

THE QUEER UNCANNY: REFRAMING THE GOTHIC
MOVING PORTRAIT THROUGH THE DISCOURSE OF
ANIMATION

by

TESS OAKLEY

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of English
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

May 2022

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Tess Oakley for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of English to be taken June 2022

Title: The Queer Uncanny: Reframing the Gothic Moving Portrait Through the
Discourse of Animation

Approved: *Katy Brundan, Ph.D.*
Primary Thesis Advisor

This paper establishes a new critical term which I call “the discourse of animation” in order to understand the uncanny as a queer sensibility instead of simply a revival of past “primitive” desires or repressed fears, which Sigmund Freud theorizes in his text, “The Uncanny” (1919). At its core, the discourse of animation disrupts binaries, allowing us to explore the boundaries between the rational and the supernatural, between the past and the present, and, importantly, between the normative and the queer.

Throughout my argument, I analyze the appearance of uncanny, animated portraits (and similarly flickering, shuddering images) in Gothic novels, early animation devices like the thaumatrope, phantasmagoria/magic lantern shows, early cinema, and finally this motif’s revival in recent stop-motion films. Because of their uncanny animation, these portraits similarly disrupt binaries; that is, when it is uncertain if they are animate or inanimate, they uncover the hidden spaces between life and death, between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and even between the normative and the queer. Through the discourse of animation, the uncanny becomes a complex interaction

between opposites, between a spectator and an uncertainly animate object, and between opposing modes of thought. This new way of understanding the uncanny allows us to recognize the boundaries that have been placed and the possibilities that exist when we break these boundaries—ultimately creating a relationship between the past, the present, and the future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professors Katy Brundan, Allison McGuffie, and Corinne Bayerl for helping me to fully examine the uncanny and consider the various perspectives and contexts related to both Gothic literature and cinema. Dr. Katy Brundan, my primary advisor, graciously took the time and effort to work with me for over a year, supporting me by honing my topic, suggesting additional readings, and looking over my writing at every step of the way. Dr. Allison McGuffie, my second reader, offered useful feedback and pointed me towards further ways to expand my ideas even beyond the scope of this project. Dr. Corinne Bayerl, my CHC representative, generously agreed to represent me later on during the thesis process out of personal interest. I'd like to thank my parents, who have supported my love for reading from a young age, and all of my teachers growing up who inspired me and encouraged me to stick with writing. I'd also like to thank all of my friends, who sat through my ramblings about animated portraits on many occasions and encouraged me throughout the process. Finally, I'd like to thank the Goodwill in town that presented me with a three-foot-tall portrait of Oscar Wilde during one of my much-needed breaks from writing: sometimes the universe has a sense of humor. To all of you, from the bottom of my heart, I am sincerely grateful for the privilege to be a part of this process and connect with excellent professors, friends, and family who were willing to guide me through it.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction: Animation Haunts the Uncanny | 1 |
| The Discourse of Animation: Phantasmagoria, Thaumatrope, and Interaction | 6 |
| Reframing the Gothic Moving Portrait | 11 |
| The Uncanny as Aesthetic Experience | 18 |
| The Uncanny as a (Queer) Sensibility | 21 |
| Expanding the Haunted Gallery | 34 |
| Uncanny Filmic Realities and Queer Ways of “Looking” | 42 |
| New Metaphors of Uncanny Animation: The Haunted Forest | 64 |
| Concluding Thoughts: Whiteness, Wildness, and Further Ways to Expand the Discourse of Animation | 70 |
| Bibliography | 83 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1 The Thaumatrope | 8 |
| Figures 2 and 3: Coraline and the Boring Blue Boy | 25 |
| Figure 3: Coraline and the Boring Blue Boy, Now Changed | 30 |
| Figure 4: “The Artist’s Dream” by Thomas Edison (Library of Congress) | 34 |
| Figure 5: Victoria’s Portrait | 36 |
| Figures 6 and 7: Victor’s Portrait and Victor in the Rain | 38 |
| Figure 8: Norman and Aggie | 40 |
| Figure 9: Coraline and her Inanimate Parents | 44 |
| Figure 10: The Other Mother’s Inanimate Coraline Doll | 47 |
| Figure 11: The Other Mother’s Transformed Insect Room | 49 |
| Figures 12 and 13: Norman and His Grandmother in the Darkened Living Room | 51 |
| Figure 14: The Blue Butterfly | 55 |
| Figure 15: Victor Cups Victoria’s Face, while Emily Watches from the Window | 60 |
| Figure 16: Victor’s Family Watches a Homemade Stop-Motion | 61 |
| Figure 17: Coraline Walks Through a “Haunted Forest” | 65 |
| Figure 18: Norman in the “Haunted Forest” | 67 |
| Figure 19: Victor in the “Haunted Forest” | 68 |
| Figure 20: Mr. Fox Salutes the Wolf | 70 |
| Figure 21: Ash Dressed like the White Cape | 72 |
| Figure 22: The Other Wybie’s Clothes Hang from a Flagpole | 76 |
| Figure 23: The Developer Unknowingly Creates an Uncanny Portrait | 78 |
| Figure 24: The Developer Confronts the Uncanny Bug-Mice | 79 |
| Figures 25 and 26: The Developer and Coraline Crawl Through Tunnels | 80 |

Introduction: Animation Haunts the Uncanny

He turned round and, walking to the window, drew up the blind. The bright dawn flooded the room and swept the fantastic shadows into dusky corners, where they lay shuddering. But the strange expression that he had noticed in the face of the portrait seemed to linger there, to be more intensified even. The quivering ardent sunlight showed him the lines of cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing.

—The Picture of Dorian Gray (Wilde 105)

This passage from Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) describes the moment when Dorian Gray first notices that his portrait, once the picture of perfect beauty, has changed to reflect the obsessive narcissism that has begun to poison his soul. The notion that the portrait may have changed is unsettling, sure, but the particular uncertainty as to whether the portrait is animate or inanimate marks this passage as one that represents the equally uncertain concept of the uncanny. In simple terms, uncanny feelings bridge the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar, as one either reacts to a familiar object that has turned unfamiliar or, in some cases, to an unfamiliar object that seems strangely familiar. Likewise, although Dorian does not see his portrait move directly, in the context of the novel the painting is certainly animated. That is, although the real Dorian Gray will stay young and beautiful forever, the nature of his corrupted soul gradually spreads across the portrait over time, inhabiting the painting. Additionally, because of Wilde's explicit exploration of homoerotic desire in

the novel, this animated portrait also seems to promise a particularly queer transformation. That is, Dorian's fascination with his own portrait exposes both the narcissism and the repressed queer desires that haunt his soul. Despite his attempts to make the portrait look perfect once again by flooding the room with more natural light—that is, to hide what he has discovered about himself—both the changed expression and his uncanny feelings remain, animated implicitly by the language of the passage. Thus, the uncanniness of the passage is directly tied to the concept of animation, emphasized by the anticipation of movement and queer transformation, Dorian's soul, and perhaps life itself: the “shuddering” shadows and “quivering” light that frame the portrait's changing soul.

In fact, the etymology of the word “animation” endows the uncanny with similarly liminal, uncertain associations. The Latin root “anima,” meaning “soul,” implies an uncertainty in the concept of animation surrounding life and death that we find carried over into the concept of the uncanny—that is, uncertainty about whether a person or object is alive or dead. In other words, an uncanny thing is uncanny because it becomes both familiar and unfamiliar simultaneously, because it is either not alive but approaching life, or alive but approaching not-life—and because it is unclear whether or not it harbors a “soul.” Ultimately, when compared to the ambiguity of the word “uncanny,” the linguistic uncertainty of the word “animation” suggests that it may be this liminality, and the interaction between supposed opposites within the very meaning of the word, that truly defines the uncanny. Notably, Freud himself identifies animation as the basis for his own understanding of the word in his text, “The Uncanny” (1919), by critiquing Ernst Jentsch's definition that the uncanny rests on “doubts whether an

apparently animate being is really alive; or, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not in fact be inanimate” (qtd. in Freud 226). In Freud’s understanding, uncanny feelings “excite in the spectator the feeling that automatic processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation,” ultimately disrupting the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate (Freud 226).

Rejecting Jentsch’s definition as incomplete, however, Freud believes that uncanny feelings reveal the mechanistic operations in our unconscious, which repeat or revive ancestral “primitive” beliefs common to animism,¹ or cause repressed matter to return. For Freud, the uncanny is not simply intellectual uncertainty, as Jentsch posits, but instead something that “occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (Freud 249). Throughout the remainder of his text, he attempts to prove this standard definition of the uncanny, to explain this irrational return to animism, and to underline the uncanny’s connection to his own theories of repression. To do so, he first describes the interlaced meanings of the German words *heimlich*, which translates to “homely” (but also “secret” and “private”) and *unheimlich*, which translates to “unhomely” or, of course, “uncanny.” He writes, “thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or another a subspecies of *heimlich*” (Freud 226). While abstract, this linguistic overlap suggests that the uncanny lies somewhere in between that which is familiar and that which is unfamiliar; that is,

¹ Animism: the tendency to attribute souls to inanimate objects, beliefs that scientists of the period found among what they called “primitive” cultures.

the uncanny occupies an ambiguous, spectral space that spans across the familiar and the unfamiliar, instead of embodying only the unfamiliar. However, at its core, Freud's narrative of repression disregards the latent spectrality of the uncanny, focusing instead on attempting to prove that the uncanny is an irrational return to animistic thought, or the unconscious workings of infantile complexes.

With this linguistic uncertainty in mind, Lynda Nead addresses the etymology of the word "animation" in her text *The Haunted Gallery* in order to convey the uncanny nature of early cinema and its predecessors. Nead's introduction establishes a metaphorical gallery of haunted portraits and statues, which stand as stilled representations of moving figures, to characterize her understanding of the uncanny.

Thus, a promise of animation "haunts" her gallery and the concept of the uncanny itself.

She writes,

Like the form of the ancestral ghost, animation disturbs chronology, drawing the past into the present and reintroducing pre-modern beliefs to modernity. This is the folded time of the haunted gallery, where living pictures and moving statues confuse past, present and future and in which new technologies express archaic, magical thinking. (Nead 47)

Animation epitomizes the shift from supernatural to rationalist thinking that was pervasive from the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, as well as the underlying overlap between these two modes of thought. Additionally, it locates the uncertainty of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* alongside the uncertainty of that which may be living or dead. Thus, in revisiting Freud's text, it seems surprising that Freud so easily disregards this angle of the uncanny. While he returns to animism at several points in his own analysis of the uncanny, and indeed reiterates the linguistic disorientation of the word "uncanny," the repetition of this idea of "animation" in the language of Jentsch's

definition is left unexplained. Freud arrives at a sort of argumentative stalemate, admitting that representations of the uncanny in literature call for a separate discussion from his own psychoanalytic definition (Freud 18), even though he uses E.T.A. Hoffmann's story, "The Sandman," to prove the link between the uncanny and repression. The pattern of describing the uncanny in terms of animation, while not explored in detail in either his text or in Nead's chapter, suggests to me that considering the idea of animation and its implications will help to clarify the latent spectrality of the uncanny.

Although Freud privileges repression as an explanation for the repetitive, and often harrowing, effects of the uncanny—over any "doubts" about whether an object is alive or not—the concept of animation may illuminate the uncanny more convincingly than his narrative of repression. This leads me to the main goal of this essay: to begin to use "animation" as its own mode of discourse, its own form of literary criticism, and as a metaphor to understand the complex, contradictory, and yes, ghostly nature of the uncanny. Throughout this paper, I use "animation" itself as a mode of discourse in order to critique Freud's exploration of the uncanny. Ultimately, the discourse of animation invites us to accept the ambiguous, in-between, and even spectral nature of the uncanny, in contrast to psychological attempts to rationalize uncanny feelings. In addition, the discourse of animation refocuses our attention on the overlapping interaction between a spectator and a given uncanny object, a key element in literary texts.

The Discourse of Animation: Phantasmagoria, Thaumatrope, and Interaction

To better illustrate what it means to use “animation” itself as a mode of discourse, it’s helpful to first return to an influential and widely-cited chapter from Terry Castle’s book, *The Female Thermometer* (1996). In “Phantasmagoria and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie,” Castle examines the history of phantasmagoria in an attempt to describe the “latent irrationalism haunting, so to speak, this rationalist conception of mind” that pervades the last two centuries (Castle 143). She notes the shift in meaning of the term, “phantasmagoria,” from referring literally to the artificially-produced illusions of magic-lantern shows to referring to the more abstract, psychological imagery that haunts the mind. Just like Nead’s haunted gallery and its promise of animation occupy the space between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, Castle’s discussion reveals the paradox of these phantasmagorical illusions and performances. She writes, “even as it supposedly explained apparitions away, the spectral technology of the phantasmagoria mysteriously recreated the emotional aura of the supernatural. One knew ghosts did not exist, yet one saw them anyway, without knowing precisely how” (Castle 144). It is this explicit interaction between the supernatural and the rational that makes phantasmagoria so popular with audiences during this time period. Ultimately, the practice of re-animating ghosts using new technologies both embodies the shift towards rational thinking and the revival of outdated supernatural thinking. At the same time, the experience of seeing these animated ghosts is equally uncanny: a complex interaction between the audience, the illusionist, the mutual understanding that

the ghosts are simultaneously real and not real, and of course the animated ghosts themselves.

Joe Kember builds upon Castle's argument that phantasmagoria represents a paradoxical imagining of the supernatural alongside the rational in his text "Spectrology': Gothic Showmanship in Nineteenth-Century Popular Shows and Media" (2020). He writes,

[...] these ghosts were not what they seemed—that is, not only were they not ghosts, but they were also not fakes, intended to deceive; rather, they were fictions: delightful, spectacular visions whose ontological status was acknowledged and agreed upon by showman, audience, and venue, as well as by the publicity and press apparatuses surrounding them. Within this relationship, it was not necessary for audiences to understand the exact nature of the optical illusion, the ingenious operation of the magic lantern on the other side of the screen, but only for them to know it was illusory, so that when the showmen offered rational explanations for sensational ghostly effects, this tended to foster conditions of mutual knowingness, if not actual knowledge, of the show's mechanics. (Kember 185)

This suggests the importance of interaction between a spectator and an animated device for a successful phantasmagoric show and, by extension, further suggests that the uncanny experience of watching these shows was generated by an agreement between the audience and the illusionist. That is, while Freud's definition of the uncanny focuses only on the return of repressed feelings of "primitive" animism, the atmosphere of the magic lantern shows suggests that uncanny feelings embody an interaction between the rational and the irrational that is equally as playful as it is terrifying. The audience knows the illusions are not real, but they are nevertheless tricked by their animation. Thus, the "mutual knowingness" that Kember describes paints a very different picture of the uncanny than Freud's psychoanalysis. Phantasmagoria is uncanny because it

embodies both the familiar and the unfamiliar through this complex interaction between illusionist, audience, and the animated ghosts alongside the interwoven, overlapping understanding that the ghosts are not real but still trick the eye.

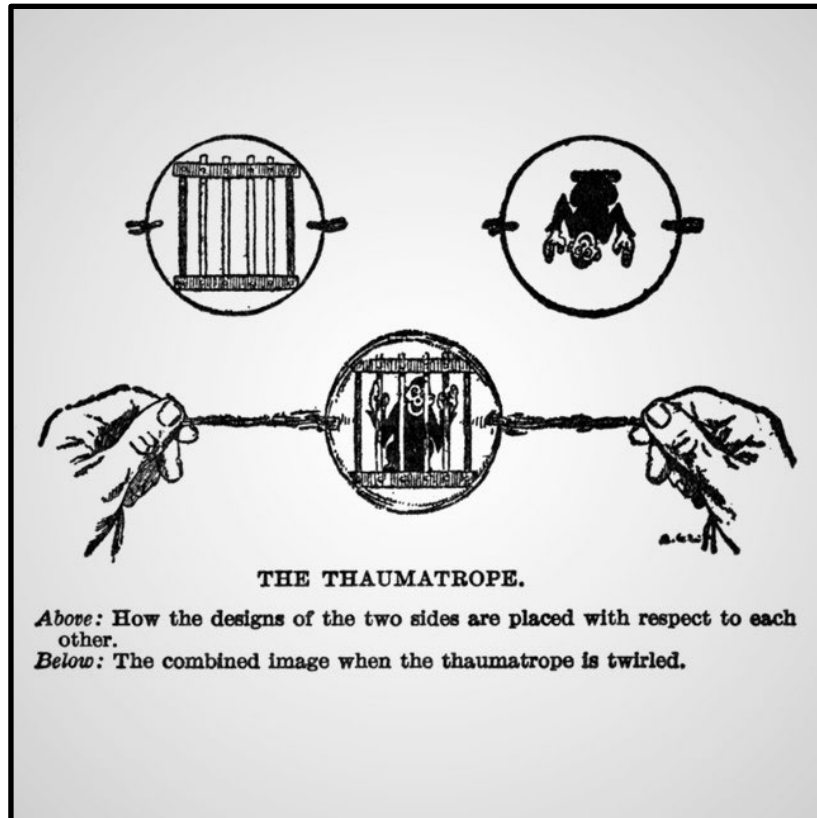


Figure 1 The Thaumatrope

Tom Gunning further explores the tension between supernatural and rationalist modes of thought in his text “Hand and Eye: Excavating a New Technology of the Image in the Victorian Era” (2012) through a specific example: the early animation device called the thaumatrope. A thaumatrope is an optical device with two sides, each with a different image, that when spun, produces what our eyes understand to be a third image of the two sides combined. For example, an animal on side A will be transposed into the empty cage on side B when spun, creating a flickering, spectral animation. Gunning takes great care to emphasize the interaction between a spectator and this

device, explaining that, “its simplicity only makes the thaumatrope’s perceptual and phenomenological paradoxes—its ‘visual trick’—clearer” (Gunning 498). The soul or “essence” of the thaumatrope, says Gunning, is “the visual experience of the merging of two things as one” (Gunning 503). Similar to Kember’s discussion of the relationship between a showman and his audience, the interaction between a thaumatrope and its user is what creates this spectral third image despite attempts to rationalize its creation.

Optical devices like the thaumatrope create illusions that are meant to be understood by a user, but these devices still trick the eye. This illustrates exactly the “latent irrationalism” that Castle describes at the heart of new rationalist attitudes during this period: when using a thaumatrope, spectators will never be able to fully rationalize how they can see the ghostly third image, even when they know how the device works. Ultimately, Gunning claims, “the shuddering, super-imposed thaumatrope image seems poised to morph into either motion or transformation” (Gunning 504). Like Nead’s haunted gallery, the thaumatrope anticipates both motion and transformation because of its uncanny animation. Thus, the animation of the thaumatrope implies a complex, overlapping interaction between spectator and moving image, between rationalist and supernatural ways of thinking, and between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*. Animation, it seems, implies this coexistence: a paradox of opposites that promise to come to life just like the ghosts of phantasmagoric performances.

In revisiting these key texts, the discourse of animation begins to demonstrate a revival of the supernatural alongside the creation of new technology and new, rational ways of thought. Early animation devices, like the thaumatrope, allowed spectators to understand how illusions work. However, since the illusions still tricked their eyes, they

also reintroduced “archaic, magical thinking” (Nead 47). Despite attempts to rationalize the magical and the supernatural, these ways of thinking persisted because there was still a factor of the unknown and the unexplainable. While Freud approaches this revival of the past as the return of repressed “primitive” beliefs that belong in the past but still linger in the cultural unconscious, he overlooks how this repeated interaction between the past and present informs and reveals uncanny feelings. Despite the linguistic liminality of the uncanny, it is the interaction between the familiar and the unfamiliar that invokes the feeling. Thus, because of the importance of interaction in the discourse of animation, Freud’s emphasis on the return of repressed internal desires and fears minimizes the intricate interlacing of the familiar and the unfamiliar that seems to haunt the uncanny. The uncanny is not just a return of repressed “primitive” perception, but an exchange between opposites: the rational and the irrational, life and death, and *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Likewise, when using a thaumatrope, the spectator is the one to animate the device, give it life, and take part in an act of creation, or reanimation—ultimately engaging with the uncanny. In other words, Freud’s discussion of the uncanny is incomplete because, in attempting to simplify the uncanny into his narrative of repression, he downplays the implications of the complex linguistic interaction between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, and the parallel interaction between a spectator and an object that creates, or “animates,” the experience of the uncanny. If we reframe the discussion to center around the implications of the thaumatrope, it is clear that the uncanny is more about a complex, overlapping interaction than it is about only repression. Thus, the discourse of animation demonstrates that the uncanny is, at its core, an embodied interaction. Additionally, it reveals the true elusiveness and

ghostliness of the term. Instead of attempting to rationalize the uncanny or condemn it to mean a singular unconscious experience, which does not mirror the spirit of the concept, it is more generative to explore the interaction between a spectator and an uncanny object.

Reframing the Gothic Moving Portrait

To confront Freud's reluctant and unconvincing return to literary analysis in order to effectively convey his own definition, I will also return to literary analysis to describe what animation reveals about the uncanny. Inspired by Nead's metaphor of the haunted gallery, the most fitting example of uncanny animation in literature is the motif of animated portraits in Gothic novels, like the example from Wilde's novel. I use the term "animated" loosely here, to include portraits that move literally in the text and portraits that foreshadow the return, appearance, or "reanimation" of characters in the novels. To preface this final section, I want to reiterate that the introductory exploration of linguistics and ultimate "return to literature" in Freud's text on the uncanny suggests an immaterial, ghostly way of thinking. Despite attempts to simplify the uncanny into a psychoanalytic definition through Freud's narrative of repression, we ultimately must return to the abstract—the supernatural, the magical, and the symbolic—to fully understand what the uncanny is and, by extension, what the discourse of animation is. Essentially, it is easier to gesture towards what the uncanny means and more useful to explore the concept abstractly than to attempt to diagnose a single definition. Instead, the tension between the rational and the supernatural as well as the interaction between a spectator and an uncanny body is what creates the animation that, in turn, produces uncanny feelings. Notably, because novels simply describe events through language, we

might begin to think of them as uncannily animated themselves. That is, as readers of novels we must “animate” the words on the page, ultimately taking part in a similar epistemological exercise to the thaumatrope and other animation devices. Thus, in this section, I reframe several passages from three Gothic novels—*The Castle of Otranto*, *Carmilla*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—through the discourse of animation in order to represent this new angle of understanding the uncanny.

Widely considered to be the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) establishes several key themes and motifs for the genre, including the uncanny moving portrait. Towards the beginning of the novel, Manfred intercepts his late son and heir’s fiancé, Isabella, in the castle’s portrait gallery to convince her to marry him instead. The passage reads, “at that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast. Isabella, whose back was turned to the picture, saw not the motion, nor knew whence the sound came, but started” (Walpole 25). Notably, the passage compares two separate reactions to the moving portrait. Isabella, who only hears the noise, uses the situation as an opportunity to begin her escape from Manfred’s advances. Manfred, on the other hand, actually sees the portrait take its first breath and is immediately captivated by this spectacle.

Just as Nead’s haunted gallery describes a confused and overlapping space between lifeless art pieces and the life they represent, what seems to trigger the portrait’s animation is a similar overlapping between life and death. When Manfred physically touches Isabella in his panic beforehand, her hands are cold: “half-dead with fright and horror” (Walpole). In fact, the passage takes great care to emphasize how the

experience of seeing the portrait become animate, after noticing Isabella's deathly cold hands, is what marks the situation as uncanny:

Manfred, distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs, and yet unable to keep his eyes from the picture, which began to move, had, however, advanced some steps after her, still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its panel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air. (Walpole 25)

While Isabella escapes his advances, Manfred is unable to look away from the portrait.

The sentence's construction, as well, creates a back-and-forth rhythm to mirror Manfred's shifting priorities. He is captivated by both Isabella and the portrait simultaneously, recognizing that both her familiar vivacity and the portrait's lifelessness have become unfamiliar in the space of the gallery. As Isabella approaches death, the portrait approaches life; that is, they both embody *heimlich* and *unheimlich* simultaneously. Thus, the complexity of this interaction between Manfred, Isabella, and the portrait is what makes it animated and, by extension, uncanny.

Additionally, Theodore's resemblance to the portrait of Alfonso in the gallery is equally uncanny, animated by a complex interaction between Matilda, the old portrait of Alfonso, and Theodore in the castle. Before Matilda expresses Theodore's striking resemblance to the portrait of Alfonso in the gallery, the passage reads:

At the upper end of the hall, where Manfred sat, was a boarded gallery with latticed windows, through which Matilda and Bianca were to pass [...]. The prisoner soon drew her attention: the steady and composed manner in which he answered, and the gallantry of his last reply, which were the first words she heard distinctly, interested her in his favour. His person was noble, handsome, and commanding, even in that situation: but his countenance soon engrossed her whole care. (Walpole 51)

Here, the gallery builds suspense in a way that embodies Nead's "promise of animation" and Gunning's "shuddering" and "poised" thaumatrope. Notably, it is not just Theodore's appearance that strikes Isabella as resembling the portrait of Alfonso, but the way he speaks and moves: his animation. Additionally, the "latticed windows" of the gallery work like early animation devices and even film reels, creating a shuddering visual effect that makes the portraits seem to move and, at the same time, makes the movements of real people less convincingly real. Again, the gallery promises animation, creating suspense that ultimately lands on Theodore's uncanny resemblance to an old gallery portrait. This haunted gallery is, as Nead and Gunning imply, a space where the boundaries between what is real and what is not real become blurred, a space where uncanny animation exposes the spectral superimposition of life and death, of the rational and the supernatural, and of the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Next, *Carmilla* (1872) opens with the protagonist Laura describing the moment she first saw the vampire Carmilla as a child, although she does not recognize it to be Carmilla. The way she characterizes this event from her childhood is similar to Nead's metaphor of the haunted gallery and Gunning's description of the thaumatrope. Thus, it similarly invokes the pattern of uncanny animation. Laura says, "I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also, but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness" (Le Fanu 8). Like the latticed windows of the gallery in *The Castle of Otranto*, the uncanny experience of waking up to a woman biting her neck at a very young age disrupts Laura's memories to the point of comparing them to mere animated images in the darkness of her childhood. The memories flicker, simultaneously

embodying both *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Notably, while Freud would argue that Laura's understanding of her childhood relates to repressed fears and desires, she nevertheless interacts with these memories as though they were, like phantasmagoria, approaching both life and not-life. She clearly describes them as "vivid," while other moments from her childhood remain obscured. Thus, the complex and overlapping interaction between Laura and her memories, as well as the way she instinctively "animates" them, is what characterizes this experience as uncanny. Again, the discourse of animation implies that uncanny feelings are more embodied than Freud describes: an interlaced interaction between an object—or in this case a memory—and the spectator that "animates" it, ultimately expressing the overlap between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*.

The way Laura describes this experience from her childhood foreshadows Carmilla's return and her uncanny resemblance to an old portrait belonging to Laura's mother that appears later in the story. When a cleaner returns some portraits to the family, Laura expresses that one picture in particular "was quite beautiful; it was startling; it seemed to live. It was the effigy of Carmilla! 'Carmilla, dear, here is an absolute miracle. Here you are, living, smiling, ready to speak, in this picture'" (Le Fanu 50). Although the portrait itself does not move, the reason it invokes the uncanny is that it bears a striking resemblance to the living Carmilla, who is beside Laura and the portrait. Thus, it is the comparison between an apparently animate person and an apparently inanimate portrait that creates the uncanniness of the situation. The portrait, because of its similarities to the animate Carmilla, is "living, smiling, ready to speak"—promising to become animate itself. The passage ultimately lands in the space of Nead's haunted gallery, blurring the lines between the animate and the inanimate as well as

heimlich and *unheimlich*. At the same time, the passage invokes the interaction of the thaumatrope, animating a complex relationship between Laura, Carmilla, and the portrait. The implications of these animated metaphors within the passage suggest that the uncanny is an interaction itself, between supposed linguistic opposites and between the characters in the novel.

Finally, as made clear by my introduction, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the most explicit example of uncanny animated portraits in the genre. Because it is primarily concerned with the intersection of art and morality, this novel reads like a thesis on aestheticism. Notably, Wilde's philosophy opposes Freud's focus on describing the uncanny in terms of psychoanalysis. The discourse of animation, like Wilde's novel, relies on aestheticism because it is concerned with the visual at its core. With the discourse of animation in mind, let us revisit the first moment Dorian Gray notices his portrait has changed:

In the dim arrested light that struggled through the cream-coloured silk blinds, the face appeared to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth. [...] He turned round and, walking to the window, drew up the blind. The bright dawn flooded the room and swept the fantastic shadows into dusky corners, where they lay shuddering. But the strange expression that he had noticed in the face of the portrait seemed to linger there, to be more intensified even. The quivering ardent sunlight showed him the lines of cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing. (Wilde 105)

Just like the latticed windows of the gallery in *The Castle of Otranto* and Laura's phantasmagoric memories in *Carmilla*, this passage focuses on how the light from the windows creates an uncanny interaction between Dorian and his portrait. While the change is subtle, only a slight shift in expression, the portrait occupies a space in the

metaphorical haunted gallery. The “shuddering” and “quivering” light from the window reveals to Dorian the portrait’s animation. It promises movement, or perhaps recognition from whom it depicts: an uncanny interaction between Dorian and his painted double.

To expand on the importance of this first moment, when Dorian recognizes that the portrait has indeed changed for certain, he expresses the horror of the animated portrait with both rational and supernatural interest, ultimately realizing the linguistic overlap between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. He says:

It was perfectly true. The portrait had altered. As he often remembered afterwards, and always with no small wonder, he found himself at first gazing at the portrait with a feeling of almost scientific interest. That such a change should have taken place was incredible to him. And yet it was a fact. Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what that soul thought, they realized?—that what it dreamed, they made true? Or was there some other, more terrible reason? He shuddered, and felt afraid, and, going back to the couch, lay there, gazing at the picture in sickened horror. (Wilde 111)

While at first Dorian attempts to rationalize the supernatural—or perhaps unexplainable—change of the portrait, he is unsuccessful. Not only is the changed expression a “fact,” but the portrait seems to come to life itself, gaining its own agency within the passage; the portrait “had altered” itself, instead of someone or something else altering it. Thus, what makes the scene uncanny is a subtle exchange between the rational and the supernatural, the living and the un-living, and of course *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. With these simultaneous modes of thought in mind, the passage lands in the space of the haunted gallery and the spectral third image of the thaumatrope. Dorian

shudders like an animated image, becoming uncanny himself alongside his uncanny, animated portrait.

The Uncanny as Aesthetic Experience

As Wilde posits in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors” (Wilde 5). This theory of aestheticism, along with the entirety of the novel, supposes that the uncanny is primarily an embodied interaction between spectator and object, not simply the return of the repressed. Wilde’s statement gestures towards a crucial element of the Gothic moving portrait and, by extension, the animation that haunts the concept of the uncanny in this motif: the importance of interaction. While Freud attempts to arrive at a standard psychoanalytic definition of the uncanny by exploring its overlapping etymology and associating it with the return of repressed animistic beliefs, he ultimately misses what interaction adds to our understanding of the uncanny. Building on Freud’s 1919 text, Gothic critics such as Terry Castle, Joe Kember, and Tom Gunning similarly gesture towards the importance of interaction in uncanny animation. Castle and Kember explore the complex relationship between phantasmagoric images, the illusionists that animated them, and their audiences—conveying the paradoxical agreement between the rational and the irrational, the familiar and the unfamiliar, and in the context of the uncanny specifically, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Gunning, on the other hand, focuses particularly on the thaumatrope: the interaction between a spectator and an animation device that creates a flickering, spectral third image which combines the device’s two faces. Recognizing the abstract, shared space between a spectator and an uncanny object—established by the metaphor of the haunted gallery in Lynda Nead’s text on the uncanny history of film—

is more apt for understanding the complex overlap between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* that the uncanny represents. Thus, because of both this question of animism and the uncertainty about if something is animate or inanimate, the discourse of animation will strengthen our understanding of the uncanny.

With this understanding and Freud's incomplete discussion of the uncanny in mind, Wilde's novel exaggerates the moving portrait motif in Gothic literature, anticipating my own thesis and promising to "bring it to life" or, as I've outlined here, even to "animate" it. When he says, "it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors," he approaches the complexly interwoven interaction that foregrounds the uncanny both in literature and in other forms of art. Despite Freud's unconvincing analysis of "The Sandman," art, and perhaps the playful reciprocity that comes with it, is what his psychoanalytic exploration of the uncanny lacks. The idea of animation that seems to haunt the uncanny, on the other hand, reveals the implicit importance of interaction between spectator and uncanny object. Through the discourse of animation—particularly the promise of animation in Nead's metaphorical haunted gallery, the complex interwoven interactions of the thaumatrope, and the symbolic animated portraits that unsettle the familiar surroundings of Gothic characters—the concept of the uncanny becomes animated itself. The uncanny is not, as Freud posits, simply the return of repressed "primitive" mode of thought, nor can it be simplified to a rational mode of thought through the theory of psychoanalysis. The uncanny really comes to life, so to speak, through the intersection of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* and through the complex interaction between a spectator and an uncanny animated object.

Ultimately, the animated portraits of Gothic fiction reveal that which is deeply hidden internally within the spectator, as they witness this haunting aesthetic experience.

The Uncanny as a (Queer) Sensibility

The discourse of animation, then, reveals what psychoanalysis cannot: the uncanny as an aesthetic experience, or as a sensibility. Perhaps we may think of the uncanny in a similar way to Susan Sontag's famous "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), an intersection between linguistic opposites that playfully pushes the boundaries between them but cannot be confined to a single definition. In fact, Sontag notes the origins of the camp sensibility in the Gothic novel, attributing the playful convertibility of the serious and the frivolous to the shocking aesthetics of Walpole's work and other novels from the period (Sontag 4). Thus, while camp aesthetics disrupt boundaries and inspire an examination of these boundaries in the first place, uncanny aesthetics continue this practice. Similarly, like the linguistic paradox of the uncanny, queerness disrupts normative gender expectations both in terms of desire for the same gender and in terms of physicality, as transgender people transition between or outside of the gender binary. That is, like the uncanny, queerness is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, as people of queer experience both recognize themselves in the queer and accept that this queerness disturbs normative gender expectations. This discourse continues to haunt queer theory even today: an uncanny revival of past aesthetics in itself.

Indeed, Mair Rigby discusses the connection between Gothic fiction, queer theory, and the uncanny in her text, "Uncanny Recognition: Queer Theory's Debt to the Gothic" at length, identifying queerness itself as uncanny: an experience that is both familiar and frightening, that disrupts the "natural" and the "normal," and that invokes uncertainty about identity (Rigby 51). Additionally, just as the uncanny represents an intersection between the familiar and the unfamiliar, Rigby's text describes how Gothic

fiction worked as an early form of queer theory, allowing for exploration of non-normative, transgressive desires. That is, just as queer theory recognizes the Gothic, the Gothic recognizes the queer. Notably, however, the familiarity of queerness is more than just a repeated experience of sexual uncertainty. Rigby quotes Tanya Krzywinska, who says, “playfulness is perhaps the crucial tool of queer theoretical practice which allows barriers and thresholds to be crossed, sexual and gendered roles to be explored, and, importantly, the acknowledgement of the role of fantasy within different discourses” (Rigby 48). Thus, considering that the Gothic is queer and that queer theory is Gothic, we might see the interaction between the familiar and the unfamiliar as foregrounding both ideas. Additionally, the playful interaction between transgressive discussions of the past, in Gothic fiction, and transgressive discussions of the present, in queer theory texts, further establishes the importance of not just unfamiliarity, but familiarity. The discourse of animation—that is, the playful interaction of opposites and especially of the past and present—confirms the uncanny as an aesthetic experience or, inspired by Sontag’s text, as a queer sensibility.

Jack Halberstam also notes the Freudian uncanny in the final chapter of his book on alternative modes of knowing, queerness, and animated children’s films, *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). “Animating Failure: Ending, Fleeing, Surviving” details how new forms of animated narratives, especially stop-motion films such as *Coraline* (2009) and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), offer a collision between “the childish, the transformative, and the queer” (Halberstam 186). Halberstam concludes:

To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings

and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures” (Halberstam 187)

Although Halberstam describes the latent uncanniness of *Coraline* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and attentively analyzes these stop-motion films through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, he also gestures towards the “bungling” of linguistic opposites that the discourse of animation exposes in the uncanny. While the uncanny is often reduced to unsettling, unfamiliar experiences, we also must recognize its familiarity. Thus, the queer art of failure employs the discourse of animation, ultimately revealing the playful, silly familiarity of childhood that underscores uncanny feelings. If we approach the uncanny as a sensibility, as Halberstam has done implicitly in his chapter, we will be on our way to a more complete discussion of its importance in literature and in other forms of art like stop-motion films.²

Stop-motion films provide an appropriate starting point to further establish the discourse of animation and to explore the uncanny as a sensibility. In fact, the term “stop-motion” accomplishes the same linguistic overlap as the term “uncanny”—a compact oxymoron that accurately describes the paradox of animateness and inanimateness, and of life and death, in its meaning. That is, stop-motion aims to create lifelike animation through a tedious process of manipulating figures in the real-world frame by frame, creating the illusion of motion through frequent stops and starts. Like Gunning’s description of its much more technologically straightforward predecessor, the thaumatrope, the stop-motion technique requires a complex interaction between the

² See also Eliza Steinbock’s *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*.

animated puppets and their spectators, and between the competing, simultaneous awareneses that the puppets are not alive but look like they are. Therefore, the discourse of animation reminds us that stop-motion films are inherently uncanny in form, whether or not they intentionally take advantage of this fact to emphasize their narrative impact.

Often, stop-motions that do intentionally take advantage of their own uncanniness also appropriate Gothic tropes like the changing portrait motif that I outlined in the last chapter. Notably, *Coraline* (2009) represents the uncanny through avenues similar to Hoffman's story, "The Sandman:" forcing the characters, and in turn the audience, to experience a looming fear of losing their eyes. Instead of the uncertainly animated automaton Olympia, the film has dolls with buttons for eyes that look like the human characters, "human" characters with buttons for eyes that look like dolls, and a changing portrait of a little boy wearing blue. Indeed, the protagonist Coraline is much like a Gothic heroine. She navigates her way through the passageways of an old Queen-Anne-turned-apartment-complex, escapes the clutches of the terrifying Beldame, who calls herself Coraline's "Other Mother," and finally returns to normalcy after exploring "transgressive" desires like greed and self-indulgence—all elements which are characteristic of Gothic fiction. As Coraline goes back and forth between the real world and the idealized dream world that the Other Mother has created for her, the narrative remains deeply conservative (Halberstam 180). Inspired by Rigby's text and Halberstam's discussion, queer theory may help to strengthen the discourse of animation and to illuminate the uncanny as a sensibility instead of simply a psychological experience.



Figures 2 and 3: Coraline and the Boring Blue Boy

During the first act of the film, it becomes increasingly obvious that Coraline's parents ignore her wants and needs, causing Coraline to feel neglected. When her dad tasks her with counting everything in the house, she does so glumly, ultimately arriving at the living room where boxes remain unpacked and the room is empty except for a sad, haunting picture above the mantel of a boy who dropped his ice cream. While Coraline marks the portrait in her notebook as "one boring, blue boy," the shot reverse-

shot technique during this scene suggests that this moment is one of deeper recognition. Her blue hair matches his blue clothes, his disappointment and shock about his ice cream cone mirrors Coraline's emotional state following the family move from the Midwest, and her ultimate resignation to describe him as "boring" matches how she feels about the present rainy day. Thus, the recognition Coraline feels towards the portrait is not unlike Manfred's uncanny recognition way back in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Just as the castle's moving portrait foreshadows Manfred's greatest fears, the Boring Blue Boy allows Coraline to recognize her own dissatisfaction with her parents and, in turn, allows the Other Mother to know how to satisfy her. What makes this interaction particularly uncanny, however, is the intersecting similarities and differences between Coraline and the boy. That is, neither Coraline nor the audience would be able to recognize her dissatisfaction if the portrait was completely different from her, for example if the boy had red clothes, or if the portrait was of her. Therefore, like the moving portraits of Gothic fiction, Coraline experiences both familiarity and unfamiliarity when she gazes at the portrait, ultimately landing in the space of Nead's haunted gallery. The picture promises animation and a particularly queer transformation because of Coraline's recognition, foreshadowing her discovery of the passage to the Other Mother's trap.

Of course, queerness has been uncanny since the moving portraits of Gothic novels. *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), for example, juxtaposes an uncanny moving portrait with a familiar yet forbidden, hidden room that gives the impression that recognition with said portrait is equally as forbidden as the room itself and, perhaps, transgressive or "queer" desires as well. When John enters his dying uncle's secret

closet, he is immediately transfixed with the horrifically realistic portrait of Melmoth that hangs there:

Urged by an impulse for which he did not attempt to account to himself, [he] caught up the miserable light, and once more ventured into the forbidden room,—the *blue chamber* of the dwelling. The motion roused the dying man;—he sat bolt upright in his bed. This John could not see, for he was now in the closet; but he heard the groan, or rather the choaked and guggling rattle of the throat, that announces the horrible conflict between muscular and mental convulsion. He started, turned away; but, as he turned away, he thought he saw the eyes of the portrait, on which his own was fixed, *move*, and hurried back to his uncle's bedside. (Maturin 19)

Again, this scene invokes the metaphor of the haunted gallery. Just as the portrait of Melmoth invokes an uncertainty about its animation, John's uncle is markedly in-between life and death. The passage repeats his uncle's uncanny movements—the convulsions between life and death—in order to blur the lines between the (in)animate and the (un)living, which forces John to recognize the correlation between the portrait of Melmoth and his uncle. Like his uncle's deathly appearance, which John describes previously as “a kind of sleep or stupor, his eyes still open, and fixed on [him],” the portrait's eyes are fixed on him, creating familiarity and perhaps further disrupting his understanding of time and revival (Maturin 18). It's as if John recognizes some forbidden transfixion, both of fear and desire, between the two.

Indeed, much like the familiar metaphor for queer “coming out,” it's no coincidence that the portrait of Melmoth is hidden in a closet. The disruption between the boundaries of life and death is instilled with an air of foreboding, and is in itself as transgressive as queerness. Thus, the novel draws a parallel between feelings of uncanniness that are hidden away and feelings of queer desire that are similarly hidden

away “in the closet.” Notably, to feed his growing intrigue about the strange portrait, John reads a manuscript left by a mysterious stranger called Stanton who visited the family in the past looking for “Melmoth the Traveller.” In the manuscript, Stanton concludes, “I have sought him everywhere.—The desire of meeting him once more, is become as a burning fire within me,—it is the necessary condition of my existence”(Maturin 59). This description is blatantly homoerotic: an attraction to Melmoth, a complex “bungling” of fear and desire that has become a deep-rooted, internal aspect of Stanton’s existence, living or dead.

However, even further, John’s reaction to this final statement of homoerotic identity exemplifies the complex recognition of the uncanny moving portrait and its relation to queerness. The passage reads:

Such was the conclusion of the manuscript which Melmoth found in his uncle's closet. When he had finished it, he sunk down on the table near which he had been reading it, his face hid in his folded arms, his senses reeling, his mind in a mingled state of stupor and excitement. After a few moments, he raised himself with an involuntary start, and saw the picture gazing at him from its canvas. He was within ten inches of it as he sat, and the proximity appeared increased by the strong light that was accidentally thrown on it, and its being the only representation of a human figure in the room. Melmoth felt for a moment as if he were about to receive an explanation from its lips. (Maturin 59)

After finishing the manuscript, John experiences a complex moment of uncanny recognition through a combination of visual and mental stimuli. Notably, the portrait feels alive because of its proximity to John’s eyes, the strange light that falls on it, and because it is the only other “person” in the room with which John can discern the information he has just read. Like the gallery in *The Castle of Otranto* and other Gothic novels, this expression of the moving portrait motif also feels uncannily realistic

because of the particular light of a Gothic room. Thus, the boundaries between what is animate and what is inanimate are disrupted: just as John is seemingly “animated” outside of his own control, the portrait becomes “animate” itself. During this moment of uncanny recognition, John’s focus funnels directly to the old portrait’s lips, expecting it to explain the manuscript to him with a complex combination of anticipation, fear, and a dash of homoerotic desire. Hidden away in the closet, so to speak, John experiences a haunting disruption between the boundaries of life and death, but also an equally haunting recognition of queerness.

In response to this uncanny disruption, John destroys the portrait of the old Melmoth. While the picture burns, he experiences further uncanny feelings at the strange appearance of a smile on Melmoth’s lips: a “transient and imaginary resuscitation of the figure”(Maturin 60). He goes to his bedroom, hoping to put these feelings behind him, but cannot escape the uncanny in sleep either. The chapter concludes:

But (for Melmoth never could decide) was it in a dream or not, that he saw the figure of his ancestor appear at the door? —hesitatingly as he saw him at first on the night of his uncle’s death, —saw him enter the room, approach his bed, and heard him whisper, ‘You have burned me, then; but those are flames I can survive. —I am alive, —I am beside you.’ Melmoth started, sprung from his bed, —it was broad day-light. He looked round, —there was no human being in the room but himself. He felt a slight pain in the wrist of his wright arm. He looked at it, it was black and blue, as from the recent gripe of a strong hand. (Maturin 60)

Here, John experiences the uncertainty of phantasmagoria. He accepts both the possibility of a dream and the possibility that the old Melmoth had indeed entered his room and whispered to him, ultimately realizing the coinciding rational and supernatural beliefs that uncanny animation exposes. Again, the novel uses the

metaphor of the “blue chamber” to emphasize the uncanny. This time, because the portrait of Melmoth appears to bruise John’s arm “black and blue,” John’s position under the control of his male ancestor marks him as a version of the Gothic heroine. Particularly, this metaphor invokes the image of domestic abuse that women experience behind closed doors: creating an inversion of traditional gender roles. Thus, not only does blueness indicate repressed homoerotic desire, it also expresses the boundaries between masculinity and femininity and, perhaps, promises transformation between the two.



Figure 3: Coraline and the Boring Blue Boy, Now Changed

Likewise, the changing portrait in *Coraline* represents a similar moment of queer recognition. Like the forbidden “blue chamber” and the “black and blue” bruises, the audience is able to recognize Coraline’s connection to the Boring Blue Boy because of her blue hair. However, because the portrait is a little boy, this recognition feels exciting and, of course, forbidden. Thus, her recognition disrupts boundaries between

gender at the same time as it disrupts boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and between the supposedly animate and the supposedly inanimate. Additionally, for a kid who is constantly misnamed by adults and other kids alike—“Caroline” and “Jonesy,” to name a few—Coraline’s identification with the Boring Blue Boy becomes even more transgender-coded. Awareness of boundaries between opposites, and perhaps the playful disruption of these boundaries, is uncanny, yes, but this example proves how potentially queer the uncanny sensibility may be.

When Coraline acts as Gothic heroine, she also recognizes her connection to “transgressive” gendered desires. Thus, when she crawls through the passageway to the dream world created by the Other Mother, she experiences another moment of recognition. As she goes through a door identical to the one at the beginning of the tunnel and enters a room identical to the one she just left, the camera zooms out until the portrait above the mantelpiece is at the center of the frame. However, as both Coraline and the audience come to recognize with the following shot-reverse shots, the Boring Blue Boy has changed. In this version of Coraline’s apartment, the boy is beaming, about to lick the ice cream that is still in its cone in his hand. In addition to the boy’s blue clothing, the sky behind him in the changed portrait is much bluer. Thus, this second moment of recognition between Coraline and the portrait reproduces the imagery of the “blue chamber” from *Melmoth*. Coraline’s “blueness” then comes to represent her narrative queerness: just like John’s combined fear and intrigue about the forbidden closet in his uncle’s manor and his ultimate presentation as a Gothic heroine, Coraline keeps returning to the uncanny (un)familiarity of the Other Mother’s world. As a continuation of the Gothic moving portrait motif, the Boring Blue Boy magnifies the

implicit queerness of uncanny animation because of Coraline's deep, internal recognition with it.

However, like the typical return to normalcy that follows the recognition of such narrative queerness in Gothic novels, Coraline also cannot remain in the transgressively queer world crafted by the Other Mother. In fact, like the structure of many Gothic novels, Halberstam even goes so far as to describe the film as "a deeply conservative narrative about the dangers of a world that is crafted in opposition to the natural world of family and the ordinary" (Halberstam 180). To escape the Other Mother's clutches and rescue her real parents, she must accept the normative and reject the queer, saying goodbye to her Happy Blue Boy identity for good. Thus, while the narrative allows Coraline to explore her "transgressive," queer desires, in true Gothic fashion, it also forces her to cast her queer identity aside. *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), comparatively, "fixes" the transgressive relationships between Conrad, Isabella, Manfred, Theodore, and Matilda in the final sentence of the novel:

"But Theodore's grief was too fresh to admit the thought of another love; and it was not until after frequent discourses with Isabella of his dear Matilda, that he was persuaded he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom he could forever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul"(Walpole 105).

This final sentence is a way to tie together the loose "queer" ends of the novel. At face value, the passage reads as a neat, heterosexual marriage to replace the failed marriage between Isabella and the sickly Conrad that provoked the events of the novel. However, like Coraline, Theodore's uncanny position in the novel marks him as narratively queer. He is expressively feminine, and an object to be desired by both Matilda and Isabella because of his resemblance to the portrait of Alfonso in the gallery. Thus, the

“melancholy that had taken possession of his soul” is not unlike Stanton’s “necessary condition of [his] existence” in *Melmoth* or even the imagery of the soul later adopted by Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

If, like Rigby, we consider how Gothic novels work as an early form of queer theory, *Coraline*’s reworking of the Gothic moving portrait is similarly queer. The language of animation, or the act of giving a soul, is essential to the discourse of these Gothic texts and, by extension, to the queerness exposed by the uncanny interaction between spectator and portrait. The stop-motion medium takes this exposure to the extreme, creating a complex, aesthetic interaction between Coraline, her recognition of an uncanny portrait, the audience’s recognition of Coraline’s uncanny movements themselves, and the simultaneous knowledge that she is somewhere in between a recognizable moving person and an inanimate puppet, and somewhere in between the queer and the not-queer. Thus, the discourse of animation illuminates the uncanny as a distinctly queer sensibility: an (un)familiar exploration of the space in between binaries like life and death, motion and stillness, and masculinity and femininity. Moving portraits, like the motif in Gothic fiction and the aesthetics of stop-motion, exemplify this sense of embodied interaction that foregrounds the uncanny, allowing the audience to examine and ultimately disrupt the boundaries that this interaction exposes.

Expanding the Haunted Gallery



Figure 4: “The Artist’s Dream” by Thomas Edison (Library of Congress)

While animated portraits are an established motif of Gothic novels, Nead’s discussion of early cinema suggests that we may think of films as uncanny, animated portraits as well. As she summarizes, “early film animates, it must create hauntings and motion” (Nead 104). Notably, she also brings up two examples of early films that include portraits coming to life: “The Mysterious Portrait” by George Méliès and “The Artist’s Dream” by Thomas Edison.³ In Edison’s film, pictured above, two women step out of their portrait frames—reviving the similarly phantasmagoric portraits of Gothic novels. Considering its appearance in *Coraline*, the uncanny moving portrait is an aesthetic experience that can be traced across early Gothic novels, early animation

³ Coincidentally, Edison’s film is also a revival of illusionist David Devant’s similar stage performance, also titled “The Artists Dream” (qtd. Nead 98, 86, 88).

devices and phantasmagoric magic lantern shows as well as stage magic shows, early cinema, and finally its revival in the aesthetics of recent stop-motion films. Similar applications of the uncanny moving portrait, or at least appearances of the motif, exist in other recent stop-motions as well, finalizing the discourse of animation and the uncanny as a queer sensibility. Although *The Corpse Bride* (2009), *ParaNorman* (2012), and *Frankenweenie* (2012) include less explicit continuations of the moving portrait motif, these stop-motion films provide further evidence to develop this new way of understanding the uncanny. Thus, just as Nead recognizes the continuation of the animated portrait motif in early cinema and the latent uncanniness of film itself, these modern stop-motion films act as uncanny portraits themselves; that is, the frequent stops and starts of their animation revive the uncanny aesthetics of the Gothic moving portrait.

As the first example, *The Corpse Bride* (2009) is explicitly a musical parody of Gothic novels: including a moody Victorian setting, an exploration of transgressive sexuality, and of course, a final return to normalcy. In summary, the film follows Victor, a young, pathetic Victorian man who is arranged to be married to a girl named Victoria, but then accidentally marries an undead bride called Emily in the woods while practicing his vows. While the examples of moving portraits in the film are not particularly relevant to the narrative, they still build an uncanny atmosphere for the audience by disrupting the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. Particularly, most of the “moving” portraits are actually just transitions between shots. For example, as Victoria’s parents discuss their soon-to-be riches during the film’s

opening number, the camera tracks their walk down a gallery hallway of indistinguishable relatives and ancestors before ultimately landing on Victoria's picture.



Figure 5: Victoria's Portrait

Then, the shot fades to center on the real Victoria preparing for the wedding rehearsal (*The Corpse Bride* 4:44). Instead of the portrait itself invoking uncanny feelings in any of the characters, like in a Gothic novel, the film repurposes uncanny aesthetics for the audience to experience the uncanny through the transition between the inanimate portrait and the real, animated puppet of Victoria. Thus, during this transition between shots, the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate are intentionally disrupted to invoke the uncanny.

This strategy is continued later on in the film during a similar transition. Lord Barkis, who intends to marry Victoria for her parents' nonexistent fortune, shares his plans with her portrait before walking towards the camera and fading to black. Then, the shot fades into a missing person's portrait of Victor (*The Corpse Bride* 48:53).

Arguably, while the first example of a “moving” portrait invokes the life of animation, the transition from Victoria’s portrait this time takes advantage of the anticipation of movement to invoke Victor’s (in)animation—or, in terms of the narrative, the uncertain position between life and death that he occupies after marrying Emily. That is, the transition between the phantasmagoric shot of Lord Barkis’ animated puppet and the inanimate picture of Victor similarly invokes the aesthetics of the uncanny moving portrait (albeit in reverse). Additionally, like Coraline’s portrait, this transition similarly illustrates Victor’s uncertain position between masculinity and femininity—visualizing the convertibility of “Victorias” to “Victors” and “Victors” to “Victorias” to revive the previous convertibility of stillness and motion. Because it’s a stop-motion, *The Corpse Bride* is aware of the latent uncanniness of the medium and intentionally takes advantage of it to represent such uncertainties. Thus, the film invokes the discourse of animation through these subtle moving portraits in order to revive Gothic aesthetics, ultimately playing with the uncanny as a queer sensibility.

Next, in *Frankenweenie* (2012), the examples of “moving” portraits are equally as irrelevant to the film’s narrative but still use the discourse of animation to invoke the uncanny. As a parody of the original film adaption of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, this movie follows a young Victor Frankenstein as he revives his beloved dog Sparky after he is hit by a car. After Victor buries Sparky, the moody, black-and-white aesthetic of the film is exaggerated even further with a storm. The falling rain reflects through the window onto a wall of family portraits, fixating on a picture of Victor and Sparky (*Frankenweenie* 16:17). The rain skids down the window jerkily, which creates the illusion of motion on the portrait. At the same time, the rain that reflects on the real,

“living” Victor in the following shots exposes the inanimate puppet behind the animation.



Figures 6 and 7: Victor's Portrait and Victor in the Rain

Thus, the boundaries between the inanimate picture and the animated puppets are disrupted. Finally, to further disorient these boundaries, the film revives the

flickering, phantasmagoric aesthetics of past magic lantern shows and early cinema alike with a scene in which Victor watches old footage of Sparky's role in a homemade short film on a hastily set-up projector. This shot-reverse shot sequence captures the uncertain space between life and death, and the animate and inanimate, through a combination of shaky camera footage, the dark shadows created by the draped fabric of the screen, and the intense flicker of the projector light. Thus, this moment of recognition between Victor and the moving "portrait" of Sparky that has outlived the real dog foreshadows the ultimate, uncanny revival that the film explores. Like the magical illusion created by early animation devices like the thaumatrope, the film applies the discourse of animation in order to create an uncanny atmosphere to foreshadow the narrative's manipulation of the boundaries between life, the animate, and death, the inanimate.

In fact, when Victor actually *does* revive Sparky, the film further bungles the rules of animation to parallel the unnatural, "transgressive" process of uncanny revival. As Victor smuggles Sparky's body back through the house, he sneaks behind his parents as they watch *Horror of Dracula* (1958) on television (*Frankenweenie* 21:50). Notably, however, the shuddering images of the real actors on the T.V. screen disrupts the established stop-motion world of the film. Not only does *Frankenweenie* revive the uncanny aesthetics of animation, it also further disrupts the established stop-motion reality by including real actors on a distorted, flickering screen. This choice is particularly uncanny because the stop-motion is what we have known to be reality thus far in the movie, and, when we watch Victor sneak around his parents so that he can re-animate Sparky, the film reveals the uncanny space between what is familiar and what

is unfamiliar. Overall, *Frankenweenie* explores the uncanny through the discourse of animation, ultimately reviving the aesthetics of Gothic moving portraits and the equally uncanny aesthetics of early film at the same time as it parodies both the novel and film versions of *Frankenstein* (1818).



Figure 8: Norman and Aggie

Like the examples of early cinema that Nead discusses in her article, stop-motion is arguably, in itself, a moving portrait. Considering this, *Paranorman* (2012) subtly revives the moving portrait motif through a more convoluted method of comparison between animate and inanimate figures. As protagonist Norman, who is the only one in his town who can see the dead, struggles to fix the yearly effects of an old witch's curse placed upon the town, he experiences a moment of uncanny recognition with the restless spirit of the witch who placed the curse. The witch, as Norman realizes, just so happens to be a young girl named Aggie from early in the town's history. Notably, Aggie's stop-motion puppet is designed to look uncannily like Norman's puppet; in fact, the two are nearly identical. Even further, Norman acts in place of Aggie's experiences during several points in the movie: in the school Thanksgiving production, he plays her; when Aggie shows him flashbacks, Norman *is* her. So, when

the time comes for them both to recognize each other's struggles, the film establishes a particularly uncanny way for the two to look at each other as moving portraits. Near the climax of the narrative, Norman confronts Aggie at her grave in the forest, where her defensive lightning strikes create a shuddering, disrupted style of uncanny animation. As Norman gets closer and closer to Aggie, her voice rings throughout the forest, disconnected from her invisible body. He attempts to reason with her, saying, "we're actually kind of the same, you and I," she replies, "you're not dead [...] and you're a boy [...] you're not like me at all!" (*ParaNorman* 1:14:15). Then, the forest returns after a fade to white, where Aggie is no longer a spectral body of energy but instead a more approachable, more viscerally "real," girl (*ParaNorman* 1:19:09). The two share this moment of recognition, "bungling" the rules of time and space, of girlhood and boyhood, and of uncanny animation. Thus, because Norman and Aggie look identical, this moment of recognition between them works just like the moving portraits of Gothic novels: a revival of past transgressions that invokes the aesthetics of the uncanny through the discourse of animation. Overall, Nead's metaphor of the haunted gallery can be expanded to include more subtle representations of the uncanny moving portrait, such as the aesthetics of stop-motion films that epitomize this motif.

Uncanny Filmic Realities and Queer Ways of “Looking”

While Halberstam’s examination of the queer art of failure implicitly uses the discourse of animation to expand on the uncanny, a chapter in his book on queer temporality and modes of looking in films, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), provides further ways to expand on the queer, uncanny animation produced by film. “The Transgender Look” describes how films with transgender characters produce new, implicit ways of looking and align the viewer’s gaze with these transgender characters. He says, “the transgender gaze becomes difficult to track because it depends on complex relations in time and space between seeing and not seeing, appearing and disappearing, knowing and not knowing” (Halberstam 78). Essentially, the creation of the transgender gaze requires a different mode of looking, perhaps even a new epistemology, that recognizes the liminality of trans identity in film and disrupts the binaries that the male gaze has established in this medium. In *Coraline*, for example, the transgender “gaze” is partially maintained by the constant, auditory reminders of Coraline’s dissatisfaction and “transgressive” inclinations: the repetition of adults misnaming her “Caroline” instead of her more gender-neutral name, “Coraline.” During one such instance of this, Coraline’s neighbor Mr. Bobinsky whispers to her that his trained circus mice have told him to tell her to not go through the door to the Other Mother’s world. He says, “they even get your name wrong, you know? They call you Coraline, instead of Caroline” (*Coraline* 26:34). Thus, the film invokes the uncanny through this strange auditory combination of familiarity—Coraline hearing her real name and real “queer” identity—and unfamiliarity—the uncertainty that the mice may know things she does not and can communicate them to

her neighbor. Halberstam's transgender gaze, then, is explicitly tied to the uncannily queer discourse of animation. Thus, while the discourse of animation may seem specific to the realm of the visual, the aesthetics of the uncanny go beyond only what we can see with our eyes. Likewise, as with this example from *Coraline*, stop-motion films convince us of their living and breathing worlds through more than just the illusion of moving puppets. In order to explore the uncanny in stop-motion films comprehensively and to establish the uncanny as a sensibility, we must expand our analysis beyond the realm of the visual to include more unseen, "spectral" considerations of the uncanny. Generally, recognizing alternative forms of looking at and in these uncanny films and revisiting uncanny moments in Gothic literature with these alternative forms of looking in mind will help to illuminate the uncanny as an aesthetic experience and as a queer sensibility, rather than reducing it to just a psychological experience as Freud does in his text.

Accordingly, Halberstam names several strategies that allow films to approach transness, strategies that ultimately disrupt time and space within and outside of the films themselves. He writes:

In one mode that we might call the "rewind," the transgender character is presented first as "properly" gendered, as passing in other words, and as properly located within a linear narrative; her exposure as transgender constitutes the film's narrative climax and spells out both her own decline and the unraveling of cinematic time. The viewer literally has to rewind the film after the character's exposure to reorganize the narrative logic in terms of the past. In a second mode that involves embedding several ways of looking into one, the film deploys certain formal techniques to give the viewer access to the transgender gaze in order to allow us to look *with* the transgender character instead of *at* him. Other techniques include ghosting the transgender character or allowing him to haunt the narrative after death; and doubling the transgender character or playing him/her off another trans character in order to remove the nodal point of normativity. (Halberstam 78)

With this complex “bungling” of time and space and of linguistic opposites in mind, Halberstam parallels the discourse of animation and its connection to the uncanny. Indeed, the strategies that these filmmakers employ are phantasmagoric: they are not simply natural successors to the magic lantern shows of earlier centuries but represent an equally uncanny interaction between the past and present, between the normative and the transgressive or the transformative, and between the moving picture and the spectator. Thus, the process of creating a transgender gaze in film anticipates transformation much like the animated portraits in Gothic literature. The discourse of animation, along with the uncanny as a sensibility, playfully disrupts normative modes of looking in order to reveal “transgressive” desires, fears, and modes of thought.



Figure 9: Coraline and her Inanimate Parents

In fact, there are notable time disruptions in *Coraline*'s narrative that further establish the uncanny atmosphere through the discourse of animation. When Coraline attempts to escape the Other Mother's world, she finds that her parents have been taken

in order to further tempt her to allow her Other Mother to sew buttons into her eyes. As she returns to the real world, her parents' groceries lay on the table, rotting (*Coraline* 1:01:56). Thus, the film creates an uncanny atmosphere through uncertainty about how much time has passed while Coraline has been in the dream world. That night, Coraline sleeps in her parents' bed with pillows that she has arranged to remind her of them using her mom's neck brace and her dad's glasses. Following these uncanny time disruptions, the film further bungles the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. Considering Coraline's moment of transgender/queer recognition with the portrait of the Boring Blue Boy as the threshold to her exploration of this other world, the film allows us access to Halberstam's transgender gaze through the uncanny discourse of animation. During this sequence of the film, we are aligned with Coraline's gaze as she feels trapped in between the transgressively queer space of the Other Mother's world and the normative world that she has left behind, but now strangely longs for.

To go a little deeper into these implicit modes of looking in film, we must of course acknowledge that "looking" goes beyond what we see with our eyes. Much like uncanny feelings are a reaction to more than just visual stimuli, the familiar methods of looking in film can be changed, disrupted, or transformed by the interaction with non-visual formal elements that represent the unfamiliar, the underrepresented, or the "transgressive." In fact, Halberstam mentions how transgender character Brandon Teena haunts his own film, *The Brandon Teena Story* (1998), as a voice recording following his death (Halberstam 78). This auditory experience is an example of a new mode of looking that aligns the spectator with the transgender gaze: rather than

representing the transgender experience through normative modes of looking, the film acknowledges the latent scrambling of time and space, life and death, and of course, onscreen representations of maleness and femaleness that haunt a narrative about transness. Brandon's return engages with the uncanny sensibility, recreating the past in the present and disrupting the way we understand filmic modes of "looking."

Comparatively, *Coraline* must convince us of two separate animated realities to invoke an uncanny reaction. As Coraline herself transitions between the real world and the dream world created by the Other Mother, a combination of (un)familiar visual and non-visual elements establish the dream world as an uncanny, "queer" space where Coraline can explore her own separation from normative gender expectations. Likewise, of course, the Other Mother represents the intersection between such narrative queerness, general otherness, and the uncanny. While it's rather obvious that a character named "the Other Mother" represents a gendered and perhaps racially othered body in *Coraline*'s narrative, the film's formal elements reveal her otherness as well. In fact, her first appearance in the film's opening sequence includes her voice humming the notes of the soundtrack, a motif that continues throughout the course of the narrative (*Coraline* 0:30). As the opening sequence progresses, we see a continuous shot that aligns us, the audience, with the Other Mother's eye. That is, the only part of her we actually "see" is a set of metal hands that begin to deconstruct a doll, which we later learn is identical to a young Black girl that she stole before attempting to do the same to Coraline (*Coraline* 0:46). While the Other Mother's body is as changeable as the doll she crafts to be identical to the children she preys upon, her voice remains the most easily familiar element of her character because of its inclusion in the opening. Not only

does this sequence align her character with non-diegetic sound, and thus disrupts how we understand the film's reality, it also prepares the audience to experience the uncanny later in the story as we recognize the (un)familiarity of the soundtrack and of the Other Mother herself.



Figure 10: The Other Mother's Inanimate Coraline Doll

Equally, with the audience's knowledge that this is a stop-motion film and that animators manipulated puppets frame-by-frame to create the movie, the scene is uncanny because it reveals the inherent inanimateness of the puppets themselves. That is, in crafting her own puppet that she intends to use to trap Coraline, the Other Mother plays the role of an uncanny animator. She brings the Coraline-doll to life by inviting the "real" Coraline into her trap just like the animators who created the film bring the real Coraline puppet to life through stop-motion. Thus, like the shared knowledge between an illusionist and their audiences that determined the uncanniness of magic lantern shows and eventually films themselves, *Coraline's* opening falls into the in-between space of the uncanny. It is unfamiliar, because we have no context for it in the

narrative, and yet hauntingly familiar. While the audience may not consciously recognize the (un)familiarity of the opening sequence, we can *feel* sensationally that the film is aware of the uncanny because of the coinciding familiarity of stop-motion methods and unfamiliarity that's created with its explicit self-awareness in the sequence. From now on, we can never be sure what is familiar and what is unfamiliar about the film's stop-motion puppets or their dolls, an uncertainty which sets the uncanny tone for the entire film and places it within the metaphor of Nead's uncanny haunted gallery.

Because of the humming soundtrack and awareness of the intersection between animateness and inanimateness in the opening, the Other Mother's perspective and voice haunt the remainder of the film. When we meet Coraline's real mother, we are already familiar with her voice. Additionally, because the opening aligns the camera with the Other Mother's perspective, we get the impression that the shot through the window feels like the Other Mother is watching Coraline (*Coraline* 8:15). Thus, when Coraline explores the house later we feel uncannily as though the Other Mother is watching Coraline through the doll, which further solidifies the discourse of animation as a way of understanding the uncanny. Through the stop-motion medium, the aesthetics of the uncanny are exaggerated to the point of ridicule, like that of the Other Mother's transformation into insectoid physical characteristics instead of humanoid ones that are mirrored in her interior decorations. Her voice is uncanny because, like the exchanging soul between Dorian Gray and his portrait, she is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to both Coraline and to the audience.

The stylized aesthetics of stop-motion films both expose the horrific, unsettling side of the uncanny and the more playful side of it as a disruption of binaries. Although the Other Mother and the mimicked world she has created for Coraline are established as a separate, uncanny, queer space in the film, they begin to fall apart towards the end of the narrative in classic Gothic fashion. Like the queer bungling of opposites that both the camp and uncanny sensibilities represent, the Other Mother is, of course, a campy monster playing the role of a mother. Thus, the uncanny marks her narrative queerness and her ultimate appeal to Coraline's feelings of misalignment in the real world: allowing her to "prey" on Coraline's own narrative queerness. When the Other



Figure 11: The Other Mother's Transformed Insect Room

Mother's world begins to crumble, it changes from mimicking Coraline's apartment complex closely to something much more visually related to the Other Mother: an exaggerated, campy insect motif. The furniture in the living room becomes animated and changes to look like various beetles and caterpillars; the portrait of the Boring Blue Boy is encased in a new frame shaped like a spider, literally "in the belly of the beast;"

and the Other Mother herself grows into a stretched, horrifically spidery, almost-but-not-quite-human creature. However, notably, her voice remains unchanged. While the dream world becomes progressively more unfamiliar to Coraline, her real mother's voice still haunts the film—emphasizing the uncanny sensibility through auditory elements alongside the visual ones. Thus, the film utilizes this campy insect aesthetic to accentuate the aesthetics of the uncanny. It both exaggerates and muddles up the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar in order to explore transgressive “queer” desires in the narrative, further proving the uncanny as a queer sensibility.



Figures 12 and 13: Norman and His Grandmother in the Darkened Living Room

ParaNorman (2012) is also deeply concerned with the queer uncanny, taking advantage of the stop-motion medium in order to play out a queer narrative about a kid who is ostracized by his family and his community because he can see ghosts. Like *Coraline*, *ParaNorman* also establishes an uncanny reality in its opening, setting up a particularly queer narrative and ultimately taking advantage of the uncanny as a sensibility to tell its story. The film opens with a cheesy, aged zombie movie so that we, the audience, can't tell if this is the real story or if we are simply watching a movie along with the characters *in* the real story. The fourth wall breaks in the zombie movie, like when the zombie victim looks directly at the camera and pushes away a boom mic,

further emphasizes the uncertainty of this filmic reality, just like the beginning of *Coraline*. After nearly two minutes of this alternate zombie-movie reality within the real filmic reality, there is a fade to black and some classic zombie chomping noises, followed by the voice of Norman's grandmother asking, "what's happening now?" (*ParaNorman* 1:50). This transition emphasizes auditory elements over visual ones to encourage us to form an understanding of the filmic reality that the movie has established thus far. Although Norman's grandmother is dead and Norman is the only one who can hear her ghost speak in response to the zombie movie, we first recognize her as a real living thing because she *sounds* real, since we are aligned with Norman's gaze and his perspective. Further, the darkness of the living room mimics the darkness of movie theaters, phantasmagoric shows, and haunted portrait galleries, which hides the grandmother's ghostly figure. For example, Norman's dad opens the door to the darkened living room, shows Norman's silhouette so we still can't tell that his grandma has a different, more spectral animated body. Then, as Norman leaves the room (the metaphorical haunted gallery) and leaves his grandmother there in the uncanny space between life and death, animate and inanimate, etc., it is finally revealed to the audience that his grandmother is a ghost (*ParaNorman* 3:26).

As the audience struggles to come to terms with the uncertain filmic reality that the opening establishes, the film continues to disrupt boundaries between our understanding of animation, of the uncanny, and of allegorical queerness. Norman, whose father rejects his ability to speak with the dead, escapes his parents' argument and storms up to his room, where he plays with figurines to mimic the disembodied voices of his parents in the next room (*ParaNorman* 4:32). He effectively animates two

lifeless dolls, imbuing them with voice and action, which continues the uncanny sensibility even outside of the darkened living room where we were introduced to the concept in the film. Because Norman is playing with dolls, a feminine activity often attributed as one that can “turn” little boys gay, his father’s fears about Norman’s ability to speak with the dead take on a new life: “I’m nothing if I’m not liberal, but that limp-wristed hippie garbage needs to be nipped in the bud” (*ParaNorman* 4:13). Norman’s ability is parallel to the queer experience, where parents criticize gender non-conformity out of fear for their children’s safety. Thus, the film compares Norman’s uncanny ability to communicate with ghosts beyond the grave to queerness—disrupting the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate through a careful consideration of auditory elements or, in this case, explicit awareness of the uncanny separation between voice and animated body. Essentially, the film exposes the latent uncanniness of stop-motion through Norman’s dolls and his parents’ voices, establishing his role in the film as narratively queer and, at the same time, further solidifying the uncanny as a particularly queer sensibility.

While both *Coraline* and *Paranorman* present alternative forms of looking in order to represent the uncanny through the discourse of animation, *The Corpse Bride* (2005) remains quite strongly in the realm of the visual to parody Gothic explorations of transgressive sexuality. Nevertheless, there are some auditory cherries on top that push the film’s uncanny flavor even further into the metaphor of the haunted gallery. Like I mentioned in a previous section, *Coraline* draws upon the connotations of the blue chamber, as in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, in order to visually represent forbidden desires that are hidden away from view. *The Corpse Bride* takes this visual motif to the

extreme: stylizing its reanimated corpses with bright blue skin to contrast the drab, dreary hues of the living world. The film opens with a Burton-style portrait of the protagonist Victor as a young boy with his dog, Scraps, before the camera shifts downwards to focus on the real Victor, who is sketching a bright blue butterfly that he has trapped within a glass casing. While the opening portrait of Victor and his dog clearly parodies the Gothic moving portrait, the butterfly's journey represents something beyond this motif. Of course, the stark contrast between the bright blue of the butterfly's wings and the shades of gray and brown throughout the rest of the shot foreshadow the parallel contrast between the dead and living characters that we see later on in the film. Moreover, because of Victor's blue tie and blue quill, we get a similar impression to the moment of recognition between Coraline and her portrait. Thus, in this moment of privacy in his own bedroom, the film shows us Victor's own personal identity through these blue pops of color. When he sets the butterfly free, it's as if he represses the colorful, "queer" side of his personality in order to prepare for his wedding to a girl he has never met: the ultimate expression of traditional gender roles and heterosexuality. Thus, the established filmic reality of *The Corpse Bride* represents transgressive desires, perhaps especially queerness, through the uncanny, blue hues of death.

After Victor finishes the drawing, he frees the butterfly through his open window—where the camera follows its flitting journey through the town below with a tracking shot, accompanied by the sound of a ticking clock. The butterfly circles around a shop selling grandfather clocks, where the shopkeeper sweeps the street in perfect

sync with the clock's pendulums in the store window. Finally, the butterfly lands briefly on the letters of the opening credits before continuing to circle the townspeople.



Figure 14: The Blue Butterfly

Like Gunning's discussion of the thaumatrope, a device whose uncanny animation represents disrupted chronology and the revival of past supernatural beliefs, the butterfly forces the audience to compare the animated movements of the human shopkeeper to the movements of the grandfather clocks in the window. This moment is incredibly uncanny: as the auditory hint towards the ticking clocks begins to disrupt how we understand the film's established reality, we experience a moment of unsettled panic in response to the strange visual repetition on screen. The sound of the ticking clocks is familiar, but the way the shopkeeper moves so perfectly in time with them is not. Thus, when the butterfly further disrupts the audience's understanding of the film's sense of reality by somehow landing on the words of the opening credits, the shot becomes an uncanny, animated portrait itself. Through a combination of visual and

auditory elements like the color blue and the flickering rhythm of ticking clocks, *The Corpse Bride* plays with our expectations of reality in order to communicate Victor's particularly queer identity and its place outside of the established living reality.

Considering the film's opening, Victor's accidental marriage to the very-blue, very-dead Emily in place of his beloved Victoria reads as queer as it reads transgressive. First, since a marriage between Victor and Victoria represents an exaggerated, campy expression of heterosexuality and traditional gender roles, any relationship outside of this marriage is deemed transgressive and, perhaps, queer-coded within the established reality of the film. Despite his name representing the ideal Victorian man, in terms of our modern sensibilities Victor is by no means masculine. He is an artist and a musician, he is soft-spoken and stumbles over his words, and he can't remember his marriage vows to the point where, at the wedding rehearsal, the priest is suspicious that he "does not want to be married at all" (*The Corpse Bride* 13:05). The gasps from the wedding guests that follow this accusation mark the phrase as borderline euphemistic: if Victor cannot perform the ideals of masculinity, then he must be transgressive—that is, he must be queer. In an attempt to rebuild his reputation, Victor goes to the forest to practice his vows and, in the privacy of the trees, performs them so perfectly that he places the ring on a stick-like hand and accidentally marries the corpse bride. It's an especially Gothic narrative to the point of parody: transposing transgressive desires and sexuality, the breaking down of tradition, and, of course, uncanny animation.

In fact, *The Castle of Otranto* uses the moving portrait motif to expose a similar detachment from normative gender expectations to *The Corpse Bride*. When we first

meet Theodore, who marries Isabella in the conclusion and thus fulfills the conventional return to social norms, he is described in deliberately gender-ambiguous, and even feminine, terms. As Isabella flees Manfred's advances within the castle's labyrinthine passages, she anxiously sees him approaching her in the dark: "she shrieked, believing it the ghost of her betrothed Conrad. The figure advancing, said in a submissive voice, Be not alarmed, lady; I will not injure you. Isabella, a little encouraged by the words and tone of the stranger [...] recovered enough to reply" (Walpole 28). In this influential moment, Isabella calls Theodore both a "figure" and a "stranger," describing him with deliberately ambiguous terms despite thinking that the darkness conceals the disembodied ghost of her former fiancé. Thus, Theodore is represented in a distinctly un-masculine way. Comparable to "Hippolita's unbounded submission" later on in the novel, he is "submissive" to Isabella's anxieties and therefore mirrors normative femininity, which recreates the trauma of gender expectations (Walpole 58). Isabella addresses her trauma through this subversion of active and passive gender roles, which is aroused by the expectation placed upon women to submissively marry whoever actively chooses them. Interestingly however, in recognizing normative gender expectations alongside the fear of the supernatural, Isabella feminizes her future husband. For the moment of his introduction, he is also a Gothic heroine—foreshadowing his ultimate restoration to normative values as he is married in the novel's conclusion. Similarly, in both manner and role in the narrative, Victor is the heroine of the Gothic parody, *The Corpse Bride*.

Like the performatively masculine name "Victor" in *The Corpse Bride*, *The Castle of Otranto* interrogates the performativity of gender roles later in the plot

through the repeated appearance of giant, spectral pieces of armor that invoke an image of traditional male chivalry and power. Notably, these aesthetic ideals are associated with Theodore despite his feminized characterization. After his father pleads with Manfred that it is “nature” and “memory of the dear woman that bore him,” Theodore answers that he would rather die “a hundred deaths” than let Manfred enact his desires upon his daughter. Following this exchange, one such spectral piece of armor begins to terrify its audience: “the sable plumes on the enchanted helmet, which still remained at the other end of the court, were tempestuously agitated, and nodded thrice, as if bowed by some invisible wearer” (Walpole 54). Again, Theodore is feminized, as his father associates his nature with his mother’s memory. His characterization is juxtaposed with the aesthetic ideals of masculinity, which are disembodied from his feminine nature. The animated helmet, then, represents Theodore’s performative masculinity as he attempts to please the traditional values of his father and of Manfred’s tyrannical rule of the castle. Thus, although Theodore ultimately returns to these social norms at the end of the novel, his separation from ideal masculinity is deliberately expressed alongside an uncannily animated body.

This image of disembodied masculinity returns later in the novel as well, when Matilda and Isabella discuss why Manfred had mistaken Theodore for a ghost. Matilda describes his “extreme resemblance to the portrait of Alfonso in the gallery,” not that “with the helmet on, he is the very image of that picture” (Walpole 81). She notes that Theodore resembles the gallery portrait of Alfonso, the very embodiment of heroic masculinity in the text, when he wears a helmet—which further relates this image to disembodied masculinity. Interestingly, Matilda and Isabella literally objectify

Theodore during this exchange, reducing him to a mere portraiture for them to gaze upon. Again, the passage subverts gender roles, placing Theodore in a feminine-coded, passive role as the young women take on a more masculine-coded, active role. Thus, the separation between Theodore's feminized characterization and the disembodied masculinity of the helmet, brought on by the appearance of supernatural elements, exposes the repressed, "transgressive" gender expressions of the text's protagonists. Likewise, a similar exchange happens between Victoria, Emily, and Victor in *The Corpse Bride*. In the blue-toned cover of night, Victor secretly visits Victoria to let her know that he has accidentally married the Corpse Bride, Emily. However, when Emily follows him through the window to Victoria's bedroom, the two women experience equal, yet opposite, uncanny feelings towards the other. Victoria, of course, realizes that a reanimated corpse has just crawled through the window of her room, but what makes this moment even more uncanny is that Victor is transgressing the traditional roles that they are both a part of. Therefore, considering the parts of her identity she has had to hide to fit into a traditionally feminine role, like her love for music, she recognizes herself in the transgressive blue of Emily's figure. Thus, through the discourse of uncanny animation, the scene represents exactly what the uncanny portrait of Alfonso does for Matilda's recognition of Theodore's gender nonconformity. Emily represents the forbidden desires that are hidden beneath the traditional roles of masculinity for Victor and the traditional roles of femininity for Victoria. Emily, on the other hand, takes on a more active, masculine role in the scene. She steals Victor back from



Figure 15: Victor Cups Victoria's Face, while Emily Watches from the Window

Victoria's side; proudly identifies herself as his wife; and, when she realizes the transgressive relationship between the three of them, she shouts the magic word to transport herself and Victor back to the land of the dead. Lightning flashes behind her, creating a flickering style of animation that signals the bungled boundaries between the dead and the living—and the camera follows her gaze as the two of them are sent backwards in a reverse-phantasmagoric shot obscured by a flock of crows and their relentless cawing. Ultimately, the scene paints a picture of uncanny, animated queerness—reviving the Gothic moving portrait through the stop-motion medium in a silly, campy exploration of the gender binary and the living/dead binary.



Figure 16: Victor's Family Watches a Homemade Stop-Motion

Frankenweenie (2012) establishes its own filmic reality in a similar way to *ParaNorman*, with particular attention to the revival of the uncanniness of early film. It opens with the flickering sound of a film projector before a fade-in to a title card that reads, "Monsters from Beyond." Then, we hear voices offscreen argue about the focus of the projector screen, until the camera zooms out to reveal Victor and his parents in their living room watching a homemade stop-motion film. Toy cars move across a cardboard road at a staggering speed of about 2 frames per second; Victor's mother's candlestick acts as a statue in the model town square in front of the capitol building, which is made from his grandmother's tablecloth; and miniature army soldiers fight off a toy pterodactyl breathing paper flames while "Sparkysaurus," Victor's dog Sparky dressed in a costume, finishes off the plastic beast. Then, during the ending card, the film reel breaks and disrupts the picture and the family excitedly returns to their day, turning on the lights and stopping the projector's whirring. Of course, like the style of early cinema, Victor's homemade stop-motion is only partially convincing as an

animated short film. It is uncanny because it's a stop-motion, but it's even more uncanny because it's a less realistic stop-motion within the real stop-motion animation of *Frankenweenie*. Thus, the film establishes an uncertain reality in its opening: exposing the latent inanimateness of the detailed stop-motion puppets because of the direct comparison to the toy figurines in Victor's home movie. The discourse of animation is the core of this film, foreshadowing the crossed boundaries between life and death later on in the narrative, when Victor literally re-animates Sparky's puppet.

While *Frankenweenie* is a parody of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), it interacts with the uncanny in a distinctly different way to the original Gothic novel. In fact, the novel utilizes the discourse of uncanny animation through the complex emotions that the creature evokes in *Frankenstein*: a combination of fear, hatred, disgust, and desire. Like the stolen pieces of Victor's family's interior decor in his homemade stop-motion, *Frankenstein*'s creature is made up of "beautiful" body parts, but together their effect is unconvincing and, of course, uncanny. Thus, when *Frankenstein* interacts with the creature his feelings of uncanniness are alike the uncanny effect of stop-motion and the uncomfortable disruption of repressed queer desires sometimes evoked by Gothic moving portraits. On the night *Frankenstein* finally animates the creature, he describes the experience:

I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. (Shelley 36)

Frankenstein himself convulses with fear, listing a series of physical sensations that call into question his own level of animation in response to the uncertain animation of his creation. Like the auditory effects of stop-motion films—such as the Other Mother’s humming in *Coraline*, the ticking clocks in *The Corpse Bride*, and the revival of familiar noises from early cinema in both *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie*—the syntax of the sentence similarly makes frequent stops to create a flickering rhythm to match the (in)animate imagery of the scene. Essentially, the sentence convulses grammatically, which allows us as the audience to “hear” Frankenstein’s fear as he, finally, describes what woke him up. Thus, considering the alternative modes of looking proposed by Halberstam and Hobson in their film theory articles and the idea that novels allow their readers to engage with the practice of animation, the discourse of animation applies not just to visual elements in Gothic novels but also to more implicit factors such as the uncanny rhythm of sentences in these novels. That is, the uncanny is an aesthetic experience beyond just the realm of the visual: a much more embodied sensibility.

Moving down the passage, Frankenstein further interrogates the auditory elements of this uncanny experience. He says, “[The creature’s] jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs” (Shelley 36). In response to the creature’s attempts to make contact, Frankenstein describes these sounds as distinctly inhuman. The creature’s movements are indeed phantasmagoric, as he reaches for Frankenstein and attempts to speak. Thus, the passage again uses the discourse of animation to invoke the uncanny sensibility: it’s as if the creature is a portrait painted by Frankenstein that now promises

to speak, anticipating a more distinctly human animation while Frankenstein's own animation deteriorates in the stress of the moment. When Frankenstein says, "he might have spoken, but I did not hear," it is an expression of his refusal to acknowledge the familiarity of his creation. Although he made the creature to be beautiful, Frankenstein condemns him to the unfamiliar, the uncanny, by denying his verbal communication from appearing in the text. Thus, the clear implications of otherness, and perhaps queerness, parallel the uncanny in the text, emphasized by the discourse of animation.

New Metaphors of Uncanny Animation: The Haunted Forest

"The picture gallery is also a place of alternating light and darkness; it is a narrow apartment illuminated by shafts of light created by a series of apertured and of shadows cast by unseen objects, obliterating the light[...] How apt that the shadows on the ceiling by the windows and tapestried walls look like a strip of film, with intermittent, spaced-out picture frames, separated by short intervals of blank darkness"

—The Haunted Gallery (Nead 48)

In the expression of stop-motion animation, the shuddering, flickering image of the haunted gallery promises transformation in a similar fashion to the epistemological exercise of the thaumatrope and other examples of uncanny animation. Particularly, it seems, stop-motions begin to adapt the uncanny sensibility to explore and disrupt the boundaries between the normative expectations of civilization and the "primitive" areas of the wilderness alongside the binaries I've described above. Across *Coraline*,

ParaNorman, and *The Corpse Bride*, the protagonists confront the uncanny—that is, the intersection of the familiar and the unfamiliar, and of life and death—in animated forests. Notably, these films take advantage of the camera to invoke the discourse of uncanny animation. The trees in these forests create a similar effect to the fragmented light in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* as the camera circles their subjects: exposing and disrupting the boundaries between motion and stillness that are inherent to the medium. While forests of course exist in Gothic novels as well, stop-motion films use this setting to further disrupt the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. Thus, the metaphor of the haunted gallery in Gothic novels transforms into a new uncanny metaphor: the haunted forest, where trees mimic the light of a haunted gallery to disrupt the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate.



Figure 17: Coraline Walks Through a “Haunted Forest”

In *Coraline*, the Other Mother fabricates a dream world that mimics the “real” Pink Palace Apartments and surrounding area. When Coraline tries to escape the Other Mother’s world by walking into the forest away from the more familiar setting of

the Pink Palace Apartments, the boundaries between what is real and not real are disrupted visually onscreen. As Coraline continues walking and conversing with the Cat, the camera focuses directly on either Coraline or the cat, switching between the two so that we, the audience, do not realize how quickly the trees of the forest are changing. When the perspective finally shifts to a wide shot, the trees are barely recognizable. Their trunks are far too straight and narrow, their branches stick out at uncomfortably perfect right angles, and their leaves are mere rectangles of color. This transition is jarring, and yet we know they are trees until they fade to white, and the cat explains that the Other Mother has crafted this world just for her. When the back of the house appears, as Coraline has effectively walked around the entire world the Other Mother has created for her, the world builds up around her yet again. Ultimately, *Coraline* establishes a filmic reality that it intentionally disrupts in order to invoke the uncanny. The forest forces fragmented light to create the illusion of movement in early animation devices, fragmenting the character animation so that we feel the uncanny alongside Coraline's journey through the familiar and the unfamiliar.

The uncanny animated forest continues in *ParaNorman*: a close tracking shot follows Norman as he makes his way through the trees to Aggie's grave, a perspective that is disrupted by the trees placed in between Norman's puppet and the camera. Just like in *Coraline*, the trees fragment Norman's animation to the point where we can no longer be sure who or what is animate or inanimate. When Norman confronts Aggie, whose puppet shudders and flickers like an uncanny portrait, he also confronts the uncanny boundaries between the animate and inanimate, between life and death, between the past and the present, and between masculinity and femininity. Thus,

through the comparison between Aggie’s fragmented animation and Norman’s disrupted animation in the new metaphor of the haunted forest, the two experience a moment of recognition across these binaries. The film uses the discourse of animation and the uncanny sensibility in this haunted forest, ultimately disrupting binaries to invoke Norman’s transgressive gendered desires.



Figure 18: Norman in the “Haunted Forest”

In *The Corpse Bride*, Victor confronts his failed masculinity in the haunted forest, accidentally completing a transgressive marriage to Emily in the process. Like in the other stop-motions, the trees disrupt the animation in order to invoke the uncanny. As Victor struggles to remember his vows, he says, “with this hand, I will cup your...” and cups his hands over his own chest. This final expression of his femininity then allows him to gain the confidence to say his vows correctly, where he pretends that the trees around him are Victoria’s parents, until he finally places the ring on a stick that looks uncannily like a hand. When he does so, the stick, which is actually Emily’s hand, twitches. To signal the overlapping boundaries between life and death, and the familiar and the unfamiliar, the camera pans across the trees. This invokes the aesthetics of

uncanny animation, ultimately foreshadowing the next moment of suspense: Emily grabbing Victor's hand before busting out of the ground in true phantasmagoric fashion, while the moonlight shining through the trees creates further disruptions in the animation. Thus, in the space of the haunted forest, the boundaries between life and death, masculinity and femininity, and familiarity and unfamiliarity are intentionally disrupted. Like the haunted gallery, the forest becomes an image of uncanny queerness: the bungling of opposites.



Figure 19: Victor in the “Haunted Forest”

In *Frankweenie*, however, the image of the uncanny forest is translated to a much more safe, suburban example. While Victor is away at school, Sparky plays with the neighbor dog through the fence, presenting a similar camera shot to the trees in the uncanny forest that disrupts the animation of this other dog (8:10). While this example is arguably less uncanny than the others, it provides an interesting segue to another uncanny motif in the language of stop-motion: the use of anthropomorphic animals to

express the boundaries between familiar human appearance and more unfamiliar, transgressive, and perhaps queer appearances in film. Halberstam concludes in *The Queer Art of Failure*, another stop-motion, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, “might bring out the queer and radical potential of a genre populated by wild animals and committed to a form of antihumanism [...and] uses wild animals to expose the brutality and narrow-mindedness of the human” through the discourse of uncanny animation (Halberstam 182). To fully understand the discourse of animation, and its connection to the uncanny and to queerness and otherness, stop-motion films ask us to return to the forest *as* animals—perhaps to revive the very “primitive” instincts that Freud himself discussed in his 1919 text.

Concluding Thoughts: Whiteness, Wildness, and Further Ways to Expand the Discourse of Animation



Figure 20: Mr. Fox Salutes the Wolf

However easily the aesthetics of the haunted forest disrupt the boundaries between the normative and the queer, these stop-motions also unintentionally revive past distinctions between the “civilized” and the “primitive:” reproducing Freud’s reduction of the uncanny to the revival of the similarly “primitive” belief in animism. When stop-motions explore the boundaries between the human and the non-human by using anthropomorphic animal characters, such as *Frankenweenie*’s adaption of Victor Frankenstein’s creature to a revived pet dog or *Coraline*’s talking cat, they create moving “portraits” whose uncanniness depends on these colonialist distinctions between the “civilized” and the “primitive.” Essentially, stop-motions are themselves uncanny portraits of Western values, reviving racist epistemologies of the past that continue in the present day. While it’s beyond the scope of my project to discuss in detail how race and other considerations might extend the discourse of animation, I see

a lot of potential for further discussions about the aesthetics of the uncanny in this context.⁴

For example, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* reaches its conclusions about queerness at the expense of a separate conversation about Blackness and its connection to uncanny disruptions of normativity and domesticity. While *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is not a Gothic film nor an uncanny film, it nevertheless draws upon the aesthetics of the uncanny to craft a narrative about humanity vs. wildness and, as Halberstam argues, a queer disruption of these boundaries. That is, through the discourse of animation, the uncanny sensibility has the potential to inhabit more than just traditionally Gothic, uncanny media in order to invoke binary disruptions. To do so, the film plays with our expectations of stop-motion puppetry: Mr. and Mrs. Fox are replaced with less animate, wax versions of themselves at a couple of points; Kylie the Opossum has fits where he remains inanimate and goes spiral-eyed; and all the anthropomorphic animals devolve into snarling, ravenous beasts when they eat. Specifically in this last example, what makes this choice so uncanny is that the audience's understanding of the filmic reality is intentionally disrupted. Throughout the narrative, we accept that the animal characters stand on two legs, wear human clothes, and do human things (like having a midlife crisis and arguing with a lawyer about getting a loan on a new house). However, when Mr. Fox or any of the others eat their meals, our expectations of what is human, what is familiar about this world, are disrupted. As Halberstam says, "the jerkiness of the stop-and-go animation replaces the smoothness of the mannered movements associated with

⁴ See also Kristen L. Dowell's analysis of the stop-motions created by Amanda Spotted Fawn Strong, which theorize indigenous futurisms through an uncanny suturing of the past, present, and imagined futures.

civility and humanness and aligns stop-motion with a relay between wild and domestic, destruction and consumption” (Halberstam 182). For a moment, the boundaries between the familiar aesthetics of humanness and the more unfamiliar aesthetics of wildness are stripped away, invoking the uncanny through the discourse of animation.



Figure 21: Ash Dressed like the White Cape

Like the other examples I’ve discussed, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* also has its fair share of animated “portraits” that revive the uncanny “bungling” of opposites in Gothic literature, magic lantern shows, and more intentionally uncanny stop-motions. The film opens with a quick shot of a library book cover of the original novel by Roald Dahl, showing Mr. Fox leaning upon a tree on a hill, before transitioning to the “real,” animated set that mirrors the image on the book cover exactly. Thus, like the openings of other stop-motions, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* makes the audience intentionally aware of the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, the human and the animal, and the wild and the civilized. This motif is continued through the narrative, including a shot of the terrifying Farmer Bean sitting in front of a gallery wall where the portraits are

replaced by sets of antlers from deer he has killed and another shot where Mr. Fox and Kylie perform their second heist on the security screens right behind Farmer Bunce. However, in the most radical example, Mr. Fox's queer son Ash revives the aesthetics of his favorite comic book hero, The White Cape (*Fantastic Mr. Fox* 13:57). The uncanny moment of recognition that I've described before with moving portraits of the past, and in stop-motions like *Coraline*, is portrayed to the extreme here. When Ash prepares for the school day, Mr. Fox asks him, "What are you wearing? Why the cape, with the pants tucked into your socks?" (*Fantastic Mr. Fox* 5:35)—and at several other points throughout the movie, other animal characters continually question why Ash is so "different." Interestingly, while the boundaries between what is human and what is animal are intentionally disrupted in the animation, the boundaries between the normative and the "queer" remain, perhaps because they are so familiar to us.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam brings up the much-debated, uncanny wolf scene towards the end of the film, in which Mr. Fox finally confronts his phobia of wolves as he, Kylie, Kristofferson, and Ash attempt to communicate with a lone, black wolf in the distance. When English, French, and Latin seem to fail, Mr. Fox returns to a more universal gesture: a fist in the air that, oddly, resembles the Black Power salute.

On this, Halberstam writes:

While the racial overtones are definitely there, and there could be an implication that otherness and wildness are the properties of Blackness, the scene can also be taken as a nod to the liveliness of the wild, the wildness of animation itself and the animatedness of life in general [...] The [Freudian] uncanny here is represented by the wolf and as he confronts the wolf, repressed feelings flood Mr. Fox and he turns to face his dread, his anxiety, his other and in doing so, he reconciles to the wild in a way that instructs the humans watching the film to reconcile to wildness, to animatedness, to life and to death. (Halberstam 183)

Notably, while the wolf indeed represents Freud's narrative of repression and the uncanny's revival of past "primitive" feelings, the racial implications of the scene far outweigh the wildness of animation that is at play here. In fact, because the wolf puppet is not anthropomorphic like the other animals, and because he does not speak in a language that Mr. Fox and the others can understand, he is arguably less "animate" in the context of the film. While the wolf represents Mr. Fox's uncanny acceptance of both the "wild" and "civilized" parts of himself, the film expresses uncanny aesthetics by explicitly drawing a connection between Otherness and Blackness—ultimately limiting this exploration of queer binary disruptions.

While critics like Halberstam draw on the discourse of uncanny animation to describe queer modes of looking in film, Janell Hobson also acknowledges the importance of auditory experiences for representations of Black women in film. In "Viewing in the Dark: Toward a Black Feminist Approach to Film," she critiques Laura Mulvey's influential book *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* for its emphasis on Freudian psychoanalysis and its lack of attention to critical race theory. She identifies invisible representations of Black women in film, and briefly mentions that "in animation, or caricature, [Black] women's corporeality is still displaced from the screen, and they exist primarily as cartoon voice-overs" (Hobson 51). If stop-motion seems to be an appropriate medium to explore the uncanny as a sensibility, then we must consider how these films both explore unfamiliar filmic realities and reproduce the familiar, exclusionary aesthetics of the white male gaze. With animation, it seems, it's easier to create a safe, new filmic reality with the appropriate distance from the white male mainstream. Thus, stop-motion animation is rich with the uncanny

sensibility because, extending from its uncanny methods of production, it explores the space between familiar and unfamiliar filmic realities. That is, animation allows us to explore new “living, breathing worlds” that differ from what we are used to in the mainstream. Ultimately, Hobson concludes that it is “imperative to analyze beyond the visual and consider all the elements within the cinematic frame” (Hobson 55).

Although I’ve already discussed how auditory elements of a film invoke the queer uncanny, Hobson’s text further encourages us to move beyond the realm of the visual and search for implicit, uncanny representations of Blackness in film.⁵ Thus, the uncanny as a sensibility must also interrogate how the abstract interaction between the visual and the non-visual—particularly formal elements like voice and soundtrack—both allow Black spectators feelings of uncanny recognition *and* revive racist epistemologies.

These two interlocking ideas are particularly relevant to *Coraline*, which, I might add, is the only stop-motion on my list to include explicitly Black characters (as opposed to Black-coded characters or simply no Black characters at all) and Black voice actors. While I think there are some intersecting implications of race and otherness that the Other Mother herself invokes, the most explicit example is the relationship between Coraline, Wybie, the Other Wybie, who is created and manipulated by the Other Mother for Coraline’s benefit, and the black Cat, voiced by Black actor Keith David, who can slip between the two realities with ease. Notably, both the Other Wybie and the Cat have distinct connections to their own voices in the

⁵ And, by extension, uncanny portraits. See also: Maisha Wester’s discussion of the relationship between racial identity and uncanny portraits in Helen Oyeyemi’s recent Gothic novel, *White is for Witching*, in “The Gothic in and as Race Theory.”

film: an apt representation of Hobson's discussion and its connection to the uncanny. First, while admittedly Coraline does use the Cat as a tool to help her escape the Other Mother, he nevertheless remains detached from both of them and retains his own agency. An unintended side effect of the Other Mother's world is that it allows the Cat to speak using Keith David's voice, which simultaneously creates a sense of unfamiliarity for Coraline and a sense of familiarity and uncanny recognition for Black spectators.



Figure 22: The Other Wybie's Clothes Hang from a Flagpole

The Other Wybie, on the other hand, is an example of the uncanny revival of racist epistemologies. When the Other Mother sees Coraline's frustration with her neighbor Wybie, she creates the Other Wybie, an identical puppet to the real Wybie with two distinctions: he has buttons for eyes, and he can't speak. She explains to Coraline, "I thought you'd like him more if he spoke a little less, so I fixed him"—that is, she literally silenced him for the benefit of Coraline's white queerness. While the button eyes certainly make the Other Wybie look more uncanny, his lack of a voice

further disrupts the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, making him look more like a doll than a living character. Thus, while the Other Mother's dream world allows Coraline to explore her subconscious desires, it also reduces Wybie to a voiceless, subhuman puppet much like the wolf in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Throughout the remainder of the film, the Other Mother uses the Other Wybie to increase Coraline's uncanny feelings: he wears a fabric chicken mask to hide his face; his cheeks are sewn into a permanent smile; and, ultimately, his empty clothes sway in the breeze from a flagpole, signaling a loss of agency and final descent into the stillness of death. Thus, Coraline's exploration of her own uncanny queerness comes at the expense of Wybie's identity. Instead, Wybie's uncanniness is a violent spectacle that encourages Coraline to return to normativity—creating a complex interaction between motion and stillness, familiarity and unfamiliarity, white conceptions of queerness and racial identity, and simultaneous modes of thought.⁶

Nevertheless, it's clear that mainstream stop-motions have created their own aesthetic language to communicate the uncanny: the disrupted boundaries between the wild and the civilized, between the domestic and the "primitive," and most importantly, between the human and the animal. Thus, to conclude my discussion, I'd like to analyze a much more recent stop-motion: Netflix's *The House* (2022). While this Gothic film has three separate acts that take place across three different, surreal time periods, the second act in particular illustrates an incredibly uncanny narrative about an anthropomorphic mouse's de-evolution into transgressive insectoid behaviors, not

⁶ See also bell hooks' discussion of how Black women must reflect on multiple modes of thought while developing a critical gaze in "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators."

unlike those of the Other Mother in *Coraline*, after he fails to flip and sell a house for profit. The mouse himself, simply called the Developer, is already an uncanny disruption of the film's reality, since the first act follows human characters in a much more Gothic narrative. Thus, like in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, the boundaries between the human and the animal as well as the boundaries between the civilized and the wild are intentionally disrupted at the start of the second act in order to establish the necessary aesthetics to invoke the Developer's unsettling, uncanny de-evolution into transgressive behavior during the conclusion.



Figure 23: The Developer Unknowingly Creates an Uncanny Portrait

Notably, in another subtle revival of the moving portrait motif, the Developer looks in the mirror before welcoming his guests to the open house viewing and finds something wrong with his face. However, because he is a mouse, the human audience cannot visually understand what he thinks is wrong. Instead, the angle of the mirror's reflected image causes the Developer's beady mouse-eyes to break the fourth wall, staring

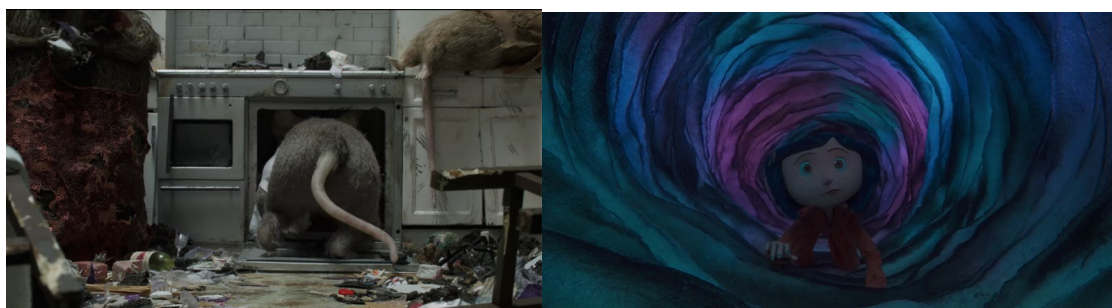
directly at us. Through this careful construction of animated figures on screen, we feel the effects of the uncanny to replace the Developer's internal anxieties.



Figure 24: The Developer Confronts the Uncanny Bug-Mice

Once the audience has settled into this new mouse-reality, however, the film wastes no time in disrupting our understanding of the world. During the open house, the Developer's phone breaks and causes the installed lighting and sound systems to fail—creating a particularly uncanny scene of flashing lights and skipping rhythmic beats. Here, the Developer meets a pair of uncanny beetle-mice who speak in similarly uncanny voices. As the narrative continues, the pair repeat that they are “extremely interested in the house,” while the Developer hesitantly allows them to stay. The uncanny, rhythmic stopping and starting of the broken sound system is paralleled at the conclusion of the second act. When it is revealed that the Developer has been calling his male dentist on the phone for the entirety of the narrative, and not a girlfriend or fiancé like the relentless chorus of “sweetheart's” and “darling's” would suggest, he realizes

that the police officers who stopped by to warn him of a possible restraining order will not help with the bug-mice infestation in his newly renovated house. He takes matters into his own hands, like he did with the remodel, by getting out the bug spray. However, like with the remodel, he fails—and knocks himself out instead. The bug-mice bring him home from the hospital to more relatives, whose applause transforms into rhythmic clapping that exposes their extra arms and other bug-like features. Thus, through the complex overlapping visual and auditory effects, the uncanny atmosphere takes hold of the house and, in turn, of the Developer. The bug-mice destroy the furnishings, while the Developer reverts to more familiar mouse-like behaviors, tunneling into his prized oven which, as he says earlier in the act, is “a statement of who he wants to be.” All in all, the film’s uncanniness is directly tied to its exploration of the boundaries between the civilized and the “primitive,” the normative and the queer, and the human and the animal (or, in this case, the mouse and the insect).



Figures 25 and 26: The Developer and Coraline Crawl Through Tunnels

When we sit down to watch stop-motion films, we experience the revival of the uncanny moving portraits of Gothic novels: recognizing the line between the familiar and the unfamiliar yet struggling to separate the two. Perhaps, despite the increasingly realistic animation technologies that modern 3-D animated narratives employ, we still find ourselves drawn to the more embodied, nostalgic, and especially uncanny

aesthetics of stop-motion. Perhaps, additionally, it is through this uncanny medium that we are allowed to play with queer binary disruptions, reviving the practice of queer theory that began with the terrifying, yet intriguing, aesthetics of Gothic literature. Through the discourse of animation, and by understanding the uncanny as a sensibility, we can accept the strange, unsettling, playful, and queer “bungling” of such boundaries, ultimately accepting the paradox of life and death, motion and stillness, and of course the uncanny. When faced with such uncanny portraits, do we crawl back through the tunnel to normativity like *Coraline*, do we revert to “primitive,” transgressive, or otherwise “queer” desires, like the Developer, or do we accept both possibilities, ultimately understanding the importance of the in-between on the journey to the future?

Of course, the stop-motion films that I’ve chosen to analyze thus far are non-exhaustive and, in fact, represent a limited discussion of the potential that the uncanny has to disrupt binaries and to juggle multiple ways of thinking simultaneously. Nevertheless, as I’ve outlined here, the discourse of animation allows us to begin to deconstruct the boundaries of what we consider to be normative and even what we consider to be human. My hope is that this discussion encourages further scholarship on the discourse of animation and, particularly, the importance of reframing the uncanny as an aesthetic experience and as a complex interaction: that is, as a queer sensibility. As Oscar Wilde famously describes in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “the nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass” (Wilde 5). While it’s easy to reduce the uncanny to the revival of “primitive” fears and desires using the aesthetics of white normativity—like

Caliban's rage at either seeing his own true nature reflected back at him or seeing nothing—the true role of the uncanny is to inspire us to reexamine binaries and hold opposing modes of thought in mind simultaneously. Through uncanny moving portraits, we see others as we see ourselves; we see motion and stillness, familiarity and unfamiliarity, the rational and the supernatural, and most importantly, we recognize the boundaries that have been placed and the possibilities that exist when we break these boundaries. The power to consider all of these things at once is the soul of the uncanny: a complex, intertwining relationship between what was, what is, and what could be.

Bibliography

- Bronfen, Elisabeth. "The Gothic at the Heart of Film Theory." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 165-181.
- Bruhm, Steven. "The Gothic Body before and after Freud." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 91-107.
- Castle, Terry. "Phantasmagoria and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie." *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.140-167.
- Coraline*. Directed by Henry Selick, Laika, 2009.
- Dowell, Kristen L. "Digital Sutures: Experimental Stop-Motion Animation as Future Horizon of Indigenous Cinema." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2018, pp. 189-201.
- Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Directed by Wes Anderson, 20th Century Fox, 2009.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Translated by James Strachey, in 24 vols, London: Hogarth, 1955, pp. 17:219-52.
- Gunning, Tom. "Hand and Eye: Excavating a New Technology of the Image in the Victorian Era." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 54, Indiana University Press, 2012, pp. 495-516.
- Halberstam, Jack. "Animating Failure: Ending, Fleeing, Surviving," *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 173-87.
- Halberstam, Jack. "The Transgender Look." *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York University Press, 2005, pp. 76-96.
- Hobson, Janell. "Viewing in the Dark: Toward a Black Feminist Approach to Film," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30 Looking Across the Lens: Women's Studies and Film, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2018, pp. 45-59.
- hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," *Film and Theory: An Anthology*. Robert and Toby Miller. Blackwell, 2000, pp. 510-523.
- Kember, Joe. "Spectrology': Gothic Showmanship in Nineteenth-Century Popular Shows and Media." *The Cambridge History of the Gothic*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 182-203.

- Maturin, C.R. *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Edited by Douglas Grant, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- ParaNorman*. Directed by Sam Fell and Chris Butler, Laika, 2012.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, edited by Philip Rosen, Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 198-209.
- Nead, Lynda. *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c.1900*. Yale University Press, 2007.
- Rigby, Mair. "Uncanny Recognition: Queer Theory's Debt to the Gothic." *Gothic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, International Gothic Association, 2018, pp. 46-51.
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. Edited by J. Paul Hunter, Norton, 2012.
- Sheridan le Fanu, Joseph. *Carmilla*. Edited by Carmen Maria Machado, Lanternfish Press, 2019.
- Steinbock, Eliza. *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*. Duke University Press, 2019.
- Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." *Partisan Review*, Vol. 31, 1964, pp. 515-530.
- The Corpse Bride*. Directed by Tim Burton and Mike Johnson, Tim Burton Productions, 2005.
- The House*. Directed by Emma de Swaef, Marc James Roels, Niki Lindroth von Bahr, Paloma Baeza, Nexus Studios and Netflix Animation, 2022.
- Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. Edited by Nick Groom Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Penguin Popular Classics, Penguin Books, 1994.
- Wester, Maisha. "The Gothic in and as Race Theory." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 53-70.