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## 10.2 Format Reflection

Looking at how to interpret text and use literature across different formats was the leading reason behind my interest in this course. Using *Coraline*, in its various forms, allowed us to use one central story and analyze its message as it changes due to the how the reader interacts with the material.

To begin, I found the reading of the novel to be a very entertaining story. Through I had previously seen the film adaptation prior to my enrollment in this course I enjoyed the text version very much and was surprised by some of the differences that became apparent as the book progressed. While the book was not illustrated in the same sense as the picture books that we discussed earlier in the semester or as meticulously as the P. Craig Russell's adaptation they did provide just enough information as to give the reader a guide for how these characters would look. Again, having seen the movie prior to reading the book I was already familiar with how the characters were portrayed in the motion picture so I carried an initial bias as to how they would look in my head as I read the story.

The novel, the original version, is a very dark story. Not necessarily scary but a dark, daunting, tale. The initial description of Coraline's Other Mother for instance, "She looked a little like Coraline's mother. Only... Only her skin was white as paper. Only she was taller and thinner. Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp" (Gaiman, pg. 28). This description allows for the reader to paint a mental picture all their own and we can make the Other Mother as tall or thin as we want, just so long as the as the Other Mother is taller and thinner than the image we have constructed for Coraline's real mother. We know what average human proportions are to be and were not given a description of what Coraline real mother looks likes. Coupled with the description of how the Other Mother had changed over the course of the story, as she was described during their final confrontation, "The other mother did not look anything like her own mother. She wondered how she had been deceived into imagining a resemblance. The other mother was huge – her head almost brushed the ceiling – and very pale, the color of a spider's belly. Her hair writhed and twisted about her head, and her teeth were sharp as knives... (pg. 128), the reader is making their own choices as to how to interpret the characters assessing and reassessing the Other Mothers appearance against what we believe her appearance to be, making her as scary of a creature as we dare.

Some of the reader's freedom is lost in this respect when we encounter the graphic adaptation. While I think that Russell did a beautiful interpretation of Gaiman's text the work of the reader is no longer construct the scenes and characters as they would appear in our minds but to react to the illustrator's perspective and artistic choices to guide us through the story. As Gallo describes, "with the pictures and the words working simultaneously, making a graphic novel not only something one reads but something that one sees as well, like reading and watching a movie at the same time" (Gallo & Weiner, pg. 115). I agree with this in that you are watching the frames of the comic in anticipation of what you will see next all the while reading the text provided in order to gain an understanding of the author/illustrator's intended meaning.

The two forms of literacy go hand in hand to give the reader an interactive experience and engaging. When we are reading a traditional novel we are looking at words on a page that progress in a very sequential manner. We can only go as far or as fast as we can interpret the next word. Once we have comprehended its intended meaning the reader can format in their mind what is taking place and proceed

to the next phrase, sentence, chapter, etc. This process can be very taxing but also highly individualized as we all have our own previous experiences, values and beliefs that will impact how come to an understanding of the text. The difference though with graphic novels is that we are presented with an image that guides our interpretation of what is taking place on the page. I believe that there is a great bit of truth to the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. Quicker than a reader can decipher a sentence of text, the reader can deduce a meaning from one frame and put the moving pieces together to formulate a sequence of action that is not included as the viewer interprets what will come in-between frames.

Gallo, in his essay, also discusses the works of Will Eisner, R. Crumb, Harvey Pekar, and Scott McCloud. Each of these I texts I had purchased several years ago and if indeed there is one book that could serve as a text book for future students to aid in their approach to graphic novels, it would be Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. It is a textbook written in the form of a graphic novel and covers everything from the vocabulary associated with this form of media to illustration and methods, icons, and what happens in the space between the frames. McCloud also describes the word as the greatest form of abstractions. Nothing about the word "eye" looks like the human eye but we are relying on our own previous experiences and knowledge to know and understand what e-y-e is intended to represent. Again, this is where I think that the implementation of graphic novels can be so impactful for all readers. This format can bridge the gap between the visual and written in a place where visual literacy can aid in the understanding of the written word and vice versa.

This leads us to the film adaptation of the Coraline and, in my opinion, least favorable version of the story. I particularly did not like the addition of Wybie. In both the novel and graphic adaptation Coraline is an empowered female character who is both introspective and heroic. Unfortunately in the film version she does not come off in this same way. I feel that Wybie is partially to blame for this interpretation. In the film version the other Wybie in needed sacrifice himself in order for Coraline to escape back to her real world. Where before in the print version of this story Coraline was able to rely on her own independence and courage to escape the other world and ultimately defeat the Beldam. Additionally, the movie adaptation depicted Wybie as the savior who smashed the Other Mother's hand with a rock and saved Coraline from being carried off in its pursuit of the key. This particular chain of events makes Coraline look feeble and not the strong heroine she was shown to be in the book. Our group discussed that the addition to Wybie would be to provide a character for Coraline to converse with because during much of the novel she is encountering these event alone. Though, this may have been a possible explanation for Wybie I don't think that he was utilized well in this manner. I think that had Coraline narrated some of her own thoughts, directly to the viewer or as a narration voiced over her actions I think that we could have seen a more complete character in Coraline rather than a forced addition of the Wybie character that does more harm than good in support of Coraline's courage and independent nature.

Also missing from the story was the scene that shows how Coraline's father had saved her from the bees by staying behind to draw their attention so that Coraline can run off. In the movie all we see of the parents are in the initial introductions where they are dismissive of Coraline's interests and we are never given a chance to see any of the parents redeeming qualities. We do not know what drives Coraline to return to the Other World other than that they need to be saved. I wish that the film would have spent more time with the development of these characters but that may have been sacrificed with the need to fit the complete story arch within a reasonable time frame that would hold the viewer's attention. This time

constraint is not a factor to the novel or graphic novel were more pages could be added and the story can me left and returned to at various intervals allowing for the author to take more space and time to provide the viewer with a rich backstory and non-linear plot.

Additionally, the knife throwing sequence during Ms. Spink and Ms. Forcible's presentation was also omitted from the movie. I thought that this was one of the most suspenseful moments in the books and I was very disappointed to see that it was left out of the film. The other scene that was regrettably altered in the film was during Coralines search for the lost souls that would have required her to go to the cellar and have a hurried encounter with the distorted Other Father. Again, I found that this was a very tense moment in the books and would have liked to have seen that depicted in the film. Instead we have Coraline chased through the garden by the Other Father on the mower in a rather clumsy sequence that does not portray Coraline as brave but just lucky. All the while that Coraline was in the other world I never believed that she was truly in danger in the same manner that I felt when reading either of the text versions.

As I alluded to earlier, the book is a very dark story and the tension that was so prevalent in both of the written versions did not seem to be present in the movie adaptation. While the artistic representation of the characters did provide a bit of visual discomfort in the exaggerated proportions, especially appearance of Mr. Bobinsky, but I feel did not do enough to alter the appearance to the Other World to make it look "off." One element that could have aided in this separation of worlds and viewer discomfort would have been a more intense use of sound. This element is really the only trait that is unique to theatrical experience when compared to reading either of the text versions. We get to hear the sound of the mouse circus; we can hear the sound of the Other Mother's nail as it taps her button eye. If everything was to appear the same but different in the other world I would have hoped that the music would have been utilized to accentuate the discomfort of this place.

What the movie version did do was provide an array of diverse vantage points and set-up shots that both provided the viewer the opportunity to be both an observer and participant in the story's events. One such example that our group discussed was the use of the close-up to draw the attention of the viewer to various aspects and foreshadowing elements within the storyline. I particularly was drawn to the opening to the introduction of the Coraline doll as it lies on the floor. The camera angle tilts and we see the scene developing from the ground level from the vantage point of the doll. This, alluding to the very purpose of the doll for the Beldam and we get to share in the same vantage point and spy on the developments of the family in their new home. This element was also present in the graphic novel as the different frames were each able to capture a different vantage points to and could have served as a storyboard for the animator when choosing how to arrange these scenes.

Between the three versions of the Coraline story that we were presented, I think that the graphic adaptation is the most engaging of the three. Providing the visual stimulation offered by the film and still allowing for the reader to draw some of their own conclusions and be an active participant in the story rather than a casual observer of the theatrical version. I think that the film made to may alterations to be an honest representation of the novel whereas the graphic novel provides the reader with as much information as they would need to engage the plot and creepy nature of the story by leaving just enough of the particulars up to the imagination of the reader. As Gallo the role that benefits of graphic novels, "offering literary experiences that linger in the mind long after the book has finished" (Gallo, pg. 115).