

FOOD AND POWER IN ROALD DAHL'S JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH AND NEIL
GAIMAN'S CORALINE

Karlie E. Herndon

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

Dr. Katie R. Peel

Dr. Diana L. Ashe

Dr. Meghan M. Sweeney, Chair

ACCEPTED BY

Dean, Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

The mother-child relationship, not only in literature, but in “real life” as well, is one that brings with it many associations of nurturing and provision, especially in the form of food. Carolyn Daniel argues that “many commentators describe food as the sex of children’s literature” (6-7). This thesis will maintain that the mother-as-food motif gains a double meaning in children’s literature: the wish to “consume” the mother (or what the mother provides) holds not only a desire to return to the womb and a state of infancy, but a desire to gain power, become one with the mother, and devour her in the sense of one lover “devouring” (using, taking satisfaction and pleasure from) another. Food is like sex in that there is an exchange of power and pleasure; the exchange of food is also like the exchange of sex in that there is a similar power struggle. By giving the child food, the mother gives the child some of herself, and, in turn, some of her power (in the form, for the most part, of knowledge). With this new power, children can see the mother as something “other” than themselves, and they therefore become desiring beings that do not have to rely on the mother for love/entertainment/fulfillment, but rather *desire* her for those things.

In this thesis, I will first look at Roald Dahl’s novel James and the Giant Peach and its film adaptation, and, second, Neil Gaiman’s novel Coraline, along with its recent film adaptation—noting that both adaptations come from renowned director Henry Selick—because these texts offer fine examples of the portrayal of food as a vehicle for an exchange of power and pleasure between the child and (m)other characters within them. In an attempt to further explore the idea of these children’s sexualities, particularly their sexualities as they relate to mother-figures, I will examine the relationships between the main characters (who are either orphaned or temporarily parentless) and the women/objects that replace their mothers. Though the children

are without both mothers and fathers, I will focus solely on their relationships with new/replacement mothers; well-known characters such as Hansel and Gretel, Alice, Peter Pan and the Lost Boys, Dorothy, and Oliver Twist have, parentless, traversed the pages of children's books while experiencing significant food moments as they sought out replacement mother figures. Critics Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer point out the importance of mothers in children's literature; using the Lacanian idea of phallus envy, they make clear the idea that children desire to have the mother's full attention and that they envy the phallus, or most powerful object/person in the situation (226). In order to receive the mother's attention, children must become the phallus, which, in families, is usually represented by the father-figure—it is for this reason that I will focus on orphaned children's relationships with their (m)others. I will discuss these themes of orphaned children, surrogate mothers, and sexually ambiguous relationships between the two in the above texts. In order to continue the argument that food generally replaces sex in children's literature (with the understanding that sex—and, in turn, food—is an exchange of both power and pleasure), I will explore the relationships between the children and their replacement mothers in each text while examining scenes with food in each. This thesis will reiterate the need to remember that children are sexual beings as well, that many of their first “sexual” encounters are with their mothers or (m)others, and that this, though a disturbing idea to some, is applicable to many children's tales involving children, mothers, and, generally, food. Just as Lacan mentions that when a child “learns that the mother does not have [the phallus],” consequences related to the castration complex can no longer affect the child (1309), the children in the stories I will examine discover that their (m)others do not have the phallus, and can then become individuals, sexually and socially ready for life.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my parents. To my dad, Dwain Herndon, who taught me how to read my first book in the stairwell during Tae Kwon Do practice. And to my mom, Kelly Herndon, who has always shared and encouraged my love of good children's books. Thanks, guys.

INTRODUCTION

There is no question that secondhand feasting can bring its own nourishment, satisfaction, and final surfeit.

M. F. K. Fisher, The Art of Eating (640)

It is my belief that food, especially sweet, rich food, often metaphorically represents the body of the mother in popular culture and that the desire for such food includes a subconscious yearning for the restoration of the primal relationship with her.

Carolyn Daniel, Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature (89)

“We give our thanks and [sic] ask to bless your mother's golden chicken breast.”

The Other Father, Coraline (Film)

In the recently released film Coraline (2009), Coraline Jones finds herself in an alternate or “other” world where everything is new, wonderful, magical, fun, and, most importantly, created just for her. When she and her “other” parents sit down to their first meal together, one that entails an actual gravy *train*, a milkshake chandelier, and two massive trays of food, including a giant, glistening, perfectly baked chicken, her other father pauses to give thanks, not only for the food, but for the other mother as well. Although the above quote from the film Coraline is a somewhat tongue-in-cheek double entendre, this short quote, along with the others that accompany it, provides a simple set-up for what is a complex issue. This issue appears often in literature and affects not only a broad range of characters, but also affects us as the audience who have dealt with mothers, food, and eating in our daily lives.

The mother-child relationship, not only in literature, but in “real life” as well, is one that brings with it many associations of nurturing and provision, especially in the form of food. Even in a time when men’s and women’s roles in society have shifted considerably from the traditional and stereotypical mother-in-the-kitchen and father-at-the-office associations, many people still associate mothers with the provision of meals for children. Though not long after (and in some cases where breast-feeding is not the choice or option, immediately after) a child’s birth, the mother’s body is no longer the actual *source* of nourishment, societal norms dictate that we continue to look to the mother to provide meals for children. As the above quote from children’s literature scholar, Carolyn Daniel argues, the mother’s body becomes a metaphor for good, nourishing food, food that provides comfort and satisfaction. Daniel argues that “so many commentators describe food as the sex of children’s literature” (6-7)¹; this thesis will maintain that the mother-as-food motif gains a double meaning: the wish to “consume” the mother (or what the mother provides) holds not only a desire to return to the womb and a state of infancy, but a desire to gain power, become one with the mother, and devour her again as a baby or as a “lover” (in that lovers gain sexual and emotional nourishment and satisfaction from one another). By consuming the mother or the food the mother provides, children consume what they have identified with the mother, and therefore metaphorically consume her as well. As Lacan states, “The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos [or speech] is joined with the advent of desire” (1308); the mother has access to the phallus because the mother has already become an individual, a desiring being who has entered the language of the father. Lacan also writes that “if the desire of the mother *is* the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire” (1309). By satisfying the mother’s desire, the child does not gain any power; by continuing to use the mother by eating her or her provisions, that

mother's power can be transferred to the child (if the mother is willing to no longer have a dependent child), helping the child create his or her own separate identity. In this way, the mother gives up her power over the child as she gives up her own body/food to the child.

It can, however work in the opposite way: if the mother is not willing to allow the child to have an identity of his or her own (in the case of "smothering" mothers), eating the mother/mother's food connotes an exchange of the child's limited power back to the mother who sees this consumption as dependency, and she, therefore, retains the power in the relationship. Though she gives the child food/herself/power, she in turn keeps the power by keeping the child in her control and dependent upon her. In the texts I will examine, I will argue that this exchange is also like that of a lover: because food is like sex, the exchange of food is also like the exchange of sex in that there is a similar power struggle. By becoming the "apple of her eye," and acting as a sort of partner to their mothers, children act out their desire for the mother by eating her food, and the mother in turn desires the child as phallus/power symbol, just as she might a lover. By giving the child food, the mother gives the child some of herself, and, in turn, some of her phallic power. With this new phallic power, children can see the mother as something "other" than themselves, and they therefore become desiring beings that do not have to rely on the mother for love/entertainment/ fulfillment, but rather *desire* her for those things.

In Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach, this mother-as-food idea becomes very apparent in a somewhat unlikely place—inside the pit of a giant peach. Though James's birth mother and father are dead, James finds himself inside a new "womb," one that nourishes, protects, and helps James to grow, not only mentally, but physically as well. In the film adaptation, directed by Henry Selick—who also directed other films like The Nightmare Before Christmas, Monkeybone, and Coraline—the womb-like aspects of the giant peach—complete

with “birth canal”—that James explores come to life on the screen. In both the book and the film, not only does James find nourishment and protection, he finds company inside the peach in the form of several giant, enchanted insects; sharing meals in the intimate space of a make-shift womb provides for some social interaction that James was unable to partake in after his parents’ deaths (having been placed in the care of his horrible aunts). As an orphan looking for a way out of his miserable life, James finds not only shelter in the peach, but sustenance, the pleasure of good food and being full, and the luxury of company. He and the insects indulge in the juicy, sweet nourishment that is the flesh of the peach/womb, all of them finally being “reborn” when the peach arrives in New York City. Although the social aspects of the peach may be fairly apparent even to children, the sexual symbolism that may elude a child audience is startling. James poses as both phallus and fetus, the peach becomes both a penetrable object and a womb for James to be born of, and eating the peach has both sexual and maternal moments for James. Using Lacan and Freud, especially as they have been interpreted by such critics as Mark I. West and Carolyn Daniels, I argue that, when Roald Dahl’s James finds himself face to face with a peach in James and the Giant Peach, his relationship with this peach is twofold: he ingests it and is ingested by it, penetrates and is birthed by it. By consuming the peach, he becomes a stronger, more powerful individual who can survive without parents, surrogate or otherwise. He has replaced his birth-mother, who is now deceased, with a peach that he eats for pleasure and sustenance, his relationship with it both like that of a child in the womb and a lover.

Similarly, Neil Gaiman’s novel Coraline presents this ambiguous relationship between a child and her surrogate or “other” mother; this relationship, however, turns sour when Coraline realizes that in order to return to this state of “oneness” with her (m)other, to reenter the (m)other’s body, she must be consumed herself. I will use the term *(m)other* interchangeably

with “other mother” throughout this thesis in order to emphasize the fact that inherent in this “other mother” is her other-ness: her status as something outside of the subject (in this case, Coraline or James). I am also playing on Lacan’s use of the word *Other*, as well as the fact that “other” is part of being “mother,” a fact that the child-characters must come to realize in order to become independent people who can be without a mother and still be a “whole” person, as Lacanian psychoanalysis calls for (1309). This surrogate not only feeds Coraline some of the best food she’s ever tasted, but eventually wants to eat her as she has done with other parentless children. Melanie Klein creates connections between good food and “good” mothers in her object relations theory: the child associates “good” milk with the breast of the “good” mother, and “bad” milk with the breast of the “bad” mother (207). Coraline’s (m)other tricks her into thinking she is “good” by providing food that Coraline finds comforting and satisfying.

Though there are several dead children in the novel who claim that the (m)other ate their souls, director Henry Selick’s adaptation of the book makes Coraline’s danger of being eaten even more clear to the audience: the (m)other eventually metamorphoses into a giant spider who literally attempts to trap Coraline in her web and devour her. The (m)other uses love, attention, and, mainly, delicious food to lure Coraline into her world, a world that is there solely for the amusement (and entrapment) of Coraline; this world (which starts to disintegrate as soon as Coraline realizes the ruse) could also be an extension of the (m)other’s body, a place that the (m)other controls and uses to try to keep Coraline trapped. Though Coraline, in both the book and film, finds the (m)other both sexually attractive and attractive as a caregiver in the beginning (she is even sculpted in a more “appealing” fashion in the film: neater appearance, brighter face, happier tone), she quickly realizes that if she continues to “consume” her (m)other, she will in turn be consumed as well, losing her body, her soul, and her identity as an individual. Although

in this text the child overcomes the temptation of replacing her mother with a newer, more appealing person, the exchanges of power, the ambiguity of this relationship between child and (m)other, and the presence of food as a sexual power exchange are once again pervasive themes.

First, I examine the novel James and the Giant Peach and its film adaptation, and, second, Coraline, along with its recent film adaptation, because these texts offer fine examples of the portrayal of food as a vehicle for an exchange of power and pleasure between the child and (m)other characters within them. In an attempt to further explore the idea of these children's sexualities, particularly their sexualities as they relate to mother-figures, I will examine the relationships between the main characters (who are either orphaned or temporarily parentless) and the women/objects that replace their mothers—having experienced “good” parents in their lives, James and Coraline seek out their replacements (for James, the peach; for Coraline, her own real mother becomes “good” by the end of the novel) as protection against the “bad” parents (James's aunts; Coraline's other parents) they encounter in their lives (Klein 242). Though the children are without both mothers and fathers, I will focus solely on their relationships with new/replacement mothers; well-known characters such as Hansel and Gretel, Alice, Peter Pan and the Lost Boys, Dorothy, and Oliver Twist have, parentless, traversed the pages of children's books while experiencing significant food moments as they sought out replacement mother figures. I will discuss the issues of food and mothers in a few of these widely known tales in an effort to situate my examination of James and Coraline and to further inspect the themes of orphaned children, surrogate mothers, and power exchange as they continue to shape children's literature. Critics Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer point out the importance of mothers in children's literature; using the Lacanian idea of phallus envy, they make clear the idea that children desire to have the mother's full attention and that they envy the phallus, or most

powerful object/person in the situation (226). In order to receive the mother's attention, children must become the phallus, which, in families, is usually represented by the father-figure—it is for this reason that I focus on orphaned children's relationships with their (m)others, noting that the children do not seek out a replacement father figure for this very reason of phallus envy: the child wants to be the most powerful thing in the relationship with the mother, and to have the mother desire only him or her. Including a new father-figure in the family dynamic would interfere with the child's ability to be the sole desired/desiring object of the mother.

I also use Lacan's focus on the mirror stage (1285), desire, and the other (noting that Gaiman's "other mother" is called nothing else in the book) in order to show how the child-characters go through stages of development during their time of food/power exchange with their surrogate mothers. Lacan states that the mirror stage functions to "establish a relation between the organism and its reality" (1287); in the literary works I examine, this stage is employed in order to show the characters' "coming to terms" with their environments and their places within those environments. The use of Lacan's mirror stage is especially fitting for the texts I use in this thesis in that each child must return to an infantile state, a stage before Lacan's mirror stage, in which identity has not yet formed. I also make use of Freud's focus on phallic and yonic symbols to show that these characters have indeed regressed to pre-identity and must find their identities over the space of the novel. I focus especially on scenes such as that in James and the Giant Peach when James actually becomes the phallus that impregnates the peach, entering the peach through a tunnel that clearly resembles a vagina, then lingering in the pit, or womb, of the peach like a fetus, as well as that in Coraline when Coraline enters the (m)other's house through a hallway that slowly transforms into something resembling a birth canal.

I discuss these themes of orphaned children, surrogate mothers, and sexually ambiguous relationships between the two in the above texts. In order to continue the argument that food generally replaces sex in children's literature (with the understanding that sex—and, in turn, food—is an exchange of both power and pleasure), I explore the relationships between the children and their replacement mothers in each text while examining scenes with food in each. This thesis will explore these issues with the goal of expanding ideas about food and power and employ them in a productive way in these somewhat unexplored texts.

THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Although many children's stories contain the themes I discuss in this thesis, it is essential to examine the work that has been done in this field in order to show how much more can be done. These stories use these themes in similar ways, but none do exactly the same things that James and Coraline's stories do. Peter Pan chooses to bring Wendy and her brothers to Neverland; having been orphaned and motherless for some time, Wendy makes a wonderful "mother" and "wife" for Peter, but, since the children eat only imaginary food while in Neverland, the exchange of power and pleasure through food is made hollow as well. Alice travels through Wonderland, experiencing the power that eating has as she does so; she finds several possible (m)others along the way, but, in her own bright and willful way, she leaves the imposters' presence soon after meeting each, aware of the downfalls that come with soup, pepper, and royal cuisine (the Queens, the Duchess, the Cook). The story of "Hansel and Gretel" features the parentless wandering of a brother and sister who also find a (m)other with food in their travels. The Brothers Grimm begin the story with a somewhat vague role for the woman that lives in the children's house. She is first called the woodcutter's wife (184), then the children's stepmother (184), the woman (186), and "the mother" (186). Though her relation to the children is vague, her intentions are not. The story takes place during a famine, and the woman convinces the children's father to leave them in the woods to starve. They return once, but the woman convinces her husband a second time, and the children become lost in the woods.

One of the more fascinating parts of this tale, at least in association with the topics of this thesis, is the fact that the lack of food creates the problems for the family, namely the children. The father and his wife can no longer feed the children; the father thinks that "it would be better if you shared the last crumb of bread with your children" (186), a thought that he keeps to

himself, but this “bad” mother thinks it better to rid themselves of two more mouths. In this sense, food creates danger for these children from the very start, and the lack of food is first associated with a bad mother. Her punishment, it seems, is death, since by the time the children return from the woods, she has passed away.

When the children become lost in the woods, they meet another “bad” (m)other who successfully disguises herself as a “good” mother through food. The tale reads, “The old woman had only pretended to be so friendly. She was really a wicked witch who lay in wait for children. She had built the little house of bread just to lure them inside. As soon as a child was in her power, she killed it, cooked it, and ate it” (188). In a time of famine (for the characters and, possibly, for the readers as well), this house of bread and sugar is the perfect temptation for hungry children. Once she lures them into her tasty house, she also feeds them “a wonderful meal of milk and pancakes with sugar, apples, and nuts” (187). Milk, which is associated with mothers and the “good breast” (Klein 207), is included in the list for good reason—the woman skillfully uses established associations to further entice the children to stay with her, thinking that she is indeed a “good” (m)other. The apples are also a telling inclusion—before the next meal in the house, the children learn that the woman is actually planning to kill and eat them, and the knowledge of good and evil becomes a frightening reality for the children.

The children eventually outsmart the witch. Though Hansel was able to hold off his death for about four weeks by tricking the witch into thinking he was too thin to make a decent meal, Gretel takes action when the witch is near the oven. Gretel tricks the witch into sticking her head in, and then pushes the witch into the oven, burning her alive.

Having been cast out of their father’s home, where they had some guidance and assistance, the children must become independent thinkers and save themselves without the help

of an adult. They have been without a “good” mother for some time it seems, and they must defeat the “bad” mothers in their lives before they can be happy and self-sufficient individuals. When they defeat the witch, they take as many jewels as they can carry from her house, returning to their father’s home and “their worries were over” (190). We can assume that, since their original worries were about food, their newfound riches are sufficient to keep them fed. The use of food in this story drives the plot, entices the characters, and threatens the children (in that they might become food themselves). These themes are salient in James and the Giant Peach and Coraline; this precursor to Dahl’s and Gaiman’s stories shows that good/bad mothers, food, and children’s independent thinking/identity formation have been, and will continue to be, important themes in children’s literature.

In the field of writing about the glories of food and eating in general, M. F. K. Fisher is one of the world’s leading food writers. Her book, The Art of Eating, is a work on her experiences and observations about food, recipes and all. She explores the gustatory pleasures of all types of food: Western comfort foods, exotic recipes, the wonders of depression-era cooking, and even foods that give pleasure in the language about them (an entire section of the book, entitled “An Alphabet for Gourmets,” discusses foods that fulfill this one requirement: that they begin with a certain letter of the alphabet). Her work in the field of food is not so much focused on literary food exhibitions, but her writing is an important stepping stone from just eating food to actually talking about food and the pleasure that comes with the language surrounding food. Fisher also has somewhat of a focus on the socially pleasurable aspects of eating, saying that “sharing food with another human being is an intimate act that should not be indulged in lightly” (577). She continues this idea of the importance of the social aspects of eating: “there is no question that secondhand feasting can bring its own nourishment, satisfaction, and final surfeit.

More than one escaped war prisoner has told me of the strange peacefulness that will come over a group of near-famished men in their almost endless talk of good food they remember and wish to eat again” (640). This statement not only brings to light the social importance of food, but also the role the mere discussion of food can have on people, giving the war prisoners the ability to “swallow without active pain the prisoner’s maggotty bread and watery soup, their spiritual palates drowned in a flood of recalled flavor and warmth and richness” (640). Fisher’s words are useful to help display the value of the literary examples I examine here. Not only are we devouring the texts in that we read and “digest” them, we are witnessing others eating, informing our own understanding of the social aspects of food in our lives. The children in the texts I examine talk about food, work with food, and come to understand the importance of food, just as readers do as they watch, eating along with the characters in a sort of second-hand meal of sorts.

In their discussion of food in children’s literature, authors Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reamer point out in their textbook, The Pleasures of Children’s Literature, that in works such as Peter Rabbit, Charlotte’s Web, and many fairy tales, “the fact that human beings eat creatures that once lived but were too weak to protect themselves suggests that people—particularly weak children—might therefore also be eaten” (195). The suggestion that children are often either eaten or desired as food in many children’s tales is an important one in this thesis; just as Hansel and Gretel almost became meals, both James and Coraline encounter situations that express this fear of being eaten. The authors also include some discussion of food, mothers, and the application of Freud and Lacan in children’s texts, all of which support my discussion of these key issues.

With Freud and Lacan in their own arsenal, Kara K. Keeling, a specialist in children’s literature, and Scott T. Pollard, bring to light some useful work on food in children’s literature in

their 1999 article, “Power, Food, and Eating in Maurice Sendak and Henrik Drescher: Where the Wild Things Are, In the Night Kitchen, and The Boy Who Ate Around.” In this article, Keeling and Pollard focus on the issues of power in the family and the way food acts as the vehicle for power between parents and children in children’s literature. After mentioning M. F. K. Fisher and her experiences with her daughter’s first tastes of certain foods, Keeling and Pollard explain that only after accepting the tastes of new foods “can the daughter be included in the meal and, thus, by analogy, society” (133). The authors deal with child-characters’ rebellion against the norms of the table and eating in order to come to terms with the rules of human eating and “table-manners” so that they can also become a part of human society. For these characters, food plays an important role in their ability to grow as socialized, independent individuals who can eat with the rest of the family without escaping to imaginary worlds where everything is in their control. Through learning to eat like humans, they gain the power of being human, as opposed to “wild things,”² just as James and Coraline must learn to do.

Another scholar in the field of children’s literature and psychoanalysis, Karen Coats focuses on Lacan and his theory’s applications in this field of children’s literature. In her 2004 book, Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children’s Literature, Coats begins her discussion of children’s stories by placing them on the same level of necessity as food, saying, “Stories, it has been said, are as old as bread. I like that image, because it links stories to something as indispensable to our survival as food” (1). By linking survival, food, and stories, Coats poignantly makes some of the connections I support here: though these are not “real” children, their need for food and affection is just as real as our own, and thus worth study. After her brief discussion of food and the link between food and literature, she goes on to explore the Lacanian issues in several popular children’s books, including Charlotte’s Web, Peter Pan,

and Alice in Wonderland. Most relevant to this thesis is her argument that Wilbur, in Charlotte's Web, is brought into the world of human subjectivity (and thus valued as more than food) by entering into the world of language through Charlotte's web-writing. This, Coats explains, does "what the Lacanian (m)Other does—together they [Fern (through her pleading) and Charlotte (through her writing)] provide the conditions for [Wilbur] to have a 'voice,' at the expense of their own erasure" (19). She also points out that people can survive without their "voice," because "basic appetites are taken care of in this position, [...] in a sort of infantilized position that ultimately leads to their complete consumption by the Other. [...] it is a trap, and to accept it blithely will lead to Wilbur's annihilation" (28). Her discussion of the (m)Other is a useful one; she has also co-written a more recent publication on children's literature entitled Haunting the Borders: The Gothic in Children's Literature (2007), in which her article, "Between Horror, Humor, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of Gothic," explores Lacanian issues in several of Neil Gaiman's books, including Coraline.

Similarly, Carolyn Daniel's Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature, is an important compilation of arguments about food, eating, and power relationships (especially between mother-figures and children) in children's literature. Daniel's main argument throughout her book is that food represents sex in children's literature, with food embodying an incredibly pleasurable vehicle for both the characters and the audience reading the works. Daniel's argument that food is sex in children's literature will inform my examination of passages in each text that involve food and the subtle exchange of power and pleasure. Though few scholars have explored issues of food and power in the texts I inspect, the issues themselves have been a subject of academic exploration for some time. Carolyn Daniel's book is an example of just how much has been done in this field, but, although she does not examine the

texts I am focusing on, the texts she does look at are similar enough to the two I examine in this thesis that her argument still resonates.

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH: THE MOTHERING PEACH

When Disney transformed Roald Dahl's 1961 children's book, James and the Giant Peach, into a live action, CG, and stop-motion spectacle in 1996, Dahl's fictional novel was skillfully brought to life on screen: a giant peach, filled with giant insects and an orphaned boy, indulging in giant helpings of the fruit right in front of viewers' eyes. Since the characters in both the book and the film are not *alive*, and therefore do not need to eat to live (Daniel 3), these scenes involving food become something significant to the viewer, even though he or she eats and/or sees others eating every day. James and the Giant Peach retains much of the original grotesqueness and sexuality of its food scenes in the film adaptation—the sexuality of some scenes becomes even more pronounced through sounds, lighting, and the camera's focus on facial expressions. As Owen Gleiberman says, "Like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and the Wizard of Oz books, James and the Giant Peach is the rare children's fable that throws off glimmers of adult knowingness" (56); the film's portrayal of certain aspects of eating express, to the trained (or adult) eye, a sense of sexuality that may not be noticeable to the child viewer. In this section on James and the Giant Peach, I argue that Dahl uses food as a vehicle for an exchange of social and sexual power in the novel, especially between James and the peach/(m)other; I also demonstrate that Selick's adaptation makes these food events even more pronounced, their sexually and socially appealing aspects even more tantalizing. As Carolyn Daniel says, "Above all, food is never just something to eat: even when it is mundane and everyday it carries meaning. Food events are always significant, in reality as well as fiction" (1). James and the Giant Peach manages to create that significance through ambiguity, while maintaining the viewer's interest and pleasure.

A Day at the Peach: James's In-Pit Socialization

The social features of food are scattered throughout the book and film, bringing attention to the importance of eating in the development of children's social selves. One especially important scene (and the very first scene) in the film that is an addition to the food scenes in the book, involves James and his parents when they were alive. The opening scene shows a birthday cake and James's family, but viewers never see them share the cake or any other meal, making them seem like a less cohesive unit and easily expendable. Carolyn Daniels says that "mealtimes [...] are powerful socializing events" (15); if we, as viewers, do not see James and his parents share a meal, we also do not see them share the intimate social contact that comes with eating. Through this scene we find that James has a loving relationship with his family and his future woes are all the more difficult because of this; his parents are soon "gobbled up" by a rhinoceros—here eating takes on a much more frightening aspect, one that will haunt James throughout the film in the form of a thundering rhinoceros-cloud. In Dahl's novel, James's parents are "eaten up" by an angry rhino that has escaped from a zoo. Whether cloud or flesh, the angry rhino leaves James orphaned in each instance.

James's closest relatives, his aunts Sponge and Spiker, take him into their home, though they have less than loving intentions for this addition to their family. Dahl describes the women as "horrible people" who beat James and use him as a slave, even placing him in a room that was "as bare as a prison cell" (2). In Selick's adaptation, he is explicitly excluded from the fancy meals that his aunts share—they even go so far as to leave fish heads in the oven for him. In both texts, not only do they beat him and force him to do manual labor that would be taxing on even the burliest of men, they further punish and alienate him by refusing the social pleasures of sharing meals—even if his aunts are so disgusting that we are glad we don't have to eat with

them. In both the book and film versions, they sit in the yard, keeping a watchful eye on James and drinking “tall glasses of fizzy lemonade” (Dahl 5). They recite poetry about themselves, smashing a butterfly with a fly-swatter, an indication of how they feel about James, whom they have called “worm” and other insect-names consistently, and whose friends and surrogate family are insects later on in the story. During one scene in the film, when James is finished with his work for the day, he comes inside to find his aunts dressed in evening-wear, gorging themselves on food and wine. With full plates on the table before them, they tell him that they’ve “finished all the dinner.” After finding their trick of fish heads in the oven, James grabs a discarded bag of potato-chip crumbs and runs to his room. Daniel claims that “eating, and specifically the cultural imperative to eat correctly, is a significant means by which society controls individual identity” (3), and that “we must eat correctly in order to be ‘human’”(5). By refusing to feed James like an equal, like a human, they refuse to grant him status and identity as human. In this way, he is denied human society and, in turn, human identity. In their discussion of other children’s books in which child characters do not eat at the table with others, Keeling and Pollard describe meals as instances of social hierarchy and power struggles (132)—clearly James’s place is far below his aunts. He eats alone; his outcast, solitary status becomes even clearer as we see him ravenously licking the inside of the bag, by himself in his miserable room.

Other socializing food scenes in literature are often compared to the story of Adam and Eve eating the apple to gain knowledge and so become “human” through knowledge (Auerbach 343). Nina Auerbach connects the story of Adam and Eve to that of Alice in Wonderland, discussing the scene in which a bird calls Alice a serpent. Another well-known children’s story that involves questions of food and eating, Alice in Wonderland has also been deemed a precursor of Dahl’s James and the Giant Peach (Tal 267). Like Alice, whose neck grows until

she appears quite serpent-like, James crawls into the peach, living there like (and with) a worm. Somewhat unlike Alice, however, James enters a strange world where the idea of the insects eating *him* is ridiculous, but they do acknowledge that, on normal days, they might eat *each other* (Miss Spider, for instance, later says the peach tastes better than ladybugs, at which Mrs. Ladybug gasps and Miss Spider excuses herself—Alice’s talk of eating other characters results in the same shock, but Alice doesn’t seem to understand the dynamics of eating and being eaten until later in the book) (Auerbach 338-339). Although these characters are considered “savage” and sing “savage songs” about eating, they do not display this behavior and so help to “civilize” James as they themselves are civilized in their new, larger forms. Also like Charlie Bucket in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, James must first give in to what Hamida Bosmajian calls “oral greed,” as Adam and Eve do, before he can enter the peach (just as Charlie first devours one chocolate bar and then buys a second, allowing him to find the golden ticket that gains him entrance to Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory—his dream come true) (Bosmajian 44). James’s entrance into this societal schooling-ground gives him the knowledge that, in the novel, allows him to make friends and find his own identity as an independent child in New York City. In the film, this socialization helps him find the courage to stand up to his aunts and discover that he deserves much better treatment than they are giving him.

James’s aunts refuse to feed him properly—they have taken away all the power he ever had by taking away his inclusion in meals. But they have also, in a way, taken his knowledge that he is being treated poorly. Only after James takes his first bite of peach and planted himself firmly in its pit is he able to see that he *can* escape, that he *can* find children like himself, and so he does. Eating the delicious flesh of the peach gives James the power to do what he needs to do to become a socialized, human individual, not just a slave in his aunts’ house. Once he has this

glimmer of power, he can also move back into the social realm of family, though it is somewhat makeshift.

When James and the insects are on-board the peach, it is only after they have shared a meal (and a song about eating—Dahl’s lyrics even make it into Selick’s film) that they are able to become a “family.” They have been on the peach long enough to become quite famished and irritable, when James brings to the passengers’ attention that their vessel, the peach, is made entirely of food. They remove large chunks of the peach flesh and share a few bites and exclamations about their food together on the top of the peach before bursting into song about it. Scenes like this, argue Keeling and Pollard, show children’s acts of gorging as ways of rejecting adult food and power in children’s literature (127): James has rejected his aunts’ disapproval and exclusion of him, thus creating for himself and his friends a more powerful bond. They immediately become much closer through this simple act of eating together; in the novel, they sing about all the foods that cannot compare to “this FANTASTIC PEACH” (65); in the film, they sing about how wonderful the peach is, create sculptures of peach before devouring them, stomp the peach into a wine/beer-like liquid (Mrs. Ladybug even finds some beer mugs and a spigot), and they lean on one-another as they eat and sing. Not long after this, the film’s characters sing another song about their new-found status as family—a direct result of having shared a massive meal.

Family dynamics become pliable around the table (a phenomenon that happens often in children’s literature according to Keeling and Pollard [142]); James no longer needs his true family, having found friends inside the peach to share his pain, his travels, and his food. James has been rejected (or pushed away, that is) by his human caretakers and finds security in these insect-surrogates. Carolyn Daniel writes that “food events in children’s literature are clearly

intended to teach children how to be human”(12), and it is eating with others, it seems, that is “correct” in this case; the insects are more “civilized” than James’s ghastly aunts, and although they are not “human,” they give James what he needs to become human himself.

Daniel also points out that “an individual’s sense of self does not arise spontaneously but is derived by literally consuming culture”(8), arguing later that cooked vs. raw indicates the level of primitive vs. civilized in children’s literature (22). By eating a food that is often associated with America, James finds himself fitting in in his new country more than he did in England. The food he eats is raw, but through a series of sculpting, mashing, and chopping activities, the primitive aspect of the peach as food is brought to terms by making it somewhat “processed,” though still raw, fresh, and wholesome. As she points out about The Secret Garden, Daniel claims that healthy, wholesome food (for Mary and Colin, the book’s spoiled, wispy children, it is milk and bread) helps to create “natural, proper children”(25) and “real children” with appetites (27).

James must also become “real” in that he must decide what he wants from the world around him and embrace his own desires. Before James’s parents are “gobbled up,” we are privy to the dreams of both James and his father: James wants to be surrounded by other children like him, while his father wants to travel to New York City. When James reaches New York, fulfilling his father’s dreams through food (as a vehicle), his own dream of having friends is fulfilled through the act of eating; the children devour James’s peach and later come to listen to his stories about the peach while he lives in its pit. Although these children do not seem to want to be James’s friend solely for the sake of being friends (only one child asks James what his name is before diving into the peach in the film, and in the novel, only one little girl asks him if the children can eat the peach), he appears to be satisfied by having them around, eating his

peach. He has made the journey from childhood and gluttonous eating to a more mature, “civilized” state, and therefore does not need to indulge in the peach as the other children do. Instead, he sits back, watching as they devour his one possession, reducing it to the pit that is soon set up in Central Park. West claims that this pit, or womb of the peach, is a maternal love symbol, one that acts as a foundation on which James may build his social life (224). James lives in the pit with the other insects, telling the story of the peach to the other children (and sharing it with us, as the narrator lets us know in the end).

Forbidden Fruit: James’s Sexual Relationship with the Peach

Though the social aspects that come about as a result of the (m)other/food, the sexual aspects of James relate directly to the peach *as* (m)other to James. As mentioned above, Sponge and Spiker are particularly cruel to James. After working all day, James comes into their house and, in the film, we see the incident with the fish heads. When James is approached by an old man in the yard, the man offers him the discarded chip bag that James sent flying previously. It is now filled with magic crocodile tongues—another reference to eating and food, especially since Dahl’s description of how the magical green coils were made involves a sort of recipe. In the book, the man tells James that he must make a drink out of the tongues and drink it (12); this is an important indication of the importance of language—the enchanted tongues represent the fulfillment of James’s wishes, and he must ingest tongues in order to see those wishes come true. The tongues, though they come from crocodiles, maintain the ability to give James (or whatever ingests them) the power of language or human capabilities; the insects that swallow the tongues wear clothes and speak fluent English. Although James does not have the chance to make this

drink, as will be made evident in the following scene, he ingests the peach, which has the magic of the tongues embedded in it.

On his way back into the house, James accidentally drops the squiggling green things just below the dried up old peach tree in the yard. The green squiggles, which West deems “spermlike” (220), burrow into the hard ground and James is left without a single magic tongue. The green things start their magic almost instantly and, after a peach grows to enormous size on the previously barren tree, James’s aunts build a fence around it and make it into a money-making spectacle. West also describes this scene as “a symbolic portrayal of fertilization” (220); the peach tree is impregnated by the tongues, and the peach is “born.” Eve Tal writes, “Initially the peach acts as an agent of magical regeneration, renewing the fertility and growth of the ‘ancient peach tree that never gave any peaches’” (268-9); the peach is saturated from the start with imagery connecting it to fertility and birth. Tal also explains that peaches, in much folklore including that of China and Japan, symbolize female fertility (269). After locking James inside all day for the peach’s debut, his aunts send him out with the spiked handle of a broom, a phallic symbol which is only included in the film, (foreshadowing what is about to happen in the yard) to pick up trash.

In Dahl’s novel, James is out picking up garbage when he finds himself strangely pulled towards the peach, “as though drawn by some powerful magnet” (28). He approaches the peach and “touched it gently with the tip of one finger. It felt soft and warm and slightly furry, like the skin of a baby mouse. He moved a step closer and rubbed his cheek lightly against the soft skin” (28). Even in this first one-on-one encounter with the peach, we can see the affection James feels in its presence. He is gentle with it, finding it soft and warm, like a baby and mother. He even goes so far as to nuzzle the peach with his face, a gesture commonly seen between infants

and mothers, as well as lovers. Though it may not seem entirely out of place when we realize what this peach means to James later in the novel (freedom, friends, family, and fulfillment), it is, at this first instance, surprising to find James treat food with such affection. As he does so, he notices that there is “a hole in the side of the peach” (28). Without hesitation, James immediately climbs into the hole: “James knelt down in front of it and poked his head and shoulders inside. He crawled in. He kept on crawling. *This isn’t just a hole*, he thought excitedly. *It’s a tunnel!*” (30). James enters the peach in what West calls a “reversal of the birthing process” (221), head and shoulders first, just like a baby. As he crawls through the tunnel, the narrator describes it as “damp and murky, and all around him there was the curious bittersweet smell of fresh peach. The floor was soggy under his knees, the walls were wet and sticky, and peach juice was dripping from the ceiling. James opened his mouth and caught some of it on his tongue. It was delicious” (30). Though in the novel, James’s first taste of the peach is after his entrance into the tunnel/birth canal, he gets a taste of the peach a bit sooner in the film.

In the film, James is also sent out to pick up trash. After following a loose crocodile tongue to the ground below the peach, James stands to find himself face-to-face with the peach, which he gently rubs and fondles before breathing the smell of it in deeply with a sigh. After James looks around him to make sure he isn’t being watched, the camera closes in on his hands as his fingers dig into the flesh of the peach and he removes a chunk about the size of a grapefruit. This action is accompanied by squelching, sucking, slopping sounds. The camera then moves to a position slightly below James, framing him from the waist up as he turns, watching the peach. A quick shot of the space where the final, lone crocodile tongue disappeared gives the viewer a glance at the green coil that James does not see; just before he

bites the peach, the camera follows the green coil, zooming in on the place where it burrows into the peach—the place where James takes a huge bite with closed eyes. Chewing, he moans softly as the juices drip down his face. He presses his lips together and swallows, opening his eyes for the first time since he took the bite. Just as he does, he gets an out-of-focus look to his eyes, rolling them as if in ecstasy—the camera speed slows down and James’s eyes momentarily cross. This moment of *jouissance* is not explicit in the book, but here it is apparent, at least to the adult audience, that James has experienced something close to orgasm.

At this point, the camera moves to a shot with James’s body from knees to navel, framing his genitals, in the right side of the frame and the peach behind him and on the left. The place where he took the handful from the peach slowly opens up to a James-size hole (accompanied by sucking, creaking noises), a green light and fog pouring from inside. Once the hole is done growing, James’s mid-section turns towards it—since his genital region is perfectly framed, this shot is suggestive that when he turns, not he, but his genitals are attracted to the peach. The camera returns to a shot that is slightly below James’s level, and James stares at the hole and listlessly drops the hunk of peach in his hand, juices still dripping down his face. Although he looks as though he might be taking his clothes off, James removes the basket he’s been shouldering for trash pick-up and moves out of the shot, dumbly going towards the light of the hole like an insect, a fitting action for him as the viewer soon finds out. Just as the fog ceases and the green light goes out, the camera moves to a shot from inside the hole, looking down at James looking up. He takes a deep breath and climbs in head first. West claims that James “subconsciously longs [...] to return to the womb” (220), and here he does just that, just as he does in the novel in the “reversal of the birthing process” (221). What Empson deems the “nightmare theme” of the birth trauma in Alice in Wonderland is here, and in the novel,

decidedly pleasant for James (349); he willingly goes back to this state of being enclosed by a womb, as we soon see.

The next shot comes from inside the peach, showing the left side of James, a black figure outlined against the orange walls, as he climbs upward through the ribbed, glistening tunnel on his hands and knees. The shot is reminiscent of an ant farm inside a glass case—the area around the tunnel is black and makes the tunnel even more vibrant by contrast—preparing us for his future family and shedding further light on the how we should see James as small and harmless, as well as returning to a tiny, baby/insect-like state. As James climbs, a green spark (perhaps the air-borne version of the crocodile tongues) swirls around his various body regions and transforms him, beginning with his head, which is almost doubled in size and proportion, and ending with the lower part of his body, which is made tiny and thin. The green spark fades and, as he crawls, James's face and body are bathed in green light, revealing his new, animated form—this is the point in the film where filming changes from live action to stop-motion and CG.

The next shot is from James's point of view as he crawls—the tunnel looks strikingly similar to an esophagus or birth canal as a medical camera is pushed to stomach or uterus, respectively; James looks like a fetus—he is being “unborn” into the womb/pit of the peach, but he could also be seen as food being eaten by the peach. Just as the children in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory are eaten, digested, and excreted by Willy Wonka's factory as Bosmajian describes (37), so too is James first taken in through this orifice to later be excreted, a changed boy. Much of Alice in Wonderland, too, is about food entering and words leaving the mouth (Auerbach 341). This scene makes aspects of eating/birthing/penetrating ambiguous. As he climbs, the orange tunnel walls fade to a glistening black in the green light. As James

approaches the source of the light, a sort of transparent green screen in the mouth of a black cave, he hears the voices of the insects that have already made it to the peach's pit. After listening for a moment and watching the massive insects strike frightening poses, he tumbles through the screen and falls into the pit himself.

In either book or film, James could also be viewed as a sort of phallus, impregnating the peach and becoming the pregnancy at the same time. Just as Alice acts as the father, fetus, born child, and mother in her story (Empson 350-351), so too does James enact similar roles: here he could be seen as the phallus, impregnating the peach with himself. Like a pregnant woman, the peach is seen to bulge and swell on the stem (Dahl 16), and Gleiberman describes it as "smooth and succulent and as big as a small house" (a simile many a pregnant woman has cringed to hear) (56). Eve Tal says that James enters "the womb of the peach and feeds on it like a baby" (270); it transports and nourishes him, protecting him throughout his adventures (Tal 269). Daniel asserts that "the provider of sweet food in a children's story can stand in for an absent and longed-for mother" (76). This is especially true for James, who has been without a mother for about three years in the book (though there seems to have been a shorter passage of time in the film). Instead of his loving parents, James has had to put up with "bad" mothers in the forms of Sponge and Spiker. West claims that James "wishes to escape from the harsh world and return to the security of the womb" (220); when James had his parents, he was able to cope with the "harsh" world, but with their deaths, his world becomes almost hopeless and his parental support is gone. In order to escape from the bad mothers and terrible life he's fallen into as an orphan, he is carried across the ocean with his insect friends, feeding on the peach and "growing" as they go. According to West, James no longer needs the womb after he starts solving problems and

taking charge aboard the peach, thus making the final birth/excretion scene plausible and appropriate (223).

In the film, when they finally reach New York City, James confronts the rhino that ate his parents for the last time as they hover above the city. He has gained a good deal of knowledge and courage; he has grown up overnight through the nourishment of the peach/womb; he has found a new family and great friends to sustain him—the rhinoceros is no longer a match for him. After telling it that he is not afraid of it, the rhino sends out one last frightening message: a lightning bolt which lets loose the fence that the peach rolled up before leaving England. This in turn severs the strings that attach the peach to the seagulls that hold the peach aloft, creating a sort of cutting of the umbilical cord (West 223). The peach falls and is then skewered on the spire of the Empire State Building—another phallic image involving the peach. The peach, that has up until this point acted as a mother for James, has been penetrated by the “father” that is NYC, symbolized by the Empire State Building. This harkens back to the first scene in which James’s father hoped to someday make it to NYC; he has been reincarnated through the spire on the building that symbolizes New York.

The book is equally effective in showing that James has acquired an identity while living aboard the peach, as well as courage and faith in his own abilities as a human. As the peach approaches NY, James “order[s]” the Centipede to begin cutting the strings that hold the peach afloat (125). The group plans to descend upon the city slowly and gently, but a plane flies by and chops all the strings that are keeping the peach in the air; in Dahl’s original version, it is not a rhino’s wrath that brings the peach to be impaled on the Empire State Building, but a stroke of (bad?) luck. The peach plummets towards the city and “was precisely onto the top of this needle [of the Empire State Building] that it fell! There was a squelch. The needle went in deep. And

suddenly—there was the giant peach, caught and spiked upon the very pinnacle of Empire State Building” (128).

Eve Tal calls this a “rape scene” in which the peach is forcefully penetrated by the spire (270). Words like “caught” and “deep” support this interpretation, conjuring images of bondage and pain. She also points out that several other scenes in the book were rape scenes, though they are removed or replaced in the film; one of these scenes involves a huge group of sharks (this is replaced by the one massive, mechanical shark in the film) that attempt to bite the peach as it sits in the ocean (the mechanical shark is somewhat more effective: it actually penetrates the peach with a harpoon). The other scene involves “cloud men” who throw hard balls of cloud at the peach and puncture it in several places. The men are hardly noticeable in the film, though they do appear in the sky as an extra-dreamy addition to the song about family, performing acrobatics in the background. Though the “rape scenes” of the book do not transfer in their entirety, the idea of forceful penetration remains; even the early scene when James is being “unborn” could be considered a rape-like scene.

The peach, which originally allowed James to be “unborn,” is finally a birthing-site for James. West says that the climax of the book occurs with James’s “rebirth” here in NYC. In the film, the impact of the peach on the spire causes James to fall while he is inside the pit, coughing up the crocodile tongue that transformed him earlier in the adaptation. He emerges from the peach, either having been born or digested, as a new boy (the film is back in live action footage as soon as James coughs up the tongue), one with a family, friends, and a will of his own. After the “hoards of greedy children” have “stripped [the peach] of its wounded flesh” and “reduce[d] it to a barren stone” (Tal 273), James and his friends set up the pit in Central Park. Though he is born of the peach, he remains connected to it forever, making a house out of the pit (Tal 270).

The final scene of the film shows Miss Spider calling to James from the kitchen with a chef's hat on as he tells his story to the children around him; Miss Spider has taken over in James's house, perhaps as mother, perhaps as a wife-like figure—the ambiguity is present even to the end of the film. Though this final scene is not included in Dahl's novel, its addition in the film serves to reinforce the ambiguity that pervades both the original story and the adaptation.

According to West, “James owes his life to a symbolic repetition of sexual intercourse, just as a newborn infant's life stems from the sexual union of his or her parents” (223). This repetition occurs not only through images of birth and rebirth, but through sexual imagery, including scenes of rape and penetration. But that is not the only important aspect of James and the Giant Peach: as Gleiberman points out, this adaptation is “celebrating the peach's gustatory glories [...] all [...] while scooping out peachy mouthfuls so juicy and glistening you can practically taste them” (56). This film has taken on the pleasurable aspects of children's books successfully. It has made “food descriptions [and in the film's case, depictions,], like menus in restaurants [...], a pleasure which notably involves both intellect and material body working in synaesthetic communion” (Daniel 2). We watch James eat; we can “practically taste” the peach, but we are thinking all the while of what this act of eating is connected with. For the child audience, the connection comes between family, friends, and socially correct values (the aunts are decidedly *not* what children should connect good food with). For the adult, the connections with food and the peach include birth, sexuality, and digestion. The significance of food in this book and its adaptation is apparent from the start, but becomes even more apparent through connections to sexuality and society.

CORALINE: THE STRUGGLE TO EAT OR BE EATEN

Though Coraline has a somewhat more disturbing journey through the world of the other mother in order to form her own, individual identity, her trials share many of the aspects of James's adventures. She finds herself unable to entertain herself after she and her family move into a new flat and ends up, for a time, in an uncanny "other" flat, complete with an "other mother" and "other father." Coraline is tempted to stay in this world when her parents disappear and the (m)other lures her in with delicious food, entertainment, and unconditional "love"—Coraline soon discovers that this love, however, will result in her becoming food for the (m)other, a possible fate similar to Hansel and Gretel's.

Real versus "Other": Coraline's Parents and Their Provision of Food

Prior to the disappearance of Coraline's parents, Gaiman very clearly sets up an association between Coraline's parents—and, more specifically, her mother—and food. The majority of her mother's attention is focused on feeding Coraline, albeit, to Coraline, joyless or uninteresting meals. When the Joneses move into their flat in an old house inhabited by several strange tenants, Coraline spends her time exploring the grounds on her own. Her parents both work, mostly from home, and have little free time to keep Coraline occupied or shower her with attention and affection. The first mention of Coraline's mother is one that portrays her main concern about Coraline: keeping her fed. Gaiman introduces Coraline's mother by telling us that she "made [Coraline] come back inside for dinner and for lunch" (6). In most cases, we find Coraline's mother in the kitchen. When Coraline first asks her mother about the door in the drawing room that later becomes her passage into an "other" world, the two are in the kitchen; Coraline's mother keeps the key to the drawing room door over the kitchen doorframe, a liminal

space. Though this doorframe is a sort of boundary to her mother's world, it symbolizes for Coraline other boundaries (rules), as well as escape (access to the other flat). By taking something from the doorframe, she is breaking her mother's rules, but she is also expanding her boundaries, taking the power her mother has in the kitchen and using it to get into the other flat.

Although we learn to associate the (m)others in the book with food and kitchens, Coraline's father makes some attempts at cooking for the family, all of which (prior to Coraline's adventures) turn Coraline's stomach. After her father stops working at his computer to cook dinner, "Coraline was disgusted. 'Daddy,' she said, 'you've made a *recipe* again'" (9). Although the meal, a "leak and potato stew with a tarragon garnish and melted Gruyere cheese" (9-10), sounds like the kind of gourmet menu many adults might prefer, Coraline finds it unpalatable. The word *recipe* connotes a sense of forced creation, of playing by adult rules, of complexity—Coraline's father didn't just come up with this on his own or buy it pre-made in a supermarket and he doesn't have it memorized, like an old favorite; he's followed a *recipe*, making the meal somehow unnatural for Coraline who prefers the simplicity of pizza and sandwiches. When she discovers that her father has made this from scratch (and actually put some thought/effort into making it), she immediately goes "to the freezer and [gets] out some microwave chips and a microwave minipizza" (10). Fisher suggests that there is a danger in the monotony of meals, a danger that can, she says (somewhat facetiously), produce serial killers (109)—though Coraline has not reached such an extreme quite yet, it is clear that her father's food is something she has gotten used to dealing with—she is bored with the food, bored with his experimenting, and bored with his attempts to entertain with food. She has found the dynamics of eating her father's meals to be banal and unappealing. Keeling and Pollard argue that "the functions of food, as well as the rituals of eating and the rituals of the table, are compact

metaphors for the power struggle inherent in family dynamics” (“Power” 132); Coraline comes to the table, recognizes and rejects her father’s food, and fixes the microwavable meal she prefers. For Coraline, anything more complicated than precooked food or putting slices of bread together makes her squirm in disgust. She wants simple, thoughtless food, which suggests that she wants everything in her life to be “ready-made”; she wants entertainment to present itself, for affection to be “ready at the push of a button” and there when she wants it. Coraline’s preferences in food show the reader her preferences in her parents’ attention as well: there when she wants it, out of sight when she doesn’t.

Although her father seems to do most of the actual (stove-using, recipe-following) cooking, Coraline’s mother seems to spend a lot of time in the kitchen; however, she does not keep food in the house at all times, nor does she rely on recipes to feed the family, something that Coraline admires. After a day of shopping, during which Coraline’s mother repeatedly shoots down her requests for items that would make her unique at a school that enforces uniforms, Coraline and her mother return to the house right around lunchtime. When they arrive, “Coraline’s mother looked in the fridge and found a sad little tomato and a piece of cheese with green stuff growing on it. There was only a crust in the bread bin” (24-25). Though it seems Coraline’s mother intends to make sandwiches, a meal that Coraline is sure to prefer over another of her father’s recipes (though, possibly, not over her microwavable meals), she does not have any edible ingredients handy. The tomato is “sad,” just like this stock of groceries. Her mother immediately leaves the house to get food, allowing Coraline to stay home; just as the lack of food leaves Hansel and Gretel momentarily orphaned, Coraline must fend for herself from this point on in the book.

She occupies herself for a little while, but before long, she goes into the kitchen and gets the keys down from the doorframe. Even when her mother is gone, Coraline associates using these keys with going against her mother's wishes. They belong in her mother's domain, the kitchen, and using them to open the door in the drawing room keeps her glancing over her shoulder, awaiting her mother's return. After turning the key in the lock, "Coraline stopped and listened. She knew she was doing something wrong, and she was trying to listen for her mother coming back, but she heard nothing" (26). Her father is off visiting friends, but could still return at any time (at least, Gaiman chooses to leave out the father's estimated time of arrival); he is not the threat, however, because the keys are not, in Coraline's mind, part of his jurisdiction, having come from the kitchen.

Just as with Coraline's mother, Gaiman creates the association between Coraline's other mother and food. When Coraline first enters the flat on the other side of the drawing room door, she hears a voice call her name and follows it straight to the kitchen, where she finds a woman who resembles her own mother: her "other" mother. Because she finds the (m)other in the kitchen, she (and the reader) instantly associates this woman with food as well, just as she does her real mother. The (m)other turns around, showing Coraline her button eyes, and announces that lunch is ready. After asking Coraline to inform her other father that it is lunchtime, "Coraline realized how hungry she was. It smelled wonderful" (28). Coraline's other father announces that he too is "starving" (28).

Although we can read this as the characters' literal hunger for food, we can also look at this first meeting with Coraline's other parents as a reiteration of her hunger for attention and her other parents' hunger for something to love or play with or even eat eventually. Up until Coraline's parents disappear, she continuously goes to them for help in decreasing her boredom.

After two weeks of exploring outside, Coraline must stay in on a rainy day. She goes to both of her parents for ideas, using their suggestions to the best of her abilities. Her mother tells her to “read a book, [...] watch a video, play with [her] toys. Go and pester Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, or the crazy old man upstairs” (6). Even after Coraline says she doesn’t want to do these things, she takes her mother’s advice and does them anyway, ticking off each item on the list and then asking her father for more help. When she goes to him, he does not even take a moment to turn from his computer to speak to her, but clumsily hands her a sheet of paper and a pen and gives her some tasks to accomplish in the house, such as counting the number of doors (7). When she’s done these things, she returns to her mother and questions her about the door in the drawing room. Later, she even sits in the floor and tries to draw the mist per her mother’s suggestion to draw something. On this same day, her father suggests she learn to tap-dance to pass the time. She questions, ““Why won’t you play with me?”” to which her father briefly answers, ““Busy, [...] working,”” without turning around from his computer once again (18). Coraline, an only child living in a house with no other children and few coherent adults to occupy her time, is hungry for attention and for her parents to be interested in what she does. Karen Coats claims, “When a child develops the capacity to be bored, it is a signal that he or she is in a transitional state, a state where he or she is developing a separate sense of self, a need to assert his or her desires over and against the desires of the mother” (“Between Horror” 86). Boredom leads to self-discovery, and for Coraline, self-discovery entails an entire “other” world in which she must form her own identity, separate from that of her parents, particularly her mother. When Coraline pushes the key into the lock and opens the door to the other flat, “we see Coraline in that liminal moment when she finds herself cut off from her parents’ desire, and not yet sure of her own” (Coats, “Between Horror” 87). Karen Coats discusses the importance of

“the process of [children’s] birthing an ego separate from that of their mothers,” and she recalls Lacan and Kristeva’s claim that “the mother is the first object of desire for the daughter as well as the son” (“Between Horror” 85). She examines the moment that Coraline “finds herself cut off from her parents’ desire, and not yet sure of her own” (“Between Horror” 87), a moment that makes her entire adventure in the other mother’s world possible.

As soon as she enters her other parents’ world, she’s given a task to occupy her: to tell her other father that dinner is ready. A small task, but one she seems eager to accomplish. After Coraline informs her other father that lunch is ready, they go to the kitchen together and they sit at the kitchen table and “Coraline’s other mother brought them lunch. A huge, golden-brown roasted chicken, fried potatoes, tiny green peas. Coraline shoveled the food into her mouth. It tasted wonderful” (28). In Coraline’s other world, her mother not only cooks hearty and delicious meals, she brings them to her and her father at the table. Coraline finds this food to be “wonderful,” not only because she is so hungry for it, but because it is not a “recipe” like her father would follow, nor is it pre-cooked or bland like something she or her mother might have made. Coraline’s father attempts to make “recipes” that are, to an adult palette, delicious and “interesting,” whereas her (m)other makes meals that harken back to an earlier time (perhaps the 1950s or so), before the trend of “interesting” and strange food combinations emerged in Western culture. Coraline’s father is attempting to embrace the trend to make flashy meals that will keep his family’s taste buds guessing. The (m)other’s meal is a simple one, one that could very well have been made by following a recipe, but it is something simple, delicious, and wholesome that Coraline does not get very often in her real world. There is again no thought involved for Coraline, but this time the lack of thought stems from the familiarity of this type of meal—it is a meal that one might find in a restaurant that boasts “home-cooked” meals. The

word “shoveled” might indicate a hurry to eat the food and a loss of pleasure in savoring it, but Gaiman includes the simple sentence, “It tasted wonderful,” to emphasize Coraline’s enjoyment of this meal, even as she eats voraciously.

Coraline’s other father takes this opportunity to express his and the (m)other’s happiness at Coraline’s arrival, saying, “We’ve been waiting for you for a long time” (29). Instead of saying, “We’re glad you’re here,” or, “We hope you stay with us,” the word choice in this simple declaration shows Coraline that she is very much wanted and important in this world. The word “waiting” indicates that the other parents have had little else to do, that they have been in anticipation of Coraline’s arrival and nothing else has occupied their thoughts. They have been waiting for “a long time,” letting Coraline know that she is worth waiting for and that they are ready to give her their full attention. Coraline’s (m)other adds to this statement, saying, “It wasn’t the same here without you. But we knew you’d arrive one day, and then we could be a proper family. Would you like some more chicken?” (29). Gaiman has craftily placed this conversation mid-meal to strengthen Coraline’s (and the reader’s) association between good food and loving parents. The offer of more chicken, though abrupt for the current topic of discussion, is well-placed between bites of delicious food and morsels of delicious affection.

Although Coraline’s world may not seem all that bad to readers of Gaiman’s book, the boring, uninteresting, and even downright disgusting qualities of her new home really come to life on film. Not only are her parents inattentive, they are unattractive as well (at least in comparison with her other parents). Coraline’s mother wears lumpy, baggy clothes that only make her wide hips wider and her somewhat flat chest flatter; she is somewhat pasty in her paleness (we can assume she isn’t wearing make-up), she rarely cracks a smile, and she has a crooked nose and pronounced cowlick. When Coraline first meets her other mother, Coraline’s

instant interest in her can be partially attributed to her aesthetic “improvements”: she is rosy and cheery (blushed and lipsticked), her hair is smooth and shiny, her clothes fit her well—perhaps her somewhat narrower hips and more shapely bust aid in the garments’ appearance. She smiles, hums, and calls Coraline’s name in happiness each time she enters the flat. When Coraline first enters the other flat, she can smell delicious food cooking, and she finds her (m)other standing by the stove, happily preparing a meal that is specially designed to please Coraline.

In the film, Coraline returns to her own world and her parents have not yet been kidnapped, giving her the chance to tell them about the other flat (which they brush off as a dream). She poutingly asks, “Why don’t YOU ever cook, mom?” Her parents, sighing, explain that they have split the household duties evenly, leaving dad to do the cooking and mom with the shopping.

During her first feast in the other flat, the other father makes some odd comments: “We give our thanks and [sic] ask to bless your mother’s golden chicken breast.” Crude as this “blessing” may be, Coraline finds this food as satisfying and perfect as mother’s milk. Not only is the food delicious, it is entertaining; a gravy train chugs around the table, spraying her mashed potatoes with the just the right amount of gravy. Her every wish is fulfilled as she sits at her other parents’ table. Even a milkshake dispenser, filled with every kind of milkshake imaginable (Coraline asks for mango), descends from the ceiling at her pleasure. She is lavished in food, fun, and the attention she craves.

Even after Coraline rescues her parents and returns to her real life, her real mother is associated with providing food. She finds Coraline asleep and immediately lets her know that dinner will be ready shortly. Her father has prepared the meal, but by taking the responsibility of letting Coraline know about dinner, her mother reinforces the association between mother and

food. This time, the food is a little more familiar to Coraline—pizza—but it is still very “recipe”-like with “slices of green peppers on it, along with little meatballs and, of all things, pineapple chunks” (141). Coraline eats this meal, only picking off the pineapples, with a new relish for her real father’s cooking. Even after the delicious meals she has devoured in the other mother’s kitchen, she has found a new appreciation for the food her parents provide. Keeling and Pollard point out that, in Sendak’s Where the Wild Things Are, “only at the end, when he is spent, does food appear on the table, thereby symbolically including Max in the family once more” (135). Max comes back to his own world to find that, not only has he grown as an individual, he has renegotiated his place in his home, including his place at the table; Coraline has a newfound appreciation of her real parents and what they provide for her, and only with this knowledge can they return, bringing their associated food with them. She has broadened not only her palate, but her ability to appreciate what her parents can and do provide for her—she understands that everything is not “touch-of-a-button” ready, and by eating her parents’ food without complaint, she shows that she can also appreciate the love, affection, and attention that they are able to offer her. A few days after this meal, Coraline’s mother once again asks her only to “be back in time for lunch” when she goes out to play (153), reiterating her mother’s role of keeping Coraline fed (and making sure she’s watched), despite the fact that her father has prepared most of the food we see her eat in the real world.

A New Spin on an Ancient Symbol: Coraline and the Apple

After Coraline’s parents disappear, she is left to fend for herself on the food front. A food she returns to often, even taking it into the other flat, is one that has carried a great deal of symbolism with it for thousands of years: the apple. One of her first meals alone in her own

house consists of “a block of cooking chocolate and an apple. The apple was yellow and slightly shriveled, but it tasted sweet and good” (50). Notice that Gaiman does not comment on Coraline’s pleasure in eating sweets as part of a meal, but rather focuses on the real, natural food she chooses. The fruit is yellow, perhaps a little on the old side, but Coraline finds it to be “good,” something Gaiman doesn’t point out about anything else she eats in her own world up until this point. The only other thing she likes “enormously” comes later on the same page: the chemical-green limeade she gets to taste at the Misses Spink and Forcible’s flat. Gaiman gives us a combination of Coraline’s appreciation of both the purely natural and the purely man-made. Although she despises her father’s “recipes” and prefers microwaveable meals to her mother’s tasteless food, her palate is not limited to the artificial; she is expanding her palate, and discovering delights at both ends of the food spectrum.

Even so, she seems to favor the apples. Although when she buys groceries, she purchases “two large bottles of limeade, a chocolate cake, and a new bag of apples, and went back home and ate them for dinner” (51), she does not take a bottle of limeade or chocolate cake with her on her return journey to the other flat (to save her parents). Instead, she takes two of the new apples and places one in each pocket of her dressing gown.

It is easy to see why an apple would be a good choice for a portable, filling snack. But Coraline, a child who generally favors pizza and chips, is not normally one to choose the healthiest food. Once her parents have gone missing, Coraline begins to discover the importance of her food choices. At this point, she seems to have had her fill of the pre-packaged, man-made stuff that has filled her up in the past; she even goes somewhat “old fashioned” in her choice of supplies: she takes the apples, the old black key (probably fashioned by hand), the stone with the hole in it, and candles. Coraline lives in a time when there are flashlights—which would

probably be a more convenient way of lighting her path—but she chooses the “old-fashioned,” simpler choice that requires nothing more than a simple spark to guide her. The apples symbolize a new attempt on Coraline’s part to start over; she has lost her parents and is rebuilding her tastes—her tastes not only for food, but for what is valuable and “interesting.” What better to start over with than the “original” fruit, one that is associated not only with beginnings, but with knowledge and danger, things Coraline is certainly about to experience. For Coraline, the knowledge and power she gains by eating the apple could be considered a *felix culpa*, or a happy fall—she is not cut off from what she desires or what is best for her, but instead gains the skills she needs to become an individual, whole person.

Later, once Coraline has reentered the other flat, she uses an apple as a defense against the other mother’s power: her food and her desire to control Coraline, even down to what she eats. When the other parents offer to fix her a snack, Coraline says, “I don’t need a snack, [...] I have an apple, see?” (61). She doesn’t need what the other mother has in her kitchen just yet—she has something real and “good” to sustain her for a while, a smart precaution that begins her defiance of the (m)other’s power. When the other mother conjures an image of Coraline’s parents coming back from a holiday and happily noting Coraline’s absence, Coraline finalizes her disbelief in the image by sitting down on the sofa and eating this same apple. Just as the stone and the key act as talismans that are representative of feminine and masculine power, the apple acts as a sort of talisman as well: a talisman of knowledge and wholesomeness. What has been used in other stories as a symbol of temptation now becomes a buffer against it; though apples are often associated with original sin and “the fall,” Gaiman has already set up the wholesome aspects of apples by telling us that Coraline finds them “sweet and good,” providing for Coraline’s *felix culpa*.

During the (m)other's display of the false image, however, Gaiman uses the apple in another way. As Coraline looks on the image of her parents rejoicing in having gotten rid of her, a doubt enters her mind. Gaiman writes, "There was a tiny doubt inside her, like a maggot in an apple core" (63). For just a moment, she thinks that perhaps her parents *were* on vacation and *are* glad that she's no longer there. In the apple and maggot simile, Coraline symbolically becomes the apple. She is no longer attached to her proverbial trees, if you will, and is somewhat vulnerable. Gaiman uses the apple, a symbol of knowledge, life, and even sin, to portray this young girl who is learning to make her own choices, without her parents. The (m)other plants in her a maggot of doubt—a disgusting, wriggling thing that does nothing but eat away at what Coraline has deemed "good." Eventually, Coraline smothers this doubt, expelling the maggot and trusting her powers of reason and understanding to decide that, no, her parents were not on a holiday and would not be happy to see her gone. The apple stays whole and healthy; she remains the only real thing in a fake world, and "Coraline was sure in her heart that what she had seen in the mirror was no more than an illusion" (63). The word *sure* re-emphasizes wholeness, strength, and reality: an apple that has nothing eating away at it, hollowing it out.

If we return to an earlier moment in the story, we will find a girl-as-apple there as well. When Coraline is alone in her house, between trips to the other flat, she becomes bored and types out a story on her father's computer entitled "CORALINE'S STORY" (51). Now, although this is a story written by Coraline, as part of a larger story about her, this is also a story *about* Coraline, despite the main character's name: Apple. Coraline writes, "THERE WAS A GIRL HER NAME WAS APPLE. SHE USED TO DANCE A LOT. SHE DANCED AND DANCED UNTIL HER FEET TURND INTO SOSSAJES THE END [sic]" (51). Though a simple story, it

clearly illustrates Coraline's story and the peril she faces. This is a girl, Apple (read: Coraline), who indulges in something she enjoys, namely dancing. She dances until, not only do her feet turn into "sossajes," but she loses the ability to dance altogether. Apple, a "good" girl (we can assume from Gaiman's earlier deeming of apples as "sweet and good" to Coraline's tastes), indulges to the point that parts of her become the total opposite of what she begins as: manufactured meat products, products that sound all the more disgusting having taken the place of her feet. Coraline faces a similar danger: she can give into the (m)other's indulgences—the cooking and the "love" and the entertainment—but she will become something eaten and digested: a sad excuse for what used to be a lively young girl.

Coraline becomes most aware of the danger she is in when she enters the "cupboard" with the dead children. Coraline's (m)other throws her into the cupboard behind a mirror (the same mirror in which she conjured the image of Coraline's parents), where she finds the ghosts or shells of three children, children who were deceived and trapped by the other mother. When Coraline pointedly asks what the other mother plans to do with her, the dead children tell her, "She will take your life and all you are [...]. [...] A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten" (86). The (m)other plans to not only kill Coraline, but to "take" all that she is into herself; Coats argues that "this is the true horror of the other mother—for her, love is a regressive desire to consume Coraline" ("Between Horror" 88). Coraline realizes what is in store for her, but she decides, even after all of these warnings, that she must save her parents and outsmart the (m)other. As she mulls over what she should do, there in the dark with the dead children, she eats "her last apple, taking the tiniest bites making it last as long as she [can]. When she was finished she was still hungry" (87). She has saved the apple until this moment, holding off on satisfying her hunger until she

can no longer take it. She eats there with the dead children, savoring an activity that they can no longer perform; she eats almost as a sort of reward for her own decision to continue. Food, especially the wholesome, portable, natural, “good” apple, is more than just food: it connects her to the real world and keeps her occupied and preoccupied in a world where her “real” resources are running low. By eating the apple slowly and carefully, she has time to think about what she’s going to do. In the very next sentence, Gaiman writes, “Then an idea struck her” (87). This turns out to be her ever more courageous and thoughtful addition of saving the dead children as well—a plan that doesn’t seem possible at the moment to Coraline, but that she eventually figures out.

A discussion of apples is almost never complete without mention of two classic stories: the creation story and “Snow White.” The apple has for some time symbolized the taste of sin, the gaining of forbidden knowledge, and expulsion from the garden of Eden. For Coraline, this is the case, though it is, for her, a decidedly good thing: she tastes what it is like to be wrong for a moment (by contemplating this other world as an escape from her own), she discovers the necessary knowledge that she is, in fact, an individual capable of doing things for herself, and, finally, she removes herself from the Eden of continual infancy. To have stayed in the other mother’s flat would have denied Coraline all of the pleasure of being real; she would never have been bored, hungry, or forgotten. Without these things, she cannot grow, cannot appreciate what it is to be entertained, full, and loved. Staying with the other mother would have, essentially, kept Coraline in a child-like state; though a dead child, she would still have remained a child forever.

The Brothers Grimm’s Snow White also runs this risk when she takes a bite of the apple. In this story, once again, there is the fear of being consumed: Snow White’s stepmother, the evil

queen, wishes to kill Snow White and eat “her lungs and liver” (84). After several attempts to murder Snow White, the queen finally creates a poisoned apple and watches Snow White die as she takes the first bite (88). Though Snow White’s ingestion of the poisoned fruit no doubt gives her the knowledge that this woman was not, after all, trustworthy, her death also sends her into a sort of “fall.” She is presumed dead for some time, until a prince attempts to transport her body. She is jostled in the process, and the piece of apple is dislodged from her throat, renewing her, mind and body (89). Snow White is privy, after her taste of the apple, to a sort of fall/rebirth. She is finally out of the queen’s clutches and can live freely with her new royal husband. Like Coraline, this taste of the apple turns out to be a good thing for Snow White: she is out of a “bad” mother’s clutches and saved from a life (read: death) of being a child forever.

Although apples feature in as an important part of Gaiman’s novel, other than a brief glimpse of some apple trees when Coraline is walking through the other world, Selick’s adaptation leaves the fruit out. However, Selick focuses on some other key features of the novel and brings them more fully to the surface for viewers. Selick emphasizes more clearly the idea of deadness (and therefore a sort of “un-birth” into the other mother’s womb, forever entombed as an infant) and castration by including the button-eyed doll versions of some of the characters; the loss of the eyes, in effect, is a loss of the soul (as David Rudd contends, “eyes being its windows” [163]) (and therefore the identity as subject), as the ghost children in the movie emphasize. As an additional character in the movie who has a “dead” version in the other flat, the eerie, sand-filled version of Coraline’s friend Wybie calls attention to the idea of Freud’s Sandman and the castration complex as well. Selick also plays up the fact that the (m)other wants to eat Coraline; the cat mentions this to Coraline, who responds with disbelief. The

(m)other eventually morphs into a frightening spider, complete with sticky, spiraling web in which to trap and devour Coraline.

Feinting Fruit Paintings

Throughout Gaiman's novel, in both her flat and her other flat, Coraline encounters a painting of a bowl of fruit. Coraline notices the painting three times in the text: once in her flat and twice in her other flat. The first time Coraline considers the painting, the narrator tells us that "Coraline could never work out why anyone would want to paint a bowl of fruit" (26). Although she cannot see the value in this painting, it will become a sort of warning to her near the end of her trials. The painting currently appears to be a flat, unchangeable object—one that she has no interest in, just like most of the things in her life. She moves on, taking in the rest of the room's décor without giving the painting much more thought.

Key to this passage is the fact that all of what Coraline's parents have placed in the drawing room, where this painting appears, once belonged to Coraline's grandmother. The narrator does not divulge which grandmother, and so, without a distinction between maternal or paternal, there is a sense that this furniture is a connection to Coraline's past and the women that came before her. With the words "they had inherited the furniture from Coraline's grandmother" (26), there is also the suggestion that this is a traditional and feminine space—the objects in the room were not from Coraline's *grandparents*, but her *grandmother*. The room is filled with things that Coraline is not allowed to touch—she is forbidden to leave her mark on this part of the house—the space does not "feel comfortable or lived in" (26). This passage brings to mind images of stiff, heavy, unyielding furniture and décor; even if Coraline were to try to "touch" it, she would not leave a mark. Again, there is the association with forbidden fruit, but also with

fruit as in “fruitful”—Coraline’s grandmother was, we assume, fruitful, in that she bore one of Coraline’s parents. The room is daunting and presents a task for Coraline: by entering the realm of the other mother, she will have to work very hard to change what is in store for her and has been laid out for her, possibly since a time before her grandmother’s life. Even while she opens the door, she knows she is doing something wrong—perhaps not only her mother’s absence makes her check over her shoulder, but her grandmother’s as well.

Coraline is able to put away her fear of getting caught, and when she next sees the painting, she is in the other flat on her second trip. She notes that the painting is exactly the same as the one in her flat, this time listing the fruit it contains: “a bunch of grapes, two plums, a peach and an apple” (71). At this stage in her journey, Coraline’s sense of the uncanny has kicked in. Gaiman writes, “It was so familiar—that is what made it feel truly strange” (71). Not only is the room strange and still unyielding, it has taken on a cold quality: there is an “empty fireplace which seemed to suck heat from the room” (71). Coraline’s task grows more and more daunting each time she sees this painting—this time the addition of the heat-sucking fireplace indicates a sort of life-sucking presence in the other flat. She has entered into the world of the (m)other, a world that is there solely to entertain, comfort, and *keep* Coraline. It is a womb, but it is also a grave.

When Coraline sees the painting for the final time, it is clear to both her and the reader that the other mother is trying to suck the life (read: phallic power) out of Coraline. At this point, even the fruit has become “strange” to Coraline: “Her grandmother’s formal furniture was still there, and the painting on the wall of the strange fruit (but now the fruit in the painting had been eaten, and all that remained in the bowl was the browning core of an apple, several plum and peach stones, and the stem of what had formerly been a bunch of grapes)” (128). David

Rudd writes that the “uncanny is the breaching of the divide between animate and inanimate” (161). The furniture itself has come to life, and a table that once sat motionless now paws the ground “with its clawed wooden feet, as if it were impatient for something” (128). What was once unyielding, cold, and lifeless has now taken on the frightening aspects of the other mother. The fruit in the painting is strange to Coraline, but perhaps it is strange in the same way that the room had an uncanny feeling—she realizes that this fruit is much more changeable and connected to her own fate than she could have imagined in her first notice of the painting. The final appearance of the painting serves to frighten Coraline even more, subliminally telling her and the reader that she has already failed (and that she, as apple, will “rot” here), that she and her companions have already been devoured and that there is nothing that can change that.

Even though the fruit painting is absent from the film, another painting takes its place over the fireplace in the drawing room. There is a little boy eating an ice cream cone; at first, the only difference between the paintings is the fact that the boy has button eyes in the other flat. Similar to the moment when Coraline last sees the painting of fruit, the little boy’s ice cream eventually falls off the cone and he is left standing there with only the drippy, soggy cone in his hand as the ice cream melts into the ground. This acts to warn the audience as well as Coraline of the danger she is in, just as the painting of the fruit does.

Although we do not see the painting again after Coraline defeats the (m)other, it is clear that she has made a change to the legacy that was set in motion with her grandmother. The painting is no longer a flat piece of decoration—it has changed, become alive, and, finally, been restored to something that now holds interest for Coraline, something that the (m)other can no longer touch. Coraline flips the legacy on its head, taking the adult’s (the other mother’s) ability to change her surroundings, to devour what she encounters, and she uses that ability as a new

way of envisioning her home as a place that she *does* have a purpose in, even if that purpose is nothing more than the important role of being an appreciative daughter.

The visual effect of the tunnel connecting Coraline's worlds is surprisingly similar to the tunnel James uses to enter the peach in Selick's film. Although the tunnel turns out to be spider webs (filled with debris, including a child's shoe), it starts out as a fluffy, sparkling, cloud-like portal into the other flat, just as James's tunnel shimmers and sparkles, the ribbed walls helping him climb. Coraline and James both enter their respective other worlds on their hands and knees, crawling like infants into their (m)others' worlds. For Coraline, the entire world on the other side of the tunnel can be construed as a sort of womb. Though it turns out to be a terrible place, it is womb-like, just as the peach is: there is sustenance, affection, comfort, as well as boundaries. After entering the other mother's "womb," Coraline must fight her way out and be birthed back into her own world. Although much of the final climb through the tunnel is overshadowed by the (m)other's pounding on the door and Coraline's battle with the spider webs, Gaiman's writing gives us a clear indication of this birthing process: "The wall she was touching was felt warm and yielding now, and, she realized, it felt as if it were covered in a fine downy fur. It moved, as if it were taking a breath," and soon after, "This time what she touched felt hot and wet, as if she had put her hand in somebody's mouth" (135). The tunnel that once "smelled like something very old and very slow" and "dust and damp and mustiness" (26, 59), now has new life and has awakened in order to birth Coraline back into her own world. Even though Coraline usually goes to sleep in the other flat and wakes up in her own bed during the film, she still has to make that final, frenzied dash back into her own drawing room in the end.

Tea Parties and Picnics: Not for the Faint of Heart

Although we may not expect to see Coraline, a girl who prefers microwave pizza over “recipes,” to enjoy hosting a picnic or tea party, she in fact “hosts” one of each upon her return from the (m)other’s world. The first of Coraline’s hosted meals is preceded by a meal with her parents, when Coraline’s father cooks a pizza, mentioned above (after their return from the other flat). This scene is significant for the fact that “Coraline ate the entire slice she had been given. Well, she ate everything except the pineapple chunks” (141). Previously, Coraline would have turned up her nose at this meal and heated up some tasteless, frozen, pre-packaged food instead of trying her father’s concoctions. This time, she does not make comments about not liking this type of food, nor does she refuse to eat it. Gaiman shows us in the simple sentence, “Coraline ate the entire slice she had been given,” that Coraline has had a change of heart. The language here is very telling: in an earlier account of Coraline’s father’s cooking, he “stop[s] working and ma[kes] them all dinner” (9). The choice to have him interrupt what he is doing in order to make dinner indicates that this is somewhat of a chore for him. When Coraline returns, the language changes: Coraline goes into her father’s study to kiss and tell him she misses him, at which point he lovingly carries her to the kitchen. Gaiman writes, “Dinner that night was pizza, [...] homemade by her father” (141). The language no longer indicates that the father sees this as a chore; Coraline’s father has prepared a “homemade” meal—there is no mention of “recipes” in this passage, indicating Coraline’s new openness and appreciation of her father’s cooking. Not only has she learned to appreciate what is put in front of her, she has learned to be grateful for what others provide for her without losing her own free will. She eats what is “given” to her—another language choice that is very indicative of Coraline’s newfound appreciation—but she picks off what still does not suit her tastes, quite a leap from her previous nose-turning antics. She has learned to accept the comfort and affection her parents *can* show her, while she does not

give up her own power to choose (to choose to accept this affection as well as to choose what she eats).

After experiencing the “perfection” that the other mother had to offer with her hearty, 1950’s, fresh-out-of-the-pan meals, Coraline realizes that this may not be the “perfect” life after all. She sees that the phallic mother, who uses her stereotypical mothering skills to lure Coraline in, is using food (associated with care, attention, and love) to control Coraline. When Coraline first enters the “empty” flat, the (m)other calls her into the kitchen, greets her, gives her a task to keep her from being bored, and feeds her what Coraline considers “wonderful”-tasting food (28). Coraline has yet to see the trap that she is playing into by consuming, without question, the food that the (m)other places in front of her. She even takes a second helping and “shovel[s]” the food in (28-29). Once Coraline realizes that, in order to stay in this world where everything is interesting, her parents are doting, and the food is outstanding, she must give up, not only her eyes, but her choice and ability to live and grow up as well, she begins asserting herself in her food choices in the presence of the (m)other.

After Coraline leaves her other flat for the first time, she realizes that her parents are missing. She feeds herself several “meals,” consisting of things such as “toast, with jam and peanut butter” and a glass of water (49), a frozen pizza (49), “canned spaghetti for breakfast” (50), “a block of cooking chocolate and an apple” for lunch (50), and “two large bottles of limeade, a chocolate cake, and a new bag of apples” (51). Without her parents around, she makes all of her food choices on her own, choices that we “grown-ups” probably would not choose without plenty of antacid on hand. She goes from (1) having parents who occasionally make a meal she is willing to try, but who do provide all of the food choices in the house, to (2) a (m)other who makes all the choices, to (3) making every food choice for herself. As she makes

these choices, she gains some confidence in herself as an individual, so much so that she can pick and choose what she accepts from her (m)other. When she returns to her other flat, she takes with her two apples (56).

As soon as Coraline enters the other flat, her (m)other tricks her into a brief embrace and tells Coraline that she and the other father are ““ready to love [her] and play with [her] and feed [her] and make [her] life interesting”” (60). Notice how the (m)other slyly places “feed [her]” in the midst of all of these other things that Coraline craves from her own parents. Coraline has shown that she is perfectly capable of, if not keeping herself healthy, at least feeding herself without a parent’s help. This is her first line of defense against the other mother’s control. After this dialogue, the other father suggests a midnight snack for Coraline, and asks that she come to the kitchen. Coraline confidently takes an apple from her pocket and says, ““I don’t need a snack [...]. I have an apple, see?”” (61). Coraline then takes a bite of the apple, causing the other father to be “disappointed” and helping Coraline to see that the other mother’s teeth are “a tiny bit too long” (61). Following this first bite, the (m)other tries to convince Coraline that her parents don’t want her anymore, showing her a scene of her real parents coming back from a holiday and proclaiming their happiness that Coraline is gone. Coraline bravely protests that she doesn’t believe this, and sits “down on the sofa and [eats] her apple” (63). The (m)other asks Coraline not to be “difficult,” a signal that she is losing some of her power over Coraline. Coraline chooses not to eat what her other parents (mainly her (m)other) offer her, thus asserting her own agency in the situation.

Although Coraline probably finds it much easier to refuse the black beetles that her other mother offers her later in the story (78), refusing a cheese omelet, bacon, and orange juice is a more difficult task, and Coraline eventually gives in to this meal, though, as I will point out, she

does maintain her power in the situation. After having been locked in a cupboard (a fitting place for the child whom she wants to consume) with the three ghost-children that gave in to the (m)other before Coraline arrived, the (m)other takes Coraline from the cupboard and into the kitchen. As Coraline attempts to discuss the ghost-children, the (m)other distracts Coraline and tries to talk her into being a “good” little girl, cooking Coraline her “favorite” meal as an enticement. As the other mother cooks, Coraline uses this time to make a deal with her. She coolly makes her terms, offering a trade-off for whoever wins: if the other mother wins, she gets Coraline, heart and soul; if Coraline wins, she gets to leave with her parents and the ghost-children. As soon as Coraline says, “It’s a deal,” she begins eating the food the (m)other has prepared. By holding off until this point, Coraline shows the other mother that she can control her hunger, that she has the power over her will, including what she does and does not eat. Once she begins eating, she tries “not to wolf it down” (93), continuing her display of control—not only for the other mother, but for herself as well. As she sees herself exhibiting control, she becomes more and more aware of her own power over her life and becomes more prepared to refuse to give in to the other mother’s wishes. She drinks “the orange juice, but even though she kn[ows] she would like it, she [can] not bring herself to taste the hot chocolate” (93). Although she eats the eggs and bacon and drinks the orange juice, she is unable to consume the one food most associated with mothers: milk. The other mother has cleverly presented this milk with the tempting addition of chocolate, but Coraline does not partake in it, a blow that, though unnoted by the (m)other, is surely a psychological blow to her, another hole in her trap. Although Coraline cannot “bring herself” to taste it, perhaps indicating that she wants to very badly, she shows her power through the disgust she must feel at the thought of milk from the (m)other.

Coraline goes on not only to find her parents and the ghost-children's souls, she also conquers her inability to appreciate her real world by outsmarting her other mother and escaping the world that was formerly a dream come true. She chooses to return to her real life where her parents have jobs, her father's cooking is sometimes a gamble, and her toys hold little interest for her; but in choosing what we might call mediocre, she also chooses to become a real person with an inner source of strength, power, and interest, and a child who can continue to grow, unlike the ghost-children. After her return, Coraline's first experience as a host of a meal occurs in her dreams; she has returned from the (m)other's world, having rescued her parents as well as the children who were trapped there. The three children, their souls previously contained in three gray marbles (which she has placed beneath her pillow), greet her in her dreams on a cloth laid out with a fabulous picnic. There is a blue sky and bright sun, and a white cloth is laden with "salads and sandwiches, nuts and fruit, jugs of lemonade and water and thick chocolate milk," and later there appear "boiled new potatoes," "cold, whole, cooked, trout," "slices of bread and jam," and even "pretty flowers" (for the child who appears to be an angel or fairy) (141-2). When Coraline marvels at all of the food and how delicious it is, she wonders aloud who organized this "finest of picnics," as the boy-ghost calls it (142). The girl ghost-child answers, "Why, I rather think you did, Miss, [...] [a]nd we are more grateful for it and for all than ever words can say" (142). Having fought her way through a world where her power of choice was in danger, Coraline has found a new sense of power and confidence in her own world, a sense that she must first realize in her dream state before she can put it to full use in her real life. These three children, through Coraline's efforts, who did not know their names or what kinds of clothes they wore in life (84), have regained themselves. Coraline can now easily tell that one is

a young boy, another is a tall, thin girl, and the third is some sort of angel/fairy-girl, with wings and a halo.

Coraline can now see the full effect of what she has accomplished—not only has she saved herself from the fates that these children suffered in the (m)other’s clutches (a fate that would have left her powerless, choiceless, nameless, and forever a child), she has restored their souls and identities—a huge accomplishment indeed. After she and the ghost-children play together, a moment that firmly establishes their identities as real, happy children with bodies and souls, Coraline and the others return to the picnic to find “the lunch dishes had been cleared away, and there were four bowls waiting for them, three of ice cream, one of honeysuckle flowers piled high” (143). After the four of them eat their desserts, Coraline says, ““Thank you for coming to my party, [...] [i]f it is mine”” (143). Although she is still warming up to the idea that this indeed is her party, and that she as host has not only provided a meal for others, but that they have been grateful for it, she too has learned what it is to be grateful for their coming to her party/picnic and eating her provided food.

At this point in her story, Coraline has not only been provided for, she has been the sole provider, for herself and for others. She has learned what it is like to be at both ends of the food spectrum in the sense of provision, but she has also had a close encounter with what it feels like to be preyed upon. Through her journey, she has acquired a sense of belonging in her new home, as well as the power to enjoy that home and grow while she lives in it. She has the knowledge now to be an independent person who, though still relying on her parents for love and support (and even indulging in the fact that they voluntarily and happily feed her), she is independent enough to be on her own, to entertain herself, and even to entertain and feed others. So it may

come as a surprise to some readers when Coraline, a child who admits to not playing with her dolls anymore, sets a trap by playing “tea party” with her dolls.

Even so, this ironic tea party is by no means childish or strictly “feminine.” On the one hand, Coraline has just spent a great deal of time defeating a woman who thinks only in the terms of traditional feminine mothering roles. On the other hand, she has lived most of her life with a post-feminist mother who has a job and does not regularly cook for her family. Coraline has seen both worlds at work, as well as the benefits and downfalls of each. She has also seen the (m)other use her stereotypically feminine, retrograde role to lay a trap for herself and other children, a trap which is quite successful until Coraline (a child of a post-feminist mother) comes along. With this in mind, it is very fitting for Coraline to use her newfound prowess as a provider to create a ruse in order to trap the other mother’s hand. Just as the (m)other must be good at what she does in order to capture children, Coraline must be “good” at giving a tea party in order to capture the hand. She sets up the tea party over the open well carefully, “making it look as much like a doll’s tea party as she [can]” (154). The most important part of this tea party, however, is the item she places in the center of the table cloth: the key to the door that separates Coraline’s flat from the other mother’s. Coraline has been carrying this key around her neck since she returned from the other flat, keeping it safe under her clothing and never taking it off. This key is the one thing that the other mother, and her hand, wants, and Coraline uses it to her full advantage. By setting up this seemingly childish, innocent tea party, Coraline tricks the hand (which we can assume has the same ideals as the (m)other, being a synecdoche made literal into thinking this is only a child’s way of entertaining herself and embodying the roles she has just learned from the (m)other. Coraline has outsmarted the (m)other once, but the (m)other is stuck in her ways, possibly since they have worked so well for her in the past. The (m)other wants this

key not only because it allows travel between the two flats, but also because this is a huge source of power for her. Until Coraline put the key in the lock and entered the other flat, the other mother had no reason to exist: no entertainment, no child to lavish attention upon, no world to create, and no little girl to eventually eat. This key is the symbol of all of the (m)other's power, simply because it is the only means by which she can get children to enter her arena parentless, unarmed, and unaware of the danger ahead.

Thus, Coraline uses the other mother's pre-feminine ideals in order to trap the hand. In doing so, not only does Coraline take away the (m)other's main source of power, she also removes what has so far been a sort of phallic talisman for herself, a traditional symbol "of freedom and power" (Parsons, Sawers, and McNally 388). She has not lost sight of the key since her return, knowing the power she holds over the other mother by keeping it out of her grasp. But by allowing it to fall into the well with the hand, she gives up that power as well—she will no longer be able to escape to her other life, even if her real life ever becomes boring. A second talisman, one that is somewhat less pronounced throughout the book, is the stone with a hole in it that she keeps in her pocket at all times. As Parsons, Sawers, and McNally point out, "the stone with a hole through it and the key that penetrates (and opens) the lock between the imagined and real worlds are genital in form and function" (378). The key, the phallic symbol of power throughout the book, has already plunged into the depths of the well (another yonic symbol that easily buries the key and the hand) to be forever forgotten. As soon as this task is done, Coraline takes the stone back to the Misses Spink and Forcible, saying that she doesn't "need it anymore. [She's] very grateful. [She] think[s] it may have saved [her] life, and saved some other people's death" (161). She has given up the key, and now she can give up the stone as well. Parsons, Sawers, and McNally argue that "their meanings are at this point so ingrained

in Coraline's psychosexual make-up that she now no longer needs to physically hold them as external manifestations of gender" (378); Coraline has, after experimenting with both types of power (combined and separately), found a happy medium in which she can easily wield traditionally masculine or feminine power at will—indeed, she does not need either of these talismans anymore to help her.

In Selick's adaptation, the picnic and tea party are, somewhat disappointingly, written out of the script. The dead children do not visit Coraline in a dream in which she acts as hostess, nor does she use her new ability of ironically using traditionally feminine roles to outsmart the hand. In the end of the film, Coraline trudges through the rain, looking over her shoulder constantly for the disembodied hand, and makes her way to the well. When she gets there, the hand attacks her, Wybie pulls up on his motorbike and saves Coraline from the hand, and the hand is eventually smashed under a rock. Although I find this scene to be somewhat of a letdown after Coraline's rousing defeat of the (m)other in Gaiman's novel, a similar end is accomplished: the key goes down the well, and the hand is no longer a threat.

Similarly, the film version makes a small change to the fate of the stone with a hole in it. Instead of Coraline returning the stone to the Misses Spink and Forcible, the (m)other takes the stone from Coraline and destroys it in the drawing room fireplace. This change is one of note, however, in that this is Coraline's yonic talisman—the other mother destroys this so that Coraline cannot see the final piece in the puzzle—where her parents are hidden—but in doing so, she also destroys the yonic power that has been guiding Coraline throughout the film. Although Coraline's ironic use of traditionally feminine roles might come across as a sort of commentary from Gaiman on women's roles, I would argue that Gaiman is instead embracing ambiguous roles for all genders. One of few authors to have a father-figure do the cooking, Gaiman

empowers Coraline's father in a way that is unexpected. He also empowers Coraline by giving her free-range of her sexuality and gender. She can embrace her mother's post-feminist ideals, her (m)other's retrograde roles, or create her own combination of the roles of males and females in her life. As she embraces the food her father cooks (and thus his provision of love and care), accepts the responsibility of providing for others, and recognizes her mother's efforts at taking care of her, Coraline finds a gender identity that is outside of both her parents' identities, thus renegotiating her sexuality as well as her overall identity.

CONCLUSIONS

Though Coraline has the good luck to return to her own world and her own parents after defeating her other mother, James's bad luck in losing his parents from the beginning does not take away from the happy ending he receives. James and Coraline, having discovered their own independent identities, defeated their bad mothers, and discovered that, though other mothers may offer seemingly good food, they cannot happily remain infantile and doted upon forever. Coraline's (m)other may make what appears to be "good" food, but, just as the witch in "Hansel and Gretel," it is ultimately "bad," having come from a "bad" breast/mother with "bad" intentions (Klein 207). The peach is soft, pliable, giving, inert, and, ultimately, "good"; the (m)other is grasping, desiring, active, and "bad." Each child has to decide whether to eat or be eaten by his or her surrogate mother, and the decisions each child makes leads to his or her development of a separate, independent identity. Perhaps showing readers what it might be like to stay inside the peach forever, floating and having adventures, but without other children to play with or other food to eat, or showing readers what it would be like to be constantly smothered and trapped in a house filled with wonderful food and entertainment, these authors succeed in reassuring their audience. The authors have shown that growing up is marked with ruptures, that children must come to terms with the "good" and "bad" mothers in their lives, digest (internalize) each (Klein 242), and use the traits they learn to succeed in the journey of becoming a subject.

Henry Selick's choice to direct both adaptations of these novels is telling: they share many common themes, including orphans, surrogate mothers, bad mothers, and, most importantly, eating. He brings these themes to life for audiences and, in doing so, brings them into an even more accessible medium: film. By creating these adaptations, he not only makes the

themes more accessible, he makes them more noticeable. He homes in on the gustatory moments that lead children to revel and adults to question the motives of the surrogate mothers. The vagina-like tunnels, the juicy, frothy drinks, the glistening dishes of fruit or meat, and the entertaining trains, animated insects, and milkshake chandeliers that he creates on film help the viewer to see that, deep down, eating is more than just survival.

NOTES

1. Daniel cites Wendy R. Kats, Perry Nodelman, and Maria Nikolajeva (216).
2. Keeling and Pollard have continued their work in food in children's literature, exploring (with other scholars) many instances of food in a broad range of texts for children. In their 2009 book, Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature, they put together articles from various scholars in the field of food and children's literature that deal with cook books for children, global food, food and the self, and many other topics that have opened up this field considerably.

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