



# **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

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### 1.1 Background of the Study

Human nature is ultimately formed in the constant struggle to manage the interplay of thought, emotion, and some form of social belonging. All humans are able to express their thoughts or immutably take form within a medium of expression, whether it is expressed verbally, symbolically, or imaginatively; the one thing all humans have to struggle to have exist beyond the functional becoming the expressive. Edward H. Jones Jr. refers to literature as “a mirror to the human condition” p.18, for both the reader and the writer it is a way to grapple with inner turmoil, ambiguity of morality or the search for meaning (Jones, 1986). Lexy J. Moleong describes literature as “the totality of human experience in our imagination through language” p.21, (Moleong, 2000). Ultimately literature becomes an identity, morality and transformation not only represented, but having gone through a process of testing. Edgar V. Roberts stated “essays and biographies represent fact; whereas imaginative forms, drama, poetry, and prose fiction utilize narrative devices to evoke an emotional and cognitive resonance” p.3, (Roberts E. V., 1992). Prose fiction is largely recognized for its capacity to follow the internal progress of the character as a result of conflict. Edgar V.

Roberts explained that fiction “keeps a record of human experience and development as it moves through conflict, more or less reducing abstraction of psychological states into concrete reactions” p.40 (Roberts E. V., 2007). Based on this perspective, characterization and conflict can be seen as two important elements of the narrative structure. Additionally, characters, especially dynamic characters, have which creates their motivation, fear and desire through internal and external problems.

Psychological literary criticism has traditionally focused on such internal evolution. Scholars have often attempted to interpret how internally developed fictional characters illuminate human development from Poetics to the psychoanalytic approaches adapted today. Alfred Adler provides a potentially rich context to interpret this phenomenon. He diverged from Freudian models of the mind which emphasize unconscious drives to emphasize conscious goals, social relatedness, and personal agency. He recognized psychological life as subsequently following lived progressions through five stages, all of which can best be understood in relation to feelings of inferiority, compensation, striving for superiority, style of life (private logic), and social interest (Gemeinschaftsgefühl). Alfred Adler stated, “to be human is to feel oneself inferior” p.13 (Adler, Understanding human nature, 1927). This universal feeling, often rooted in a child’s overwhelming experiences of helplessness, must be the starting place for all growth.

Adler also argued that a person reacts to feelings of inferiority through recuperation and ‘compensation,’ which might occur as courage and creativity or, if misdirected, as aggression or withdrawal. This process of striving therefore matures into a striving for superiority—not as trying to dominate, but to wholeness, competence, and meaning. With time, experiences and beliefs shape their own viewpoint, or private logic. Social interest results from this process’s culmination whereby the individual lives for the well-being of others instead of just for personal fulfillment. Gerald J. Manaster pointed out that Adlerian therapy is most appropriate in stories where the characters are gaining independence as part of a group p.117 (Manaster, 1982). Literature becomes a strong vehicle for investigating mental metamorphosis within this.

The novel *Coraline* (2002) by Neil Gaiman represents such a vehicle. As a work often categorized as children's literature, *Coraline's* dark fantasy world disguises a highly psychological journey. Children's literature plays an important role in education, not only for the development of literacy and language skills but also as a mirror for young readers to face emotional conflict, acquire moral reasoning, and develop psychological resilience. Its stories frequently provide easily understood platforms for considering difficult emotional realities. Coraline Jones is established as a young girl with parents that are emotionally absent and neglectful. Bored and unseen, Coraline is accidentally transported into a

mirror world manipulated by the "Other Mother" – a beautiful imaginable world that is seemingly inviting but culminates in hopelessness as a prison. Coraline progresses through the journey in the exact stages of psychological development described by Adler, with Coraline first suffering from emotional inferiority; then compensating with physical curiosity and exploration; then striving for mastery and confrontation with evil; then personally developing a logic that defined her bravery and autonomy from her manipulative parents; finally, with social interest, developing into an emergence that will save the others and choose to care over comfort. *Coraline* is not simply a fantasy hero, but a theoretical case study of psychological health and stamina in development. Bruno Bettelheim suggests, "fairy stories often resolve mental or personal chaos symbolically, providing young readers with a concrete example of dealing with fear and change" p.7 (Bettelheim, 1976). *Coraline's* triumph is non-magical like the concept fantasy of the novel, it is psychological. Her courage, moral agency, and anti-deception demonstrated the Adlerian constructs of creative self-directed action. She does not use adults or magical interventions to accomplish her agency; she uses her own developing sense of self, purpose, and responsibility.

Although, Coraline has been examined critically through a Freudian (Khan, 2021) and feminist perspectives (Naraswari, 2022), there are no studies that have examined it thoroughly through the lens of Adlerian psychology. This gap

in the literature is surprising, especially since the novel's themes of self-overcoming, identity formation, and moral development appear consistently throughout the text. This gap is something this study attempts to fill. Given Adler's five-stage personality progression, this study analyzes Coraline's character development as a social contribution—progressing from a person with inferiority to one who contributes to society. Moreover, this study exclusively analyzes the novel and not the movie. The movie involves a mode of visual representation that limits the narrative complexity and psychological depth that can be found in written text. Gaiman's novel—especially *Coraline's* interior dialogue, the symbolic imagery and moral dilemmas, involves the psychological richness that Adlerian reading seeks to explore. The novel allows access to Coraline's private logic while figuring how her worldview shifts through conflict, courage, and care.

Finally, this investigation is timely. In a context of potentially rising youth anxiety and emotional dislocation, *Coraline* maps not just a narrative of adventure and fear, but also a model of resilience, self-definition, and care in the collective. While Adler's psychology originated in the early 20th century and emphasized the importance of human connection to identity, Adler's ideas echo contemporary paradigms such as self-determination theory and positive psychology (Ryan, 2000). Coraline's journey followed what Edward D. Ferguson referred to as a “narrative of hope” p.52,

(Ferguson, 1991), where the hero succeeds not through perfectionism, but an acceptance of imperfection, ethicality, and a preference for connection over control. Alfred Adler noted that “The only striving that is worth having is that which is for the common good” p.118, (Adler, The practice and theory of individual psychology, 1929). It follows that this investigation, together with *Coraline*, offers a small contribution to literary psychology since the story provides a literary testament to human potential for growth, generating meaning, and moral configuration.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

- 1.2.1 How is Coraline's character development seen from Adler's Individual Psychology?

## **1.3 Research Purpose**

- 1.3.1 To analyze Coraline's character development seen from Adler's Individual Psychology.

## **1.4 Significance of The Research**

### **1.4.1 Literary studies**

This study examines the interaction of psychological theory and creative writing to show how Adler's theory helps us to grasp character development in literature, especially in



children's literature where growth and selfhood are key themes.

#### **1.4.2 Student and researcher**

This study serves as a useful example of how psychological theory can be used in literature, particularly when examining young protagonist emotional conflict, identity, and self-development.

#### **1.4.3 Educators and Psychologists**

This study demonstrates the ways in which children's literature can serve as an educational tool to mirror moral development, emotional maturity, and psychological resilience in real-world learning.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitation of The Study**

#### **1.5.1 The Scope**

This study examines Coraline's psychological development in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* novel through the lens of Adlerian Individual Psychology, incorporating characterizing theory and conflict to facilitate her development.

#### **1.5.2 The Limitation**

This study does not include other psychological theories for interpretation, such as Freudian or Jungian analysis, nor does it intend to evaluate gothic horror interpretations or feminist readings. Again, the primary



focus of the study remains Coraline's psychological development through the Adlerian focus of striving for superiority.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.6.1 Characterization**

An author's method of shaping and changing a character's personality. Characters that are dynamic experience significant changes, whereas static characters stay the same (Abrams, 1999).

### **1.6.2 Conflict Theory**

A framework for literature and psychology that emphasizes the importance tension of character development, whether the source of the tension is internal (psychological) or external (social or relational). Conflict shows the power dynamics that exist between characters, facilitates change, and characters value (Kenney, 1966).

### **1.6.3 Character Development**

A character's emotional or psychological transformations brought on by conflict or personal development during the course of the novel (Perrine, 2002).

#### **1.6.4 Psychological Development**

A character's internal growth, often impacted by personal experience, in terms of their thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Feist, 2017).

#### **1.6.5 Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology**

A personality theory that focuses on social interest, inferiority, and the desire to overcome weakness in order to progress personally (Adler, Understanding human nature, 1927).

#### **1.6.6 Feelings of Inferiority**

A common childhood feeling of inadequacy that spurs people to develop and conquer obstacles (Adler, Understanding human nature, 1927).

#### **1.6.7 Compensation**

A psychological reaction to inferiority in which people build on their talents to compensate for their shortcomings (Adler, The science of living, 1930).

#### **1.6.8 Striving for Superiority**

A natural desire to rise above feelings of inadequacy and attain competence, progress, and purpose (Adler, The practice and theory of individual psychology, 1929).

#### **1.6.9 Style of Life (Private Logic)**

A distinct set of attitudes and actions that are shaped during childhood and influence how an individual views the world

(Adler, The practice and theory of individual psychology, 1929).

#### **1.6.10 Social Interest (Gemeinschaftsgefühl)**

A feeling of inclusion and a drive to make a significant difference in other people's lives (Adler, Social interest: A challenge to mankind, 1933).

#### **1.6.11 Coraline (Main Character)**

(Gaiman, 2002) about a little girl who discovers a parallel world, which represents her journey of self-discovery and freedom.

