other neighbours button eyes, in fact, also marks them as closer to inanimate, likening them to dolls or teddies. (Drillsma-Milgrom et al. 21)

The shift from human to inhuman, is one that the other mother encourages Coraline to make as well: “On a china plate on the kitchen table was a spool of black cotton, and a long silver needle, and, beside them, two large black buttons ... ‘Oh, but we want you to,’ said her other mother. ‘We want you to stay. And it’s just a little thing.’” (Gaiman 43). The wording here points very precisely at what it means to shift from being a subject to an object. There is a loss of agency attached to this transformation and that is revealed with the words, “we want you to”. The button eyes are indicative of the kinds of eyes that old-fashioned dolls were once given. In a way, the other mother is pushing Coraline to forgo reality in order to enter a world of play. She wants Coraline to cease being a human girl and become a humanoid plaything instead. The

combination of the other mother's expectant button eyes is part of the reason it is easy for Coraline to spring into assertiveness and decline the offer.

4.1.2.2 The Other Mother as Subject

On the other hand, it is not just that the other mother looks inhuman that pushes Coraline into displaying agency. The other mother's offer is additionally sinister because, as Susan Honeyman notes, "child readers and characters have a presumed emotional responsibility to reciprocate love and earn adult approval" (Honeyman 3). It is also possible that the nature of the other mother's play-acting too has another purpose. She is playing the role of Coraline's mother and behaving the way Coraline wishes her real mother would behave. Just as the other mother has built the landscape to mirror an idyllic world for children, she is also enacting the role of an ideal maternal caretaker. She, quite literally, wears domesticity on her face in the form of neatly sewn buttons. The other mother's manner of luring Coraline to stay is also a form of play-acting. She is an almost-human being who replicates what she views as an enticing family setting for Coraline. The other mother shows her affection for her family through cooking, and in the way in which the other father's affections are comparatively muted and his mannerisms pleasant to the point of neutral.

It is only when Coraline declines the offer to stay in the mirror world in exchange for her human eyes that the other mother's act begins to fall apart. It starts with the kidnapping of Coraline's real parents. As the story progresses, the more inhuman her disposition is revealed to be, the more monstrous the other mother physically appears. For example, when Coraline returns to the mirror world to rescue her parents she notices that the "other mother's wet-looking black hair drifted around her head, like the tentacles of a creature in the deep ocean" (Gaiman 60). This is also the point at which, the mirror world and its inhabitants begin to disintegrate: "He looked

less like her true father today. There was something slightly vague about his face—like bread dough that had begun to rise, smoothing out the bumps and cracks and depressions” (Gaiman 68). Eventually, as a final reminder that the other mother was never human to begin with, we see that her right hand is detached and functioning perfectly on its own (Gaiman 145). Up until that point, however, there is a strong conflict between subject and object, as well as between subjective behaviour and objective behaviour. These transformations in the other mother feed Coraline’s conviction to hold on her identity as a subject.

The more that Coraline’s stays true to her own subjective experience as a human child, the more that the other mother attempts to objectify her. For example, while alternating between positive and negative reinforcement to regulate Coraline’s behaviour, the other mother provides her with the kind of wardrobe that would have delighted any child. Just like in a fairy tale, the other mother is attempting to trap Coraline in a net of idyllic family life. Arguably, though the other mother’s appearance is less human at this point, she is grasping at the human notion that a firm hand can mould a child. This is illustrative of what Honeyman argues about fairy tales often depicting the pros and cons of good intentions. For instance:

Protectionism can imprison ... Rapunzel is the original material girl, controlled by the material relations surrounding her and in fact named after the material for which she was bartered. A prototype of the consumer child, she is at once excluded from and defined by commodities- a commodity herself. (Honeyman xii)

Unlike Rapunzel, however, Coraline has the luxury of choice from early in the story. Though it takes her a while to understand the dangers of “protectionism, smothering possessive love, and our own vulnerable craving” (Honeyman xii) Coraline does, eventually, figure out for herself the ways in which the other mother is trying to gain ownership on her:

If I'm going to do this, thought Coraline, I'm not going to do it in her clothes. She changed back into her pyjamas and her dressing gown and her slippers, leaving the gray sweater and the black jeans neatly folded up on the bed, the orange boots on the floor by the toy box (Gaiman 96).

As the other mother moves from being a nightmarish creature to occupying the role of a stern parent, Coraline remains unyielding. When Coraline refuses to do as she is told, the other mother imprisons her in a dungeon behind a mirror. In the morning, Coraline finds herself freed and the other mother explains that she “came and fetched (her) out of the cupboard” (Gaiman 87), as if the child were a piece of china. It is clear that the other mother sees Coraline as a kind of “object-daughter”; a daughter whose role is rigid and specified, who has her agency only if her owner should grant it to her. At every turn Coraline finds ways to reject being “a commodity herself”.

Food in *Coraline* serves a similar, colonising purpose as clothing does. Early in the story, when Coraline first encounters the other mother, she is delighted by the food she can consume. The other mother is, at this point, primarily performing the role of an ideal mother here. Later in the story, however, Coraline realizes that it is unwise to consume what the other mother has produced. “Food— procuring it, cooking it, eating it— dominates the material as the overriding image of survival; consuming it offers contradictory metaphors of life and civilization as well as barbarity and extinction” (Honeyman 4). Coraline is careful to consume only what she needs to sustain herself and avoids anything that could be deemed as a privilege: “She drank the orange juice, but even though she knew she would like it she could not bring herself to taste the hot chocolate” (Gaiman 91). Thus, the comforts of home life— food, clothing and even emotional support— are transformed by the shift in their purpose. They are no longer meant to nourish a

child, rather they are used by the other mother for two purposes. The first is to use these comforts to create a poor imitation of what it means to be a human family. The second, most important purpose is to use these empty gestures to control and subjugate. In a way, every time Coraline exercises her agency, the other mother views this transgression as a sign that Coraline is transforming from something she fancies as an object into a foreign thing she cannot understand. It is because of the other mother's attempts to control her that Coraline learns to react with cleverness. She uses simple rejections to display that she is transitioning from a victim position to a position of power. It is uncanny for the other mother to behold. In reality, the other mother does not see anyone but herself as a true subject, a being with agency and power.

4.1.3 Through the Seeing Stone: The Context of Objects as Weapons and Tools

Just as the other mother tries to colonise Coraline's sense of self through the misuse of material objects, so too does Coraline use objects as tools of resistance. In this section I will examine how Coraline is able to use the objects that come into her possession and how these interactions transform her.

4.1.3.1 The Stone

The first and most important tool that Coraline has in her possession is the stone that she was given from adults who do not want to control her. Instead of allowing their concern for her safety to manifest in a restricting, protective air, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible decide to empower her:

On the mantelpiece was a small jar, and Miss Spink took off the top of the jar and began to pull things out of it. There was a tiny china duck, a thimble, a strange brass coin, two paper clips, and a stone with a hole in it.

She passed Coraline the stone with a hole in it.

‘What’s it for?’ asked Coraline. The hole went all the way through the middle of the stone. She held it up to the window and looked through it.

‘It might help,’ said Miss Spink. ‘They’re good for bad things, sometimes.’ (Gaiman 19)

One of the stipulations of the game Coraline is playing with the other mother is that the only way Coraline can return home safely with her real parents is if she first locates the souls of the other mother’s previous victims. The stone, Coraline finds, is what allows her to do this task, having no idea what shape or size a child’s soul is meant to be: “Through the stone, the world was gray and colorless, like a pencil drawing. Everything in it was gray—no, not quite everything: something glinted on the floor, something the color of an ember in a nursery fireplace, the color of a scarlet-and-orange tulip nodding in the May sun” (Gaiman 95). As it turns out, the physical appearance of a child’s soul is similar to that of a marble.

However, the stone is useful for more than a treasure hunt. The stone is, what Connor would refer to as, a “thinking thing”. In his study of how “things get into life and thought”, he argues that a thinking thing must be “at once a thing and no-thing. It must offer a picturing of the unpicturable, in a form with limit, definition and internal continuity ... But it must do so in such a way as always to suggest its own insufficiency” (Connor 17). While Connor is specifically looking at the notion of words and how they are affected by the subject/object nexus, this idea could be applied in this particular case as well, where the stone on its own remains a most mundane object until Coraline looks through it and sees a different world. Once more, Gaiman uses commonplace objects and gives them completely new contexts. If the house is what hints at the other mother’s realm being a trap for Coraline, it is the stone that confirms it. When Coraline put the stone up to her eye, it is transformed from an inert object to a looking glass that reveals the depressing reality of other mother’s world to Coraline. Without the stone Coraline is lost; and

without Coraline, the stone remains a stone. It becomes an externalization of Coraline's courage as well as a display of her innermost thoughts and desires. Thus, the nature of the stone is transformed just as it simultaneously transforms Coraline's perception of the world. For example, when Coraline is getting ready to face off with the other mother, she pulls on her clothes— a pair of orange boots, eats the apple that she had brought from her own realm— and then pulls out the stone from her pocket; “and it was as if her head had cleared a little. As if she had come out of some sort of a fog” (Gaiman 67). In another instance, the stone is described as having a “reassuring shape” and instinctively, she pulls it out of her pocket and holds it as if she were handling a gun (Gaiman 93). Through her decision to challenge the other mother, the stone is transformed from a lifeless object to a weapon-like thing. By the same token, it puts Coraline in a position of power by granting her the kind of clarity of purpose that only knowledge can bestow. The stone is instrumental in transforming Coraline into a girl of action instead of a victim of ignorance.

4.1.3.2 The Black Cat

While Coraline is wondering how best to negotiate the release of her parents and the stolen souls, she gains an ally. Coraline is periodically is advised by a black cat that is, like the other inhabitants and objects in the mirror house, transformed. Honeyman refers to the “tendency of post-industrial toy narratives is to idealize passivity by romanticizing the object position” (Honeyman 33). She elaborates using the example of the *Toy Story* films “where the toys prefer passively playing possum while being played with (“loved”) by human children over moving freely as they do when left alone” (Honeyman 33). While the cat is yet another creature that is can be classified as a creature that shifts between the subject and object positions, it is still a creature of flesh and blood. The cat is not like the toys provided to Coraline by the other mother.

Unlike toys, the cat makes it very clear that it does not belong to anyone. It speaks when it wants to speak, and uses Coraline for comfort just as Coraline uses it. It does not play possum or indicate passivity in any way, despite the fact that the house and its inhabitants could be considered a part of the other mother's private collection of objects. The cat notes astutely about the nature of the relationship between the other mother and her "collection": "'Made it, found it—what's the difference?' asked the cat. 'Either way, she's had it a very long time'" (Gaiman 73). The cat, however, being a character that shuttles between the subject and object binary cannot be owned by anyone. While it has been interacting with Coraline in the real world, it only speaks to Coraline in the mirror world. Whether this is how the fantasy world has been built, whether this is Coraline's imagination, or whether this is a choice that the cat makes, we cannot be sure. What is certain is that the cat is a very important ally for Coraline to have, much like the stone. By making the decision to present a familiar with such dry wit, Gaiman has ensured that the cat is not idealized, and only pushes Coraline to seek out her own identity as a subject.

Furthermore, the cat provides Coraline with the courage she needs to face the other mother. The cat does this by encouraging Coraline to affect change and challenge the other mother to a game of exploring since, as the cat says, "There's no guarantee she'll play fair, but her kind of thing loves games and challenges" (Gaiman 63). This transition from a quest for freedom to a game of exploring is reminiscent of Rijke's study on boundaries and horror in picture books where she notes that:

play mimics or mocks the uncertainties and risks of survival, and the best picture book experiences can create social agency in a reading process that evokes the horrific and the ludic as unconsciously as the processes at work in the nightmare, the daydream, and the child at play. (Drillsma-Milgrom et al. 171)

This is also the case in *Coraline*. The introduction of play allows Coraline to exercise her agency and play to her strengths. When the stone reveals the physical manifestation of these souls to resemble glass marbles, her quest is turned into a treasure hunt. The nightmarish setting of the other mother's realm no longer hinders Coraline. The cat's suggestion of playing a game puts Coraline back in her element as she has always been an explorer and this is merely another expedition. Thus, the cat's transformation within the other mother's realm has directly affected the way Coraline transforms from the passive position of a girl who is lost to the active position of a girl who is merely exploring.

4.1.3.3 Building and Divesting Personal Collections

Eventually, like Miss Spink and the other mother, Coraline begins her own collection. This section analyses the changes that Coraline goes through as she collects, builds, and divests her personal collection of objects. As Akin notes in her examination of the motivation behind collecting objects and the histories that the objects receive from their collectors: "What we learn by studying privately collected material is that its movement through space and time depends on these motivations for developing any particular collection ... Understanding the different motivations that lead to personal collections can provide us with new information" (Kingery 105). Analysing Coraline's personal collection leads to the conclusion that hers is a temporary collection simply because her motivations for hoarding objects—magical or otherwise—are often related to survival. In the beginning of her quest, Coraline goes through the motion of arming herself and her collection of supplies are all objects that she would have to return, lose, or consume: "[She] found a box of in-case-of-emergency white wax candles, and thrust one into a candlestick. She put an apple into each pocket. She picked up the ring of keys and took the old black key off the ring" (Gaiman 53-4). While, in the other mother's realm the candles are used

up and the apples are eaten. Later, when Coraline makes her escape from the other mother's house, she locks the door behind her, keeps the key with her "but she put(s) the gray marbles beneath her pillow" (Gaiman 139). That night, Coraline dreams about the children whose souls she had rescued. She dreams that they are finally free to move on. Upon waking up she finds that the marbles are broken and hollow. Coraline, unlike the other mother, does not hoard objects for her own selfish purposes. Coraline has used her identity as a subject to choose to set her friends free, thereby restoring their humanity to them. Losing her personal collection only changes her in the sense that she is moving towards being a very empathetic teenager.

When she realises that the other mother's hand has followed her through the tunnel, Coraline is quick to set up a trap. For this she must sacrifice yet another personal collection. It is a collection of playthings that Coraline had amassed as a young child: "I didn't think you played with your dolls anymore," said Mrs. Jones. "I don't," admitted Coraline. "They're protective coloration" (Gaiman 151). With a child's tea party being Coraline's "protective coloration", the black key sits in the middle of a paper picnic cloth atop a very much open well (Gaiman 156). When the hand goes for the key and consequently falls into the well, it heralds a metaphoric transformation in Coraline's identity. Coraline has forfeited a part of her childhood. She is now transitioning into an older and wiser child. At the end of the book, Coraline also sees fit to return the stone to Miss Spink: "I don't need it anymore. I'm very grateful. I think it may have saved my life, and saved some other people's death" (Gaiman 159). The issue of "need" versus "want" is, at this point, quite clear for Coraline. This can be seen as a direct result of her interactions with the other mother who constantly attempts to entrap her with material things. When confronted about her indifference at the offer of having whatever she wants Coraline is exasperated: "You really don't understand, do you?" she said. "I don't *want* whatever I want.

Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted? Just like that, and it didn't *mean* anything. What then?" (Gaiman 118). It is, therefore, through the act of divulging all the things she has thus far encountered that Coraline is finally able to transform into her own person, individual and free.

4.1.4 Summary of Transformative Subject/Object Relationships in *Coraline*

Over the course of her story, Coraline encounters three major contexts that prompt certain kinds of transformations within her. The first context is her environment, which serves to transform Coraline's limited perception of the other world by introducing objects that malfunction in unsettling ways. It becomes clear that it is not so much the "dislocation" of Coraline from the real world to the mirror world, as the tiny ways in which objects malfunction and turn into things, that causes Coraline to realise how volatile her own identity is. The transforming house alters Coraline's understanding of what home really means to her, the various transformations of the mirror prompt Coraline to transform into a character that must challenge the other mother, while the unsettling nature of the buttons ensures that Coraline chooses to defend her own identity as subject. Coraline's interactions with the environment transforms her from a girl who escapes reality to a girl who fights to gain it back. The second context of the other mother as a quasi-human reinforces Coraline's transformation into an agentive heroine. The other mother's inclination to collect Coraline (as she did with other children) and treat her as an object, provides a catalyst for a change within Coraline. Coraline is forced to transform from a girl who is reacting to the other mother's gestures, to a girl who is actively challenging them. The final context of objects as weapons or tools provides several examples of how Coraline's character development— as gauged through a series of transformations— is very much dependent on the objects that she encounters and their breakdowns. She is, by resourcefully using the tools handed

to her, able to reject an identity that takes away her subjectivity. She is also, by giving away objects that once belonged to her, able to avoid encroaching on others' subjectivity. In the case of the cat— a being that floats between the subject/object binary— it is the fact that the cat is able to speak his mind that prompts Coraline to be brave and speak her own. Only through these interactions and reactions is Coraline able to transform from a girl who wanted special clothing in order to stand out in school, into someone whose self-worth is not dependent on what she owns but rather on how she uses the things that have come into her possession.

4.2 *Half World*

4.2.1 Between Worlds: The Context of Subject/Environment Relationship

“In times of crisis and indecision who will advice you?” (Goto 78).

Melanie Tamaki is the child of two worlds. She was conceived in the half world where it should have been impossible for any life to grow, but was born and raised in the mortal world, unknowing of her background. In addition to this unusual origin story, Melanie is also implied to be the focus of the prophecy that the novel opens with. At the time of her birth, the three realms are at disorder, and the prophecy hints at the existence of a child that may bring balance to the realms. It is implied that although Melanie is born in Vancouver, Canada and leads a mundane existence for most of her life, she may have a larger destiny awaiting her. Her journey then, is to find out what that destiny is and face it.

4.2.1.1 The Crows

This section examines a prevalent feature of both the worlds that Melanie is to interact with— crows. Throughout the text, it is suggested that these birds are otherworldly creatures, and thus, cannot be entirely considered as subjects. In this section, I study how Melanie's interactions with the crows prompt her transformation from a mundane girl to a chosen one. Her journey begins

with the crows in the city of Vancouver. It is in this city that it becomes evident that Melanie is indeed a girl of two worlds— a misfit, with her large body, her Japanese decent, but most importantly, her odd affinity for crows and their affinity for her: “Melanie didn’t know if the crows began loving her first or if her love had called the crows, but whenever she ventured outdoors they were nearby ... her dark guardians were never far” (Goto 17). Unable to carve a place for herself in this world and chased away from school by bullies, Melanie finds peace by observing the crows by the docks. It is at this point that the world around her begins to crack around the edges. Melanie’s isolation from the rest of her peers and from her family gives way to the desire for transition, even if the transition does not take her to a new place. It is the desire to belong that sets off a chain of events that push Melanie to adventure. Thus, her connection with the crows prompts a series of quick, unsettling transformations.

As Melanie is absently watching how crows work at breaking open mussels for consumption, they are aware of her gaze. To her surprise, they drop a fortune cookie in front of her. Its message, a chilling one, is undoubtedly for Melanie’s own digestion- “GO HOME” (Goto 19). Goto has taken the simple fortune cookie with its standard set of formulaic “fortunes”, and transformed it into a foreboding motif. This message has transformed Melanie’s humdrum life into something chilling and fantastical. Her gaze and her desires have transformed the crows from undomesticated creatures to messengers that evoke reaction and action, especially since Melanie does go home after receiving the fortune. In this case, the crows have two functions. They serve as extensions of the half world as well as a physical manifestation of the call to adventure. When Melanie finds that her mother is kidnapped, she realizes that she must travel to the half world. Here, the crows have a third function in relation to Melanie. Not only do they metaphorically push Melanie into action, as a pathway between the worlds, they literally serve as

a bridge that allows Melanie to traverse into a new environment: “The black airborne bridge. . . . It was crows” (Goto 57). Thus, Melanie’s attention to the crows transforms them and, in turn, they transform her from a regular teenage girl to a girl more befitting a prophecy.

4.2.1.2 The Gatekeeper

This section deals with the gatekeeper between the worlds as a salient object that interacts with Melanie. The gatekeeper is a statue that collects a toll from all who pass between the half world and the realm of flesh. In that sense, the gatekeeper is a permanent fixture of the half world and is one of the first things that Melanie must interact with. The half world is not— as evidenced by the bridge of crows— an exact replica of the world Melanie was born into. Instead, it takes elements of the real world and twists their nature for an eerie effect. The toll keeper of the half world is one such distorted figure. The statue has very limited lines, which could indicate her limited scope for cognition and emotion, however, the narration humanizes her by giving her a gender: “With a great groan a giant wrenched free of her mountain prison, and the cliff ledge shook, small stones tumbling, as the Gatekeeper stiffly stepped out of the wall . . . ‘You must pay the toll in order to pass,’ her low voice rumbled” (Goto 6). This is the first introduction we get of the gatekeeper in the book, when Melanie’s parents are attempting to flee the half world. It is interesting to note that the almost-subject of the gatekeeper asks for a hefty price— one that commodifies the passengers. The gatekeeper asks for payment in the form of the smallest finger on a traveller’s hand. It is a toll that Melanie’s father offers to pay in his wife’s stead in addition to staying behind with Mr. Glueskin as insurance. In that sense, the gatekeeper has affected the nature of Melanie’s life even before she is born. If Fumiko and Shinobu were able to evade the toll and escape sooner, they would not have had to make a deal with Mr. Glueskin, and Melanie may have had a father.

Baudrillard makes the argument that subjects are the ones who make history and objects are the ones that are “shamed, obscene, and passive” (“Thing Theory” 8). The gatekeeper certainly verifies this assessment of subjects and objects, given that she uses her ability to speak—the only feature that humanizes her—to perpetuate a base system of consumerism. The gatekeeper is an interesting example of the subject/object relationship wherein both subject and object attempt to transform each other and fail. Melanie never has to alter herself by biting her finger off in order to pass between worlds, and the gatekeeper remains an objective bystander, unwilling to change at Melanie’s insistence. At the very end of the novel when Melanie is attempting to return to the living world, the gatekeeper is not swayed by her cause: “‘Change the cycle!’ She smacked the stone so hard the small bones of her hand were on the verge of breaking. ‘Help us now! Choose!’ Melanie’s voice cracked” (Goto 189). The disinclination of the statue to be an agent for change is likened to the people who dwell in the half world, who are not only compelled to repeat the traumas of their human lives but sometimes choose to repeat them. Brown mentions that act of putting economic values on cultural values influences how people perceive themselves and the objects in their vicinity. He believes that this kind of cycle of objectification and social coding disallows the production of things; that is, items that are not perceived as anything other than what they actually are (“The Secret Life of Things” 2). Similarly, the inhabitants of the half world, especially the gatekeeper, act as enforcers of a consumer culture that cannot produce change while transforming subjects into objects. The gatekeeper, inadvertently, transforms Melanie into someone who would rather not fall victim to the realm’s frightening consumer culture. She may be ignorant of her journey ahead, but at this point, Melanie knows who (or what) she does not want to become.

4.2.1.3 The Prophecy

In this section I examine how Melanie has, thus far, carried the burden of a prophecy without understanding how the words affect her. The prophecy is an incredibly important part of the half world given that its fulfilment may alter the nature of the entire realm. The truth behind the prophecy is only revealed to Melanie's eyes, and thus Melanie is compelled to transform from her mother's rescuer to the saviour of the realms. The prophecy is primarily concerned with the state of affairs in the half world and mention that change can only be brought by an unlikely child who is born in the half world realm. This is why, when Melanie encounters one version of the prophecy in Vancouver, it does not make sense to her: "So ends what should not be / when a child is born / impossibly / in the nether Realm of Flesh" (Goto 38). It is only in the half world that the prophecy is clearer to her. While Melanie is pushed into a state of action by crows, and is transformed by the gatekeeper into a person who resists unfavourable change, it is the full comprehension of half world's prophecy that transforms Melanie into someone who accepts her role as a bringer of change.

The half world is a place where people are changed radically, but these changes are meant to punish its inhabitants. The residents are so traumatised by the purgatory they are endlessly forced to suffer that they become as unyielding as the gatekeeper. It is because of their seeming apathy that the half world residents are unable to make the decisions that may lead them to the Spirit Realm, thus necessitating Melanie's role as an agent of change. One resident of the half world, however, is different from the rest. Her name is Gao Zhen Xi, and it is hinted that she is an ancestor of Melanie's neighbour in Vancouver, Ms. Wei. Gao Zhen Xi provides a clear understanding of why the people of the half world are so void of motivation and agency. It is because of these roles that govern the half world that Melanie finds herself taking up the role of

the reluctant hero: “You are alive in a Realm that is not alive, that is why you create change. That is why you are capable of breaking the patterns” (Goto 108).

However, this knowledge is not sufficient enough to transform Melanie from a regular teenager into a saviour. As they rifle through the towers of old records, Gao Zhen Xi finds a prophecy that is similar to the one in the introductory narrative. It echoes the words that Ms. Wei shows Melanie in the realm of flesh. The words and Melanie have always had a connection and like with the crows, Melanie’s gaze is the thing that transforms the object she is interacting with. The words only take shape and make sense when a reader is intent on deciphering them. At this point, however, the words have changed slightly and seem to be talking about more than one baby that could be relevant to the half world’s future. This constantly mutating history is a kind of thingness that Kingery refers to as “a formation process” and explores to some extent in *Learning from Things*: “All history is fiction; we can never ‘know’ the past ... Formation processes are the ways by which material entities— documents, artifacts, monuments, oral histories, geographical features— are able to survive the ravages of time and becomes evidence” (Kingery 6-7). By understanding the prophecy that Gao Zhen Xi has managed to preserve, Melanie is able to understand the how the half world perpetuates its own existence. She understands why the realm must break the cycle of violence and pain. Unfortunately, she is unable to understand her own role in fulfilling the prophecy. Gao Zhen Xi asserts that, “Words are Spirit also, and when they are written down there is power” (Goto 105). Although this is an empowering thought, it is a double-edged sword. As we have learnt, words in the half world change to accommodate even the most recent of changes. This suggests that just because a prophecy is written, it does not have to the strength to undo the future that may come to pass. Should Melanie fail at her task, the prophecy could simply read differently. Once more, it is up

to the subject to push back at the restrictions placed by objects. Melanie has the choice to believe in the transforming words and take up the role of saviour, or she could choose to simply rescue her mother and leave.

At this point Melanie's transformation, though a small one, is still significant. Given her various interactions with the prophecy and her understanding of the way the half world functions, Melanie has gained a new skill. She is slowly moving from the position of a hesitant girl, to one who can use her ability to decipher the prophecy for her own purposes. Melanie chooses to use this ability to her advantage when she is faced with a deranged Mr. Glueskin who is forcing her to read the prophecy to him. She sees that the words have indeed changed: "A child has grown / across the Realms / what divides draws / near. A child / may be reborn / so ends / what may / begin" (Goto 155). Having read these words that have opened themselves only to her, she realizes what she must do. She proceeds to recite a prophecy that is entirely of her making, thus tricking Mr. Glueskin into letting his guard down: "All you have sought / has been lost / oh child of woe / weep, accept / your fate lies / in the hand / of the new / master / obey" (Goto 158). For once, instead of being coerced and pushed into action by the words of others, Melanie is able to reject incorporation and initiate her own change. Melanie is able to set into motion a new set of possibilities for the future. Thus, Melanie transforms the half world just as she herself is being transformed by the mutating prophecy.

4.2.2 On Mr. Glueskin: The Context of Antagonist as Quasi-Subject

In this section I analyse Mr. Glueskin's unique function as both subject and object and the ways his fluid, shifting nature affects the way Melanie's understanding of the half world and of herself. Particularly, I examine how the transformations within Mr. Glueskin prompt reactive transformations within Melanie. As with the rest of the inhabitants of half world, Mr. Glueskin

forgoes the ability to have a completely human form, but it his ability to use his unnatural form to collect people and make them his playthings that makes him a formidable opponent to Melanie who is barely in charge of her own destiny. It is his will that drives half world into a state of perpetual anguish, and Melanie cannot avoid interacting with him if she intends on rescuing her mother and bringing balance to the realms.

4.2.2.1 Mr. Glueskin as Object

Right from the opening of the novel, Mr. Glueskin is presented as supernatural. He has a humanoid appearance but Mr. Glueskin does not care for a human form when his power lies in the ability to stretch his body like glue: “Something white, gluey and elastic smacked and adhered to the rock face, a long strand stretching, intact from the point of origin” (Goto 7). When Melanie first hears his voice on the phone the narration describes the voice as sounding “moist” (Goto 30), comparing his speech to the sticky nature of glue. Mr. Glueskin can disfigure his shape and take form again, such as when he wants to attack from a distance: “The bulbous tip began to grow, growing fuller, larger, bringing shape to the smoothness, the beginnings of a mouth. A white tongue. It whipped out blindly and struck down a mountain of books” (Goto 110). He also uses his glue-like body to embarrass his victims, in addition to capturing them. When he is pretending at being human, he twists simple things, like twisting the activity of playing into a mockery. In one instance, he forces Melanie to play a “fun game” of dressing up as a bride (Goto 135), when clearly he wishes to kill her. Mr. Glueskin with his teasing tone and mercurial temper is himself a grotesque imitation of a child who has no self control and who only wishes to control others. It is especially exaggerated in his celebration scene, when he has successfully trapped Melanie: “WHERE ARE MY FREAKING PRESENTS” (Goto 137). This temperament intimates a conscious decision to reject human behaviour and the status of being a

subject. Later in the story, Mr. Glueskin's disgust and delight at Melanie who is an anomalous living being in his realm, manifests in a kind of consuming hunger: "'Isn't she loveleeeeeeee,'" Mr. Glueksin sang. 'Isn't she deeeelicious?' He released his tongue and it sailed five meters across the room to land with a friendly *splat* upon her upper arm" (Goto 147). At this point, Goto is setting Mr. Glueskin up as gothic motif; a villain whose "dangerous impulses and aggressions" amidst "dark landscapes" is a way to deal with the protagonists' own mental topography (Jackson et al.78-79). This implies that every time Mr. Glueskin's actions confirm his status as quasi-subject, Melanie is able understand why she herself must value her status as a subject. Thus, Melanie's understanding of herself and her relation to the half world is triggered by observing Mr. Glueskin's fluid identity.

When Melanie is captured by Mr. Glueskin, he stares at her with disdain, and declares, "You look so ugly and you have so little to work with. You need to *freshen up*. You need an *outfit* ... Fumiko, get her a dress" (Goto 139). Fumiko complies, having been subdued by the half world and Mr. Glueskin. This subservient act from her mother fills Melanie with a rage and resolve: "A sheet of fire seemed to roar behind her eyes. Her mother treated like this. Like an object. Like a *thing*" (Goto 153). Not only is Mr. Glueskin ignoring his humanity but he is also dehumanizing Fumiko, which is a transformation that deeply affects Melanie here as she admits, for the first time, to feeling angry about her situation instead of hopeless or defeated. Melanie's transformation from a passive victim to a reactive agent of change is one of the changes triggered by Mr. Glueskin.

4.2.2.2 Mr. Glueskin as Subject

The only time that we see Mr. Glueskin in a close approximation of a human appearance is when he has laid a trap out for Melanie. By keeping Fumiko as a hostage and his personal maidservant,

Mr. Glueskin has ensured the return of Melanie to the half world. Up until that point, Mr. Glueskin has coerced Melanie into a state of action. By the time Melanie finds her mother, however, Melanie is already starting to exercise what little agency she has. At this point, both Melanie and Mr. Glueskin are playing parts to deceive one another. Melanie has forgone her own clothes to disguise herself as housekeeper and a resident of half world. Meanwhile Mr. Glueskin is playing the part of a well-dressed human man:

Mr. Glueskin seemed taller than the last time she had seen him. And his face had changed yet again. Longer, leaner, he had raised the bridge of his nose and widened his brow. His hair was silver instead of white, slightly messy upon his high forehead. His white eyes gleamed. Dressed in a worn and ragged tuxedo, still ensconced in his stinking rubber boots, he looked like a groom who had deserted his wedding and had been on the streets for a very long time ... His middle was not bulging, as it would have been if he had swallowed up Gao Zhen Xi. (Goto 127)

It is interesting that Mr. Glueskin is described as having been dressed for a wedding, given the clothes he forces Melanie to wear. She contemplates with growing trepidation that the white dress provided for her “looked like something for a wedding ... or for a sacrifice” (Goto 146). Mr. Glueskin, though he cannot reclaim his status as a subject completely, can perform shallow imitations of what it is like to be human. In this case, he forces Melanie to wear a white dress in mockery of a wedding but also in order to transform her, against her will, from her “ugly” self to someone dressed to celebrate an event. Unbeknownst to him, this forced transformation only causes Melanie to react with bravery rather than submission.

When Melanie admits to liking books, “[especially] antique books in used bookstores. They’re like finding treasure”, Mr. Glueskin “squealed with glee. ‘You’re going to love this ...

It's filled with secrets and prophecies, and I want you to tell me what you see. Because they tell me the words change depending upon who reads them'" (Goto 150). It is very likely that the prophecy did not reveal itself to Mr. Glueskin. It is also possible that a person with half-life, a quasi-subject such as Mr. Glueskin, may never be able to read *The Book of Realms*. It is partly because Melanie is so used to interacting with words and so accustomed to visualising the various possibilities presented by the prophecy that she is able to use the book to her advantage. Mr. Glueskin, in all probability, has never treasured anything, whereas Melanie's story begins with her finding refuge at a bookstore. This is the moment when we see how much Melanie has changed over the course of the novel. In the beginning, we are introduced to Melanie who is running from her bullies. Now, Melanie is facing Mr. Glueskin and, in a bid to save the half world, she outwits Mr. Glueskin by extemporising a fake prophecy. This does nothing to save herself or her mother, but having had enough of Mr. Glueskin objectifying her, Melanie finally transforms from a passive bystander to an active agent who accepts her role as the chosen one. She understands that in order to save her mother, she must take responsibility of the prophecy's fulfilment and save all of half world as well.

4.2.3 "Ask Again Later": The Context of Objects as Weapons and Tools

In this section I deal with the manner in which the relationship between subjects and objects are altered when a personal collection is shared or divested. Particularly, I examine the objects that Melanie has either collected or presented. I analyze how the histories of the objects in her own collection begin to transform as she manipulates them for her own purposes, and how Melanie is affected by the transformations and manipulations of the quasi-objects in her possession.

4.2.3.1 Jade Rat

When Melanie receives the phone call from Mr. Glueskin, which confirms that her mother was indeed taken to a different world, Melanie seeks consolation from Ms. Wei, who had always helped Melanie when she was being bullied. Once it becomes apparent that Melanie is the girl who must bring about change in the half world, Ms. Wei assigns herself as a guardian for the girl, preparing her for the journey ahead. She proceeds to pick out one of her treasures:

The second item was a smaller piece of green jade, and amulet tied to red string. Melanie thought it looked like a rat. Ms. Wei held the amulet up to the light and it twirled slowly.

The jade was a deep imperial green, darker in the centre and more transparent at the edges. (Goto 41)

She chooses to give the Jade Rat to Melanie for “luck and strength”. She explains that the “Jade Rat has been in Ms. Wei’s family for more years than can be remembered. Ms. Wei gifts it to Melanie now.” (Goto 41).

When Ms. Wei and Melanie get separated, it is Melanie who experiences Jade Rat’s thingness first. As Melanie is negotiating with the gatekeeper who asks for the payment of a finger, she is not only under the shock of being faced with a new world, but is also under the pressure of time as the bridge of crows await impatiently to provide passage. Melanie tries and fails to bite her own finger off. At this point, the Jade Rat impatiently crunches the smallest of her jade toes off: ““Do you accept this toll?” the green rat said hoarsely, panting” (Goto 60). This does not, however, indicate an affection or loyalty for Melanie. When Melanie’s footing fails her, the Jade Rat does not look behind. Animated jade though she may be, the Jade Rat could not have done much for Melanie, and while Melanie understands this, she is also affronted at being abandoned. She considers thanking the Jade Rat for presenting the gatekeeper with payment but

struggles to sympathise: “Besides, she’s made of stone. Stone can’t feel pain.... She did not have it inside her to forgive the rat” (Goto 66). Later, when Jade Rat asks about another of Melanie’s magical possessions, Melanie is annoyed and fantasizes about kicking the rat into a chasm. Though Melanie considers it, she does not leave the Jade Rat behind, Melanie feels that it would be “disrespectful and wrong to leave the gift behind” (Goto 71). At this point, Melanie feels no sense of companionship to the tools that have been placed in her charge. Especially in the case of Jade Rat, she is reluctant to solidify this bond between herself and what she sees as a thing. She instead chooses to connect with the person who presented “it” to her. In turn, Jade Rat’s inability to value her travel companion, and Melanie’s annoyance at being unable to understand the mysterious Jade Rat’s motive and nature is the starting point for both subject and quasi-object to transform one another. This transformation begins when Melanie inadvertently returns Jade Rat to archivist Gao Zhen Xi.

As they reunite, Gao Zhen Xi and Jade Rat are both ignited with a new fire. It is clear, however, that Jade Rat has a great amount of agency that has been granted to her. She is the most human-like object because she is literally made out of Gao Zhen Xi: “I left a little of my Spirit inside the properties of stone” (Goto 101). Just as Melanie is looking for her mother, Jade Rat had unknowingly been seeking her own maker. Kingery notes that:

The association of objects in a new form can tell us a lot about the conscious and unconscious beliefs of the collector and his or her cultural context ... The study of humankind through what they collect and how they use it, the associations and transformations involved, offers a new and fascinating perspective. (Kingery 9)

In that case, Jade Rat transforms from amulet to creature, to a creature with a human spirit that carries with it the history of Gao Zhen Xi, Ms. Wei, as well as Melanie since it was Melanie who

connects all four of them together. Furthermore, Gao Zhen Xi, as the archivist of half world, is also the keeper of Melanie's past and future. Had Melanie not led Jade Rat to Gao Zhen Xi, she would not have been able to free Gao Zhen Xi from her cycle. This in turn means that she would not have been able to befriend Jade Rat and neither would she have been able to view the prophecies that Gao Zhen Xi has in her archive. Thus, Melanie is just as responsible for transforming Jade Rat, as Jade Rat is responsible for transforming Melanie. Both Jade Rat and Melanie have shifted from individuals who demand loyalty from others to individuals who are loyal without condition to those that they cherish. Jade Rat has, in Melanie's eyes, shifted from being an uncanny object to being an canny subject.

When Mr. Glueskin attacks the archives, Jade Rat once more sacrifices herself for Melanie and this time the gesture transforms Melanie from someone who is unable to forgive and is easily annoyed, to someone who chooses to forgive. This is particularly important when a baby is retrieved from the broken and frozen body of Mr. Glueskin. As she fends off the mistrustful mob, Melanie realises that she has no intention of answering violence with violence. This, unfortunately, leads to an unwanted transformation with respect to the Jade Rat:

“He must not be allowed to be born again. Not like this! It goes against everything that he has become! If one cycle is broken who can say what will happen to ours?” He took a step closer to them and Melanie heard a small *crunch*.

“No!” Melanie cried out. She shoved the bird-man's hand, and he staggered several steps backward. Melanie crouched down, her heart thumping loudly.

A piece still remained attached to the length of red string. But half of the jade amulet had been crushed into fragments.

Jade Rat—broken.

Melanie's lower lip wobbled. I'm sorry, Gao Zhen Xi, she thought. I'm sorry, Ms. Wei.
I'm so sorry, Jade Rat. (Goto 177)

By this point, Jade Rat has become a friend and ally to Melanie. She is changed from someone who believes a jade creature cannot feel pain, to someone who has forgotten that Jade Rat was ever made of stone at all. She must confront this transformation of Jade Rat as almost a kind of malfunction:

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. ("Thing Theory" 4)

With the breaking of Jade Rat, Melanie is forced to reconsider the relationship she had taken for granted. Having come a long way from contemplating pushing the rat off a mountainside, Melanie quickly scoops up the remains of Jade rat's body for safe-keeping. At the very end of the novel, when Fumiko transfers part of her spirit to Jade Rat in order to revive her, the subject/object relationship has completed its transformation. It links to the very end of the novel when Melanie enquires if a white cat really is an amulet, to which the cat replies with a question: "How is anyone 'really' more one thing than another ... Is a table 'really' more furniture than wood?" (Goto 223-224). Melanie is finally able to accept that Jade Rat is both object and subject. Melanie and Jade Rat transform from being merely collector and object to being a family along with Baby G. Without Jade Rat affecting Melanie's ability to show mercy and compassion, Baby G would not have been saved and the realms would have remained in imbalance.

4.2.3.2 Magic 8 Ball

The second object in Melanie's temporary collection is a Magic 8 Ball delivered to her by a raccoon: "The creature gave the round black ball a final annoyed push and the object settled upon its flat bottom. There was a sound of sloshing liquid, then it stilled" (Goto 51). Melanie had once examined a Magic 8 Ball that belonged to a classmate, recorded all the responses that the ball presented to her, and had calculated that the odds of getting a positive message was higher than getting a negative one. This is why she chooses to ask the Magic 8 Ball about the fate of her rescue mission— she wants some kind of hope or affirmation, even if it is a manufactured one. The answer that comes up, however, is not an answer at all: "Can your part in destiny be fulfilled without your knowledge of the part" (Goto 69). Melanie is visibly shaken. "She almost dropped the ball ... She wanted to leave the unsettling toy behind, there, on the stair" (Goto 69). Thus, the Magic 8 Ball manifests as a thinking thing. It is a thing that appears to think and does "exceed or fall beneath our power of thinking them [because] they are all incipient figurings of thought's desire to encounter in things the objects of its own thinking" (Connor 17). The only issue is that Melanie is as of yet unaware of the bigger role she must play in the half world, and thus is unaware that the Magic 8 Ball is in fact reflecting her own desires. In a way, the Magic 8 Ball is attempting to alter the way Melanie perceives her fate by introducing new questions for her to consider. In return, Melanie is futilely asking desperate questions, trying to transform the Magic 8 Ball's puzzling replies by merely hoping.

The second time that Melanie consults the Magic 8 Ball, it presents another puzzling response: "In times of crisis and indecision who will advise you?" (Goto 78). She curses the raccoon that gave her this ball and is frustrated enough to dash it to the ground. However, she notices something that stops her— the ball is literally breaking down. At first, Melanie does not

expect the ball to answer her questions with questions, and now that she is learning to expect a question that might serve as a hint, the ball begins to disintegrate, indicating to Melanie the fragility and impermanence of things. This breakdown prompts Melanie to reassess her relation to the tools in her possession:

The Magic 8 Ball felt a little different—the slosh of liquid that held the answers, the questions felt slower. More viscous. As if it were engine oil instead of water. Melanie clutched the orb in her lap. Don't let me down, she prayed. Please. I really need help ... Melanie clutched the 8 Ball to her belly. Now that it was on the verge of disintegrating, it suddenly seemed precious.” (Goto 78- 79)

Until recently she had referred to it as a “toy” but now, given circumstances, its messages merit prayer. By displaying a different kind of thingness, the Magic 8 Ball is transforming Melanie’s annoyance to something kinder. Melanie’s ability to cherish inanimate objects and see the value in them stands in direct contrast to Mr. Glueskin whose inability to value anyone or anything is partly the cause of his downfall.

This attempt to transform Melanie into a more merciful person is evident when the Magic 8 Ball’s advice to Melanie’s personal predicament can also be applied to the issue of bringing balance to the realms: “What your enemies inflict upon you will you inflict in return” (Goto 109). Both Melanie and the Magic 8 Ball’s conversations follow a sort of pattern. When she first asks whether she may find her mother, the Magic 8 Ball asks if she can solve two problems at once without considering the largeness of the second problem, implying the imbalance between the three realms. The next time, she merely asks what to do next and the Magic 8 Ball essentially states that it cannot advice her on such a question. When, finally, Melanie asks the right question, the Magic 8 Ball asks her to consider whether reciprocating violence with violence may end the

cycle or start it once more. Both Jade Rat and the Magic 8 Ball are instrumental in not only transforming Melanie from a person who is unforgiving to a person who is compassionate, but also transform her from someone who is clueless and afraid to someone who is knowledgeable and uses this knowledge to act with determination.

4.2.3.3 Building and Divesting Personal Collections

In this section I deal with Melanie's relationship with the objects she has temporarily gained and the changes that occur within her when she is forced to divest herself of these objects. I also analyse how these objects are transformed in the process of being divested, whether Melanie wills these transformations or not. After escaping the archivist's room, Melanie finds that she is without her ally for the first time since entering this realm as Jade Rat was captured by Mr. Glueskin. As Melanie is contemplating how best to rescue her mother, she has a very important epiphany, one that has been a direct result of the things she most interacted with— the ball, Jade Rat, and the Book of Realms: “[Maybe] Melanie didn't have any special magical skills, but she had the power to make choices. She was alive in a place that was not. She was not caught in the eternal loop of suffering and resuffering the same trauma, like everyone else in this Realm” (Goto 113). The transformations that her collection of objects has prompted within her are clear even for Melanie to see, but it is the divesting of these objects that will bring around a final set of transformations in both subjects and objects.

The first instance of divesting an object is when she is contemplating how many more questions the Magic 8 Ball would be able to “answer”. As she touches the ball, the worn thing cracks open to reveal a key: “The Magic 8 Ball had given her the final key ... the key to find Mr. Glueskin” (Goto 116). While losing the ball is a blow to Melanie, it has also delivered a way for her to rescue her mother. Throughout the book, when faced with misfortune Melanie is unable to

see an opportunity for a positive outcome. It is a testament to how much Melanie has changed that this loss does not adversely affect her. Melanie is determined to rescue her mother now more than ever. When she is caught by Mr. Glueskin, she even makes the decision to fight back rather than surrender since she has gotten this far and is, at this point, reunited briefly with Jade Rat. The confrontation with Mr. Glueskin leads to an epiphany that Mr. Glueskin is made of a gum-like substance. Melanie quickly scopes her surroundings for something to combat the sticky nature of his form, and douses the man in ice that he had ordered Fumiko to fetch for the champagne. He is immediately turned into a brittle, unyielding substance and both his allies and Melanie's allies are stunned: "Mr. Glueskin had been disabled. By a girl with buckets of ice" (Goto 169).

Moments pass and his "guests" who have long been tortured by him are vocally against letting him awaken. They are intent on destroying him, though Melanie is painfully aware that should they do such a thing, he would only be reborn into the half world, angrier than ever. At that moment, she realizes that although the Magic 8 Ball is no longer available to her, she is still able to remember its responses. It is then that she understands that it isn't Mr. Glueskin's being that must be destroyed, but rather it is the cycle of fear and pain he perpetuates (Goto 173). As Melanie is contemplating how to stop the angry mob, it is her mother who approaches Mr. Glueskin with a meat cleaver in her hands. It drops onto Mr. Glueskin's head revealing a tiny, bawling baby. This time it is the prophecy that is being divested of, in a sense, since it is finally coming to fruition. The impossible child that ends the troubles between the realms has been born. It is not like the others of the realm. Baby G is a real living baby, which implies that he could be killed. Melanie is, at this point, faced with a choice. She could choose to kill the baby or save the baby, and having lost both Magic 8 Ball and Jade Rat, Melanie decides to collect one more thing.

The difference in this collection, however, is that she is collecting a subject, and by doing so she is saving his life. Just as Fumiko and Shinobu had taken a chance to save a baby, Melanie makes the decision to save another child.

Unfortunately, Melanie's building of a new family means that she must divest of her old one. While this is not equal to divesting a personal collection, she is in a way giving up part of her history by leaving her parents behind. We do not realize the extent to which the people that Melanie has interacted with, and in the case of her parents, shared a familial relationship with, have transformed her despite all being only partly human. While some of them broke Baudrillard's expectation of objects being passive and shameful, as residents of half world, they are still only quasi-subjects:

If children identify with beings- unreal, meatless people- who cannot be the agents of their own decisions and actions but only agents for other actors, their own agency is thwarted by a false promise of power. In denying our own fleshiness we barter away our own autonomy. And in denying possibilities for a child's agency (autonomous from that which we imagine for ourselves), we further marginalize the young. (Honeyman 184)

Melanie, however hesitant about leaving her parents in half world, does not sacrifice her own "fleshiness" for them. Melanie holds on to the baby as her mother bites off her other pinkie finger to pay the toll. This is, in the main, because Melanie's strong sense of agency affects those that she cherishes. With Melanie's return to the realm of the living with the baby, she will have effectively broken the cycle and brought to an end Mr. Glueskin's reign of terror. As she traverses the void between worlds, she feels her mother's spirit move towards her and then Melanie awakens. It turns out, in the end, that her mother's spirit had healed Jade Rat. And now, Jade Rat and Melanie are linked in a way that is similar to how Jade Rat had once belonged to

Gao Zhen Xi. Although Melanie is unable to restore her biological family, she is able to build a new one with Ms. Wei, Jade Rat, and Baby G. While some of these character still shuttle between being an object and a subject, it is important to note that they all belong to each another, rather than conforming to a strict subject/object relationship that implies superiority of one status over the other. By divesting her objects and gaining a new family, Melanie is able to transform.

4.2.4 Summary of Transformative Subject/Object Relationships in *Half World*

Throughout the novel Melanie is transformed and, in turn, transforms the various objects, quasi-objects, and quasi-subjects that she encounters. These transformations occur under three contexts. Under the first context of the relationship between subject and environment, Melanie is first transformed from a passive victim to a reactive one by crows which double as guardian creatures as well as a means of traversing from the realm of the flesh to the half world. She is changed once more by her interactions with the toll collector who allows passage between worlds and is Melanie's first introduction to the unyielding nature of the half world. This stubborn statue inadvertently transforms Melanie into someone who is defensive of her status as a subject and the agency that this position entails, even though Melanie is, at this point, reacting desperately to her environment instead of taking charge of it. It is not until Melanie encounters the various manifestations of the prophecy that only she can decipher, that Melanie is transformed from a reactive victim to an agent of change. With every manifestation of the prophecy, Melanie is able to coax out new meanings, until at last she feels she has some kind of a grasp on her own destiny. The second context is that of the fluid nature of Mr. Glueskin, who is both subject and object at once. The fact that he favours the object side of himself, to the point of using his own body as a weapon, prompts Melanie to truly understand how linked Mr. Glueskin is with the problem within the realms. His inhumane behaviour not only reveals to Melanie the

qualities that she values in herself but also strengthens her resolve to accept her part in fulfilling the prophecy. Without meaning to, Mr. Glueskin transforms Melanie from a girl who is a reluctant hero to someone who is accepting of her role as a saviour.

The final context deals with the building, transference, and divesting of personal collections of objects and quasi-objects, and how they are transformed in Melanie's hands, and how they transform Melanie from a fearful and ignorant child to a knowledgeable and empathetic bringer of change. Jade Rat is responsible for Melanie's transformation from an unforgiving person to a merciful one, while Melanie in turn grants Jade Rat the status of a quasi-subject instead of an object. The Magic 8 Ball provides insight into the larger picture of Melanie's quest to rescue her mother and through a series of breakdowns, it is able to drive home to Melanie the importance that she break the cycle and do so by valuing her sense of compassion. The divesting of these two objects leads to the acquisition of a new family, one that consists of a baby found in Mr. Glueskin's shell. Melanie's lack of allies and her need to save her family as well as the realms, transform her into an able, empathetic individual who not only accepts her role as saviour but chooses to retain this role even in the face of hardship. After all these transformations, she is rewarded with having brought balance to realms and having gained a new family for herself.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 Summary of Findings on Subject/Object Relationships in *Coraline* and *Half World*

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to look at how subjects and objects affect one another within a horror setting for children and young adults, and analyse how each book represents transformations within subject/object relationships. I examined these moments of transitions between subjects and objects through the lens of thing theory as well as scholarship that focused on horror fiction and the norms the genre presented readers with. In order to summarise my findings from this study done on subject/object relationships in my chosen primary texts, I will first re-state my research questions. My first question was, how do two female protagonists, within a horror setting, engage with the material world around them in order to make sense of themselves as well as their respective situations? My second question was, how do the transformations of these objects into things parallel or trigger the transformation of the protagonists? The findings for both *Coraline* and *Half World* in answer to these questions will be summarised under three contexts. These contexts were organized around significant moments of transition between subjects and objects that were common to both texts. The first context was the subject/environment relationship. This context examined how the subject interacted with salient objects from their respective surroundings and how certain elements from the surrounding, in turn, responded to the subject's attention. The second context examined the representation of the antagonist as a quasi-object and how this fluid identity affected the manner in which the subjects interacted with them. The final context looked at objects as weapons and tools. It examined how the subjects were able to use or misuse objects to their advantage. It also looks at how animal allies in both books functioned as quasi-subjects and how this fluidity affected their relationship with the subjects.

5.1.1 Subject/Environment Relationships

This context, as mentioned above, looked at the relationship that Melanie and Coraline have with objects from their respective settings. In both books, it is the horror setting that initiates a dialogue with the protagonist. This in itself is an act of thingness. In the case of *Coraline*, it is the bricked up doorway that catches Coraline's attention. Shortly afterwards, bored and alone, Coraline desires the house to transform which prompts it to open up a parallel world. In the case of *Half World*, it is the crows that deliver a message to Melanie through an ominous fortune cookie. Upon reaching home and finding her mother missing, Melanie is contacted through a dead telephone by Mr. Glueskin who informs her of Fumiko's situation. When Melanie must travel from the realm of the flesh to the half world, it is once more the crows that transport her from a mundane life to a uncanny one. In both books, the major catalyst for the interactions between subject and object, is the fact that the secondary world takes the protagonists' families hostage. This dialogue between subject and object is furthered by both Coraline and Melanie answering the malfunctioning world by embarking on their respective quests.

Upon leaving the realm of the flesh, Melanie must pay the toll of a finger in order to enter the half world. The gatekeeper who connects the two worlds is, thus, the second reminder that the world she is traversing to is foreign to her. The gatekeeper's unyielding nature hints at the manner in which half world residents are treated like objects. Melanie is hesitant to do so, and this hesitancy transforms into a conviction by the end of the novel where she ignores the gatekeeper's request and instead demands that it changes its ways. Coraline, on the other hand, finds that she cannot manipulate the house that the other mother has created. She can, however, learn to tell when the mirrors of the house are lying to her as opposed to when they hold truths or secrets. The mirror, like the gatekeeper, is an extension of the environment it exists in and

therefore, Coraline reacts to its many manifestations by shifting away from being a passive victim and accepting her role as a hero. This is especially evident when Coraline is able to interact with the shells of the children the other mother had locked away behind the mirror.

Coraline's understanding of the mirror world is deepened by her interaction with one more object: buttons. Buttons, which are meant for fastening clothing, are repurposed here to lend an element of horror to the other mother. They also double as fully functional eyes. Every occupant in the other mother's realms wear them as eyes. When the other mother tries to convince Coraline to stay in the secondary world, Coraline is wise enough to say no. The price of her staying would have involved giving up her real family as well as giving up a part of her identity when the buttons are sewn on. The buttons serve as a warning that alerts Coraline to what is at stake should she agree to the other mother's proposition— she would have to give up her status as a subject, a human being. The thingness of the buttons transforms Coraline from an unsuspecting child to one that implicitly understands the weight the decisions she makes. Similarly, Melanie's own understanding of the half world is broadened by the various manifestations of the prophecy that only she can read. Each manifestation hints at a child that would be able to save all three realms. These words have two transformative effects on Melanie. She is, firstly, becoming a person who is more confident in her ability to decipher the prophecy. In fact, she is confident enough that she is able to create a fake prophecy in order to trick Mr. Glueskin. A second transformation is that, eventually, she is able to understand more of what the prophecy has to say and is therefore changing into a more self-aware person who is willing to shoulder the responsibility of bringing balance to the realms. From their interactions with their respective environments Coraline and Melanie are both poised to accept their roles as heroines of their own stories.

5.1.2 Antagonists as Quasi-Subjects

It is, interestingly, interactions with antagonists that shuttle between the subject/object dichotomy that cause Coraline and Melanie to shift decisively into heroic roles. The ability of their respective antagonists to make use of their status as subjects and take humanoid form only to make mockeries of human relations causes both Coraline and Melanie to transform from passive figures to active ones. This is seen most clearly, in the case of *Coraline*, through the other mother's act of kidnapping Coraline's parents. In the case of *Half World*, it is seen through the kidnapping of Melanie's mother by Mr. Glueskin. If Fumiko had not been coerced back to the half world, Melanie would never have sought Miss Wei's help. She would not have Jade Rat or the Magic 8 Ball. Thus, through the actions of the unwitting antagonist, Melanie is able to finally make sense of the objects around her, how they display thingness, how they function, and how she can use them to change the world around her and break the cycle of terror and violence. Initially, Melanie reacts with helplessness, but by the end of the novel she is transformed into a braver character. Similarly, Coraline would not have rescued the children's souls and defeated the other mother for good had it not been for the kidnapping of her parents. Coraline too is transformed into a heroine by the monstrous actions of the other mother.

Another similarity between the other mother and Mr. Glueskin, in relation to the protagonists, is that both characters frequently embrace their object status and reject their humanity. While doing so, they favour consumeristic relationships that do not truly value the subjects or objects involved. The other mother who wishes Coraline to sacrifice her human eyes and don buttons eyes, also utilizes objects to gain Coraline's affection. Coraline is quick to learn to decline these constant propositions. She eats only the food that she must. She wears only the clothes she is comfortable in. Coraline understands that her acceptance of certain objects from

the other mother is not the same as when she accepted tools or food from Miss Spink. While Miss Spink gifts her the stone with the sole intention of helping her out, the other mother does not gift things. The other mother's provisions are meant to be a tactic through which she may colonise and consume Coraline. Coraline is, due to these interactions, wiser about her own identity as a subject and a human with agency. Melanie undergoes a similar transformation, where she is finally able to see the value in her own humanity because of Mr. Glueskin's inhumanity. Like the other mother, Mr. Glueskin is represented in ways that are both human and inhuman. Mr. Glueskin can make his body to stretch like glue in order to manipulate the world around him to suit his purposes. He often uses this ability to victimize and consume the inhabitants of the half world. Since they cannot die, he can continue this kind of terror and torture for all of eternity. Mr. Glueskin takes a world that is not his and twists it to make it his own. He is, in essence, colonising the realms one by one. Melanie's interactions with him enable her to understand her role in the half world. She, like Coraline, embraces her status as a subject and chooses to use this status to bring about change. Both Melanie and Coraline have transformed into determined adventurers because of the unsettling, fluid nature of their respective antagonists.

5.1.3 Objects as Weapons and Tools

However, these twisted secondary worlds with their near-human villains do not respond well to Coraline and Melanie's good intentions without liaisons. These liaisons are presented to each heroine in the form of tools or weapons. In *Coraline*, Miss Spink looks through her personal collection of special objects. She picks out the circular stone with a hole in the middle and hands it to Coraline. Miss Spink sees this object as being best suited to Coraline. And while Coraline does not recognize its importance or its use immediately, the object eventually becomes

something more in her hands. The transformation here is triggered by both subject and object. When Coraline accepts the challenge to find the missing children's souls, she instinctively reaches the stone in her pocket and uses it as a seeing stone. Suddenly, it ceases to be an ordinary carved stone and it displays thingness. It reveals the true nature of the other mother's world to Coraline, displaying how it is colourless and how only the souls of children sparkle with vitality. It thus transforms Coraline from a fumbling, reactive character to an agentive one who is armed with knowledge. This is how Coraline infers that the tiny colourless marbles she thought she saw, are actually the things she must collect in order to win the game against the other mother. Similarly, in *Half World* it is a third party— a person who is neither family nor an intimate friend— who provides Melanie with the tools she will need to explore the secondary world. The first object she is given is a jade pendant of a rat from Miss Wei's personal collection. The second object that is presented to Melanie is a Magic 8 Ball that is delivered to her by a raccoon. This ball's function is similar to that of the stone in *Coraline*. In Melanie's hands it malfunctions and instead of answering with stock phrases, it answers with questions that are meant to transform Melanie's perspective of the half world as well as her own destiny.

Arguably, when it comes to interacting with things, it is Coraline who is at ease. Coraline is immediately able to figure out that the stone is meant for seeing through. Melanie already knows how to use the Magic 8 Ball but when the ball displays thingness, Melanie is perplexed and annoyed. She uses it to seek reassurance on her quest, but for the most part she is unable to see the Magic 8 Ball's relevancy to her quest. The transformation of Melanie from someone who is lost in her single-minded rescue mission to someone who is aware that her quest to save her mother is in fact connected to a larger mission to save half world is a slow one. Melanie must accept that she cannot ignore the needs of the world around her simply to save her mother. It is

only when the Magic 8 Ball begins to literally breakdown that Melanie starts to value its advice. It is similar in the case of *Coraline*, with the rescue of her parents being dependent on her rescuing the souls of the other mother's previous victims. In a way, both books require their respective heroine to look up from their personal issues to acknowledge the wider world.

Part of this process of broadening horizons can be attributed to their interactions with the quasi-objects in their company. The Jade Rat, Melanie's first possession, has a similar role to the black cat in *Coraline*— both, unintentionally, play the role of an animal guide. The black cat in *Coraline* does not have the ability to speak in the primary world, but in the secondary world, it is able to talk. The cat mentions how it does not consider itself to belong to anyone, and that belonging is a rather human concept. This exchange serves to parallel Coraline's relationship with the other mother. The other mother seeks to own and to objectify through empty human gestures. Coraline learns how unfavourable a system this is. Coraline is thus, transformed into a character who wishes to embrace her individuality just like the cat, but is unwilling to forgo any of her humanity. The black cat may not want to belong to Coraline, but by saving it and using it to save herself, Coraline transforms her relationship with the cat to a more amiable one.

As mentioned above, unlike *Coraline*, Melanie does not have a harmonious relationship with the physical world. Granted, her secondary world is much more jarring in its difference to the primary world, but Melanie does not have the same ease that Coraline has when conversing with the objects in her possession. It should be of note that Jade Rat has, by way of narrative, been granted a personhood. "Jade Rat" is the jade rat's name, and she is given a gender by the usage of "she/her" pronouns. On the other hand, the black cat is a subject that veers towards objecthood with the lack of name and the "it/its" pronoun. But Coraline is quick to catch on that this is simply another way of being a person. Whereas, when Jade Rat first quickens into a being

with agency, Melanie finds it difficult to accept that the Jade Rat does not belong to her and that the creature can make her own decisions, especially if those decisions mean leaving Melanie behind to fend for herself. Every time that Melanie fantasizes about hurting or ditching Jade Rat, she objectifies her companion. The turmoil of her emotions are much closer to the surface than Coraline's and thus, it interferes with her interactions with the world. It is only when Jade Rat is reunited with Gao Zhen Xi that Melanie sees her value as a real friend and companion rather than an object. Jade Rat's difficult personality prompts Melanie to transform into someone who lets go of past grievances and chooses to value compassion and kindness. Melanie's loyalty to Jade Rat and the act of returning her to Gao Zhen Xi sparks a similar understanding in Jade Rat. Like Coraline and the black cat, Melanie and Jade Rat's relationship is transforming over the story and by the time their adventure comes to an end, Melanie and Jade Rat have become each other's family.

The final transformations of the subjects and objects in both texts brings to light the main difference between *Coraline* and *Half World*, which lies not in how these objects were acquired and used, but rather in how they were divested. With Coraline, the moment she realises that the things have fulfilled their purpose and reverted back to mundane objects, she is able to return them to their rightful owners. In the case of the seeing stone, Coraline returns it to Miss Spink. In the case of the black cat, Coraline had never believed that she owned the creature in the first place. As part of her plan to trap the other mother's hand in the well, she even sacrifices a childhood collection of dolls thereby signalling her transformation from a child to someone anticipating growing older. Coraline has found that she is happier to experience her surroundings and express her identity without the burden of possessing objects, unless absolutely necessary. This does not mean she ceases to desire objects, only that she sees that making things belong to

her will never make her truly happy. She has also transformed from the girl who believed that certain objects will give her an identity, when in fact, it is how she has used these objects that granted her individuality.

Melanie, on the other hand, has great difficulty letting go of things. With the Magic 8 Ball especially Melanie, who is initially frustrated with it, becomes attached the moment it shows a second kind of thingness. As it begins to fall apart, it becomes more precious to her, especially when its last gift is not only a hint at how to break the cycle of half world but also a way to rescue her mother. Similarly, just as Melanie accepts Jade Rat as a friend, the Jade Rat is stepped on and broken. Part of the reason why Melanie chooses to save Baby G is because she has lost two companions that have transformed her from unknowing and unforgiving to knowledgeable and merciful. While Melanie loses (and sometimes regains) objects, Coraline tends to give away objects or sets them free before she gets too attached. I believe this is an indication of how the age of the protagonist manifests itself on the page. Melanie is constantly reminded of the individuals that her collection is related to, which only makes divesting them harder. Coraline, on the other hand, sees the stone as hers until it has served its purpose. Thus, we can see how Coraline and Melanie make sense of the world around them through the objects and quasi-objects in their respective vicinities. While certain aspects of the subject/object interactions are similar in both books, in the end, Coraline's personality comes through strongest when she is rejecting things and Melanie's by contrast is strongest when she is accepting of things that are difficult to love

5.2 Contributions to Existing Scholarship

As mentioned previously, while thing theory has been used to examine contemporary fine art as well as modern and contemporary English literature, the usage of thing theory to examine

subject/object relationships in children's literature has not been employed before. By applying thing theory to a book for children as well as a book for young adults, my study brings a new lens for children's literature theorists to consider. Thing theory made it possible to distinguish between the various kinds of relationships represented by subjects and objects, to observe how these subjects and objects interacted with each other, and to study how each affected the other and set off a series of transformations. It also provided insight into how female characters transformed when faced with uncanny, unsettling circumstances within the horror genre. It helped gauge how subjects manipulated their surroundings to their advantage and how the surroundings in turn manipulated them into transforming.

Analysing Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and Hiromi Goto's *Half World* with the use of thing theory brought to the forefront some of the subtleties of having protagonists who do not display the kind of heroism that is most commonly portrayed in children's literature. Through the myriad of ways in which Coraline and Melanie used, and sometimes abused, the objects and quasi-objects in their surroundings we see a different kind of strength being highlighted in the face of great adversity—the ability to adapt. Thus, my thesis provides a unique perspective into the analysis of character development in gothic and dark fantasy settings. Additionally, it is useful to note that thing theory was born out a compilation of various philosophical branches which allows a study to adapt it to function well with other lenses. Postcolonial theory and second wave feminist theory have particularly influenced the development of thing theory and therefore can be used alongside each other. This implies that my research can act as a bridge for further study on how thing theory may be used within children's literature to examine the feminist and cultural dimensions of subject/object relationships.

5.3 Implications for Further Study

As mentioned above, this thesis and the usage of thing theory as a lens lends itself for adaption, should one choose to explore the worlds of *Half World* and *Coraline* further. The similarities between the two books, such as the fact that both have female protagonists may prompt the inclusion of feminist gender theory as a secondary lens through which to analyze subject/object relationships and study, for instance, how objects affect the subjects' understanding of agency and how subjects are able to use objects to manipulate misogynistic power structures. Both Coraline and Melanie are frequently objectified by their respective antagonists and that leads to a kind of adaptive identity building, using the objects around them to change their appearance but not who they are inside. In other words, the possibility that their transgressions and transformations may partly be related to gender norms and how they negotiate or accept them is an unexplored avenue. Another similarity that the scope of my thesis did not allow me to explore, was the illustrated work. Both books came with illustrations that were sometimes descriptive, and sometimes told the story in the stead of the textual narrative. In *Coraline*, it is Dave McKean's illustrations that add an extra layer of darkness to the text. His illustrations of the other mother in particular would have been interesting to analyze, especially when studied in relation to the other mother's status as a quasi-subject. Combining thing theory with multimodal theory would also have helped in the analysis of Jillian Tamaki's illustrations for *Half World*. From the fortune cookie's message that was delivered by crows to every instance of the Magic 8 Ball's thingness, it is Tamaki's art that shows us the words instead of Goto's text. One difference between the two texts provides yet another avenue for further study— while *Coraline* is decidedly European and has a white protagonist, *Half World* has elements of Japanese Buddhism influencing the nature of the world mechanics. Cultural studies with a focus on postcolonial

theory may have been useful to gain a deeper understanding of why Melanie's relationship to objects is different from Coraline's. Postcolonial theory coupled with thing theory could provide a more complete understanding of why Melanie's understanding of thingness is different from Coraline's. Tropes like personal collections, divesting objects, destroying objects could also be explored from a cultural perspective.

Other possible avenues of study could include having a much narrower focus. For instance, my analysis of the inhuman nature of the other mother and Mr. Glueskin prompts a closer look at how human bodies are twisted to seem like objects, and consequently, how beauty and monstrosity is constructed by the writers as well as the readers' own standards of beauty. This study could be especially interesting if it makes use of young adult dystopian series that objectify subjects, such as Scott Westerfeld's series *The Uglies* and *The Selection* series by Kiera Cass. Another option to narrow down the focus of subject/object relationships is by choosing to look at middle grade novels that deal with the animation of inanimate objects, such as Holly Black's *Doll Bones*. Conversely, the focus may be to look at stories like *Half World* that cater to young adults and use Japanese, Buddhist inspired fantasy to tell the story of a protagonist of colour. In this case, Hiromi Goto's *Darkest Light*, a companion book to *Half World* may also be taken into consideration. Thing theory could also be used to look at genres that do not utilise elements of horror but have narratives that rely on strong connections between subjects and objects to tell the story. For instance, romance novels for young adults where themes like desire and possession are common between subjects as well as between subjects and objects.

5.4 Limitations of Study

The limitations of my study have to do with the similarities and differences between my chosen primary texts. As stated in the previous section, the most salient similarity is the fact that both

books have female protagonists which implies the need for a focus on feminist theory alongside thing theory. While I was able to focus on issues like passivity and agency within representations of the female protagonists, a feminist reading could have yielded further discussion on the roles of mothers in both texts, as well as an understanding of how objects and quasi-objects conserve and subvert gender roles, especially within the context of family. In terms of the limitations linked to the differences between the primary texts, the most prominent one is that both books follow different traditions of fantasy. It is possible that the varying levels of fantasy had a hand in how subject/object relationships are formed, with the ages of the protagonists heightening these differences in interactions. The scope of my study did not allow for these aspects to be taken into consideration.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to use thing theory to look at how subjects and objects transformed one another within the context of two dark fantasy novels for children and young adults respectively— Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and Hiromi Goto's *Half World*. I have found that when isolated child protagonists are left to their own devices, they are able to manipulate objects from their environment to make sense of their respective predicaments. They are also able to achieve their goals by learning about their own identity from the quasi-objects and quasi-subjects they encounter. This knowledge, in turn, allows them to either affect change within objects and allies or accept change from objects and allies— oftentimes, both. Eventually, both subjects find that whenever they have chosen to affect change (or to be affected by change), they have also made the choice to transition into wiser, heroic subjects. Thus, thing theory, used alongside scholarship on horror and the gothic for children, can be used as a new lens through which to study issues like character development, agency, and heroism in children's literature.

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