

Nina Hanee Jang
2019 CHLA Conference Abstract
“Activism and Empathy”

Coraline: A Hero of Relational Morality

Children’s literature often deals with a hero’s journey. In many cases, the hero is empowered by the traditional western patriarchal morality system that the scholars of feminist ethics such as Gilligan and Noddings describe as the masculine and paternal voice. This morality system often privileges the traditionally masculine principles such as reason, justice, and fairness over other significant moral values. However, Neil Gaiman’s gothic novella for children, *Coraline*, subverts the patriarchal moral framework as the hero enacts the moral values seen as feminine and relational in the theory of care ethics.

Surrounded by the adults who express apathy and remain distant, Coraline instead forms caring relationships with the children she encounters in her nightmarish journey in the “Other World” where alternative reality is allowed to come alive. With the empowerment gained by Coraline’s ability to empathize with the children and her utilization of the caring relationships she forms with them, Coraline succeeds in defeating “the Other Mother” together with her community of abused children. In this paper, I will argue that Coraline is not only capable of intelligence which is a virtue often expected of a hero, but she also achieves the status of a hero through her ability to form caring relationships with empathy that enable other morals to be saved and valued in this narrative. *Coraline* provides a strong female voice that calls out against the traditional moral structure that attempts to bind her, providing children with an alternative moral framework.