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THE DOUBLE AS THE "UNSEEN" OF CULTURE: TOWARD A DEFINITION OF DOPPELGÄNGER

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Abstract. *Despite a considerable interest in the fictional double, as a literary device for articulating the experience of self-division, the motif of the double seems to resist narrow categorization and definition. The starting position in the attempt to arrive at a comprehensive definition is founded on the assumption that the fictional double is not a literary motif but a construction of traditional culture – myth, legend and religion. Although surviving as a perennial motif present in all literary styles, periods and genres the double is never "free" – it is not "outside" time but produced within and determined by its social context. Though it often struggles against the limits of this context, it cannot be understood in isolation from it. Its origins in traditional culture make him a motif liable to semantic changes because literature tends to adjust its treatment of the double to the respective culture, being in functional correlation with it. In a progressively secularized culture dialogues of self and the double are increasingly acknowledged as being colloquies within the self: the double has become an aspect of personal and interpersonal life, a manifestation of unconscious desire. Through the introduction of some modern psychoanalytic theories, it has been possible to claim for the double motif a subversive function. Signifying a desire to be reunited with a lost centre of personality the double shows in graphic forms a tension between the "laws of human society" and the resistance of the unconscious mind to these laws. In this way the double changes the focus from intrapsychic psychology toward a view of the social structures. It points to the basis upon which cultural order rests tracing the unseen and the unsaid of culture: that which has been silenced by the symbolic, rational discourse. Many dual and disintegrated bodies in modern literature violate the most cherished of all human unities: the unity of 'character', drawing attention to its relative nature and its ideological assumptions, mocking the blind faith in psychological coherence and in the value of sublimation as a "civilizing" activity. Like its mythical predecessor, the double in modern literature desires transformation and difference. By attempting to transform the relations between the imaginary and the symbolic, the double hollows out the real, revealing its absence, its great other, its unspoken and its unseen.*

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The double, both in literature and out of it, is an enormous and seductive subject. As an imagined figure, a soul, a shadow, a ghost or a mirror reflection that exists in a dependent relation to the original, the double pursues the subject as his second self and makes him feel as himself and the other at the same time. While its imaginative power springs from its immateriality, from the fact that it is and has always been a phantasm, the psychological power of the double lies in its ambiguity, in the fact that it can stand for contrast or opposition, but likeness as well. It can be complementarity, as in the Platonic conception of twin souls which seek each other in order to make a whole out of their sundered halves. Sympathy between individuals, even human love, can also be seen as one aspect of the dialectic between "I" and "non-I", the subject and his double, upon which the possibility of wholeness and integration within the self rests.

Literature, more than either philosophy, religion, or the social sciences, presents a detailed account of mankind's chronic duality and incompleteness, as well as his attempts, which range from the noble to the ludicrous, to achieve integration. In reading prose fiction it is not uncommon to discover that the double is a literary, and specifically a fictional, device for articulating the experience of self-division. Its variations in prose fiction most often include the phantasmal duplication of the individual, through likeness or affinity; and the division of a personality, by fantastic or rationally inexplicable means, or through the opposition or complementarity of separate characters who can be looked upon as different aspects of a sundered whole. In all its variations, the double arises out of and gives form to the tension between division and unity. It stands for contradiction within unity, and for unity in spite of division. "Doppelgänger", the German word, which is the usual literary term for this common phenomenon and which literally means "double-goer," was brought into the language, and simultaneously, into the literary tradition – as a term only – by the novelist Jean Paul (Richter), who in 1796 defined the word in a one sentence footnote: "So heissen Leute, die sich selbst sehen." (So people who see themselves are called.)¹ For scholars seeking a precise definition, Jean Paul offers little help. Consequently, contemporary specialists widely agree with Guerard, who states: "The word double is embarrassingly vague, as used in literary criticism."²

The association of the double with imagination and desire has made it a notion difficult to define. Indeed the "value" of the double has seemed to reside in its resistance to definition, in its "escapist" qualities, in the possibility it offers to the individual to imagine his self and reproduce himself in endless ways. Part of the problem arises from the fact that the Doppelgänger can be traced not to a single authority, but to ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance. Moreover, in the broadest sense of the idea, "double" can mean almost any dual, and in some cases even multiple, structure in the text. Finally, the double as a fictional device seems to defy many of the conventions of so-called realistic texts: it obviously puts in question unities of character, time and space, doing away with chronology, three-dimensionality and with rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and other, life and death. Given this resistance of the double to narrow categorization and definition, it might seem self-defeating to attempt to "theorize" about the double and get a satisfactory explanation of its status and function in modern literature. Since this article does attempt to offer such an explanation, it is best,

¹ Jean Paul Richter, "Siebenkas", *Werke*, Carl Hansen Verlag, Munchen, 1959, pp. 242

² Albert Guerard, "Concepts of the Double", *Stories of the Double*, ed. Albert Guerard, J.P.Lippincott, New York, 1967, pp. 3

perhaps, to try to clarify at the beginning some of the theoretical and critical assumptions upon which it is based.

The double can be approached from two standpoints - form and content – though, as is characteristic of dualities, these contrasting aspects reflect each other. With respect to the form, the double originates in myth and thus it is not a strictly literary motif but a construction of traditional culture. Anthropological data offer evidence for scholars researching the double motif in literature of the widespread belief among ancient and "primitive" peoples that twins are magical, reflections awesome, shadows tabooed, dreams portentous and, most significant of all, that the soul itself is portable. As the length of the article does not allow us to go into the particulars we only wish to emphasise the most important anthropological conclusions concerning the double. Various forms of the mythical double, twins, firstborn parents, rival brothers, metamorphic twinning, scapegoat and sacrifice, lovers and soul-mates, are special and limited cases of the larger category of the archetype of universal duality. The archetype of universal duality reflects pagan beliefs in the primacy of dyadic structure and in the plurality of the Sacred. The many forms it takes are only facets of one indivisible divine being, symbolising nature in its creative and destructive aspects. The baffling power of this archetype lies in its ambiguity and contradiction which cannot be resolved. The ambivalence of spiritual power is what allows it to operate, alternately, as a wounding and a healing influence, as that which generates order or disorder as if by caprice. The archetype of universal duality in ancient myths illustrates the ruthless inequity of nature, the way the balance of forces is continually shifting. The appearance of the demonic double here signifies some disbalance and disorder in a communal exchange between man and nature. To bridge the gap this negative, demonic energy must be returned to the tribe or the group by means of mediation: ritual and magic. Therefore, while the modern, rational mind wants to resolve this terrible inconsistency of the Sacred in a final closure or all-encompassing aim, ancient and 'primitive' peoples prefer to accept it as it is, without looking for a way to bargain themselves out of the dilemma.

Literary criticism overlooks a very important aspect of the double: like many other mythical symbols it has preserved its forms but altered in character in accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes "reality" and "human identity". The increasing ideological polarisation of the existential continuum into irreconcilable opposites – of body and soul, life and death, man and woman, good and evil - basically changes the character and status of the double in Christianity. The belief that the animate or spirit self, in part or whole, somehow departs and continues to exert an influence on the "host" while enjoying an autonomous existence has acquired an extremely negative meaning in Christianity, best defined in three categories: unclean soul, evil spirit and hell, and by three concepts: misfortune, evil, death, which, taken together, jeopardize not only the survival of an individual but of mankind itself. One must be struck by the fact that the very life force which animates a person in ancient myths returns in the form of an evil, haunting presence eager to do harm in orthodox Christianity. This curious principle of inversion is addressed by Otto Rank in his important chapter in *Beyond Psychology* entitled "The Double as Immortal Self": "In confronting those ancient conceptions of the dual soul with its modern manifestation in the literature of the double, we realize a decisive change of emphasis, amounting to a moralistic interpretation of the old soul belief. Originally conceived of as a guardian angel, assuring immortal survival to the self, the double eventually appears as precisely the opposite, a reminder of the individual's

mortality, indeed, the announcer of death itself. Thus, from a symbol of eternal life in the primitive, the double developed into an omen of death in the self-conscious individual of modern civilization. This reevaluation, however, is not merely due to the fact that death no longer could be denied as the end of individual existence but was prompted by the permeation of the whole subject of immortality with the idea of evil. For the double whom we meet after this completion of this developmental cycle appears as "bad," threatening self and no longer a consoling one. This change was brought about by the Christian doctrine of immortality as interpreted by the church, which presumed the right to bestow its immortality on the good ones and exclude the bad ones. At a certain period during the Middle Ages this fear of being doomed on judgment Day...became epidemic in the cult of the Devil, who in essence is nothing but a personification of the moralized double."³ The appearance of the demonic double as opposed to and irreconcilable with the guardian angel marks the moment in the history of western civilisation when the archaic belief in the continuum of life and death and the exchange between man and nature was replaced by a sense of man as discontinuity leading to death and madness – a sense of man ultimately alienated from his own wishes, desires and fears, embodied in the figure of the double. Therefore, in its broadest sense, narratives in which the double motif plays a central thematic role, from religious narratives to modern fiction, have always been concerned with revealing and exploring the interrelations of the "I" and the "non-I", of self and other. Their central thrust is an attempt to erase the distinction itself, to resist separation and difference, to re-discover a unity of self and other. However, these attempts reveal themselves differently in different periods. In order to contextualize the double motif in modern literature it is worth considering a few determining factors and pointing out some contrasts with earlier religious allegories.

The double has always provided a clue to the limits of the culture, by foregrounding problems of categorizing the 'real' and of the situation of the self in relation to the dominant notion of "reality" and "human identity." As Frederic Jameson argues in his article "Magical narratives: romance as genre", it is the identification, the naming of otherness, which is a telling index of a society's deepest beliefs. Any social structure tends to exclude as "evil" anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction, and this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture. It is a concept "at one with the category of otherness itself: evil characterizes whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a very real and urgent threat to my existence."⁴ A stranger, a foreigner, an outsider, a social deviant, anyone whose origins are unknown or who has extraordinary powers, tends to be set apart as evil. The double is defined as evil precisely because of its difference and a possible disturbance to the familiar and the known.

However, the concept of evil, which is usually attached to the double is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values. A massive shift in ideas of order and unreason during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries effected a radical transformation of man's perception of himself and consequently a shift in the naming, or interpretation, of the demonic. It is in this period that inherited patterns of meaning are lost, with the result that notions of "reality", of "human nature", of "wholeness' are

³ Otto Rank, *Beyond Psychology*, Dover, New York, 1958, pp. 74

⁴ Frederic Jameson, "Magical narratives: romance as genre", *New Literary History*, 7, no. 1, Autumn, 1975, pp. 140

dissolved. Over the course of the nineteenth century, narratives structured around dualism – often variations of the Faust myth – reveal the internal origin of the double. The demonic is not supernatural, but is an aspect of personal and interpersonal life, a manifestation of unconscious desire. The text is now structured between self and self as other, articulating the subject's relation to cultural laws and established rules. William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* are the first of many narratives deploying the double motif on a fully "human" level. From then onwards, the double motif is clearly secularized: the "other" is no longer designated as supernatural, but is an externalization of part of the self. Because of this progressive internalization of the demonic, the easy polarization of good and evil which had operated in tales of the supernatural ceased to be effective. Early religious romance fantasies locate good and evil outside the merely human, in a different dimension. The other tends to be identified as an otherworldly, evil force: Satan, the devil, the demon (just as good is identified through figures of angels, benevolent faeries and wise men), which is a displacement of human responsibility on the level of destiny: human action is seen as operating under the controlling influence of Providence, whether good or evil. A loss of faith in supernaturalism, a gradual scepticism and problematization of self to the world, introduced the double as something more disturbing and less definable but also as a crucial index of cultural limits: it returns us to an encounter with our own "heart of darkness" - that area which has been "silenced by culture".

Since the ideas articulated with the double motif deal so openly with unconscious material it would seem absurd to try to understand them without some reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of texts. Contemporary scholars of the Doppelgänger are virtually unanimous in stating their position that our understanding of the double (in fiction and otherwise) is directly related to psychoanalytic theories, particularly to Freud's breaking through in understanding of the human personality. Rogers states: "The conventional double is of course some sort of antithetical self, usually a guardian angel or tempting devil. Critics oriented towards psychology view the diabolical devil, which predominates, as a character representing unconscious, instinctual drives."⁵ Keppler makes a similar, more detailed, observation: "Often the conscious mind tries to deny its unconscious through the mechanism of "projection", attributing its own unconscious content (a murderous impulse, for example) to a real person in the world outside; at times it even creates an external hallucination in the image of this content."⁶

Although my intention is not to undermine the importance of Freudian readings of narratives with the double motif, which still offers a privileged view of individual and family psychology in western civilization, I want to point to one aspect I take to be the major blind-spot of this criticism. Aligning themselves exclusively with Freudian readings of dualism as a sign of psychic disintegration or a serious identity problem and of the double motif as a metaphor of divided consciousness or conscience, these readings tend to encourage allegorical identification of the double as evil. At first sight this criticism does not neglect political and ideological issues nor does it deny the subversive function of the double motif. However, a direct association of the double with the barbaric and non-human exiles it to the edge of literary culture. From a rational world and

⁵ Robert Rogers, *A Psychoanalytic Study of the Double in Literature*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1970, pp. 12

⁶ C.F. Keppler, *The Literature of the Second Self*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1972, pp. 25

a positivistic point of view, otherness cannot be known or represented except as foreign, irrational, "mad", "bad." It is either rejected altogether, or transmuted into a metaphor by this tradition of literary criticism concerned with supporting establishment ideals rather than with subverting them. In so far as it is possible to reconstruct a 'history' of the double motif, it is one of repeated neutralization of the desire it expresses – both in literary texts, and in the criticism which has mediated these texts to an audience. The double has constantly been dismissed by critics as being an embrace of madness, irrationality, or narcissism and it has been opposed to the humane and more civilized practices of 'realistic' literature. The dismissal of the double to the margins of literary culture, however, is in itself an ideologically significant gesture. As a symptom of unreason, and of desire, the double has persistently been silenced or re-written in transcendental, rather than transgressive terms.

Through the introduction of Jungian readings of the double and the impact of modern psychoanalytic, linguistic and Marxist theories, it is possible to claim for the double motif a truly subversive function. Unlike Freud, Jung sees the Self as *complexio oppositorum*, where good and evil are simply complementary opposites, each a necessary condition for the existence of the other. In his doctrine of the shadow he defines the double as neither good nor bad, but as "a replica of one's own unknown face."⁷ It acquires a demonic aspect only because one side of the personality is repressed and subordinated to a faultless and absolute good. This repression is liable to issue in an 'enantodromia' (the conversion of a thing into its opposite) which is exactly what happens in many narratives with the double motif.⁸ Seeing the double as a force of neither good nor evil, Jung recovers something of its original mythical meaning and directs attention to the particular historical and social constraints against which it protests and from which it is generated. Jung defines the double as a manifestation of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss and points to its main function: to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints. Never ceasing to express the desire for unity with the lost centre of personality, never losing its transcendental quality, the double in modern literature expresses itself as a violent transgression of human limitations and of social taboos which prohibit the realization of desire. As a manifestation of a forbidden desire, of everything that is lost, hidden, or denied it points to the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it focuses on the possibility of disorder, that which lies outside the law, that which is outside the dominant value system. It is in this way that the double traces the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, made "absent". It threatens to dissolve dominant structures, it points to or suggests the basis upon which the cultural order rests - the unified individual. The "other" has been categorized as a negative black area – as evil, demonic, barbaric – until it is recognized as the unseen of culture.

The many partial, dual and disintegrated selves scattered through literature violate the most cherished of all human unities: the unity of "character". It is the central power of the double to interrogate the category of character – that definition of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole which has dominated western thought for centuries. A unified, stable ego lies at the heart of the illusive coherence of modern culture, for as Helen Cixous writes: "The ideology underlying the fetishization of "character" is that of

⁷ C.G.Jung, *Selected Writings*, introduced by Anthony Storr, London, 1983, pp. 92

⁸ See C.G.Jung, *Answer to Job*, London, 1954

an "I" who is a whole subject, conscious, knowable; the enunciatory "I" expresses himself in the text, just as the world is represented complementarily in the text in a form equivalent to pictorial representation, as a simulacrum."⁹ In fictional works in which the "I" is dual or even multiple, there is a resistance to such reduction. From 18th century gothic fiction and English Romanticism to the modern fantastic in horror films, the double motif has tried to erode this pillar of society - the unified and coherent subject, questioning the possibility of fictional representation of its unity. By drawing attention to its relative nature, the double shows the concept of character as an ideological construction, mocking the blind faith in psychological coherence and in the value of sublimation as a civilizing activity. In this way it threatens to undermine the dominant philosophical and epistemological orders. Far from construing this attempt at destabilization of "the character" as a mere embrace of barbarism or chaos, it is possible to see it as a desire for something excluded from cultural order – more specifically, all that is in opposition to the capitalist and patriarchal order which has been dominant in western society over the last two centuries.

Through the introduction of some modern psychoanalytic theories, it has been possible to recognize in the double motif an attempt to depict a reversal of the subject's cultural formation. Dualism becomes a symptom of the desire for the imaginary. If the symbolic is seen as "that unity of semantic and syntactic competence which allows communication and rationality to appear"¹⁰, the imaginary suggests all that is other, all that is absent from the symbolic and outside rational discourse. Unlike the symbolic, the imaginary is inhabited by an infinite number of selves preceding socialization, before the ego is produced within a social frame. These selves allow an infinite potential to emerge, one which a fixed sense of character excludes in advance. In this way the double offers an exclusive insight into the process of subject formation, suggesting possibilities of innumerable other selves, of different histories. It also directs attention to this area where we can perceive the ways in which the relations between society and the individual are fixed. The double denounces the categories and structures of the accepted and established social order, attempting to dissolve that order at its very base, where it is established and where the dominant system is re-produced – in the individual.

Finally, it is important to say that the double motif, as exemplified for instance in Gothic novels, in the works of Mary Shelley, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Stevenson, Wilde, Kafka, Lovecraft and Calvino does not simply seek a dissolution of "civilizing" forms as such, nor does my approach to the double as an ideologically subversive literary device urge a fall into the pre-linguistic or pre-cultural. If a non-repressed subject produces unexpected forms of subjectivity, from Frankenstein's monster, to Kafka's man as beetle and vampire, which may be viewed as the ultimate metamorphic twinning, it is a matter of apprehending the symbolic as crippling and repressive to the subject, and of attempting to transform the relations between the symbolic and the imaginary rather than a simple desire for death. The double in modern fiction reveals a tragic truth of the whole western civilization – a reluctance to give in to a desire for something other, which can only be experienced in its 'devouring' and horrific aspect, yet apprehending this other as the only alternative to a hostile, patriarchal, capitalist order.

⁹ Helene Cixous, "The character of 'character'", tr. by Keith Cohen, *New Literary History*, 5, ii, Winter, 1974, pp. 305-307

¹⁰ Allon. H. White, "L'eclatement du sujet; the theoretical work of Julia Kristeva", *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Working Paper*, Birmingham, 1977, pp. 8

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DVOJNIK KAO "NEVIDLJIVO" KULTURE: KA DEFINICIJI DOPPELGANGER-A

Milica Živković

I pored brojnih studija posvećenih motivu dvojnika u književnosti, kao kritički termin dvojnik je i dalje neprecizno određen. Ovaj rad je pokušaj da se bliže odredi pojam, uloga i značaj motiva dvojnika u savremenoj književnosti. Polazna pretpostavka jeste da je motiv dvojnika kulturna kategorija, to jest mitski simbol duboko društvenog karaktera. Njegova forma je ostala relativno nepromenjena, a njegovo značenje menjalo se u skladu sa promenama kulturne stvarnosti i književnih normi. U savremenoj književnosti motiv dvojnika se koristi kao personifikacija otuđenog dela čovekove ličnosti, koje čovek ne prepoznaje kao sastavni deo sebe i koje izrastaju u autonomnu "demonsku" silu. Sekularizacijom kulture i promenama definicija čovekove stvarnosti i subjektivnosti tokom 18. i 19. veka, dvojnik gubi mogućnost da se tumači u transcendentalnom "ključu" i na osnovu jednoznačne hrišćanske polarizacije etičkih koncepata dobra i zla. Zahvaljujući tome on postaje sredstvo od centralnog značaja za tematsku i strukturalnu diferencijaciju teksta. U svetlu Jungovog tumačenja, kao i savremenih psihoanalitičkih teorija, moguće je u dvojniku prepoznati "mračno" naličje preterane racionalnosti zapadne civilizacije, to jest priznati mu ideološki subverzivnu funkciju. Udvojeni i dezintegrisani likovi savremene književnosti narušavaju sliku objedinjenog i stabilnog ega - osnovnog stuba buržoaske i patrijarhalne kulture. Izražavajući želju za imaginarnim poretom, za nevidljivim i nepriznatim sadržajima dvojnik izražava večnu težnju dvojnika za celinom i integritetom. Istovremeno on otkriva metode kojima se kultura brani od nepoželjnih sadržaja i nastoji da neutrališe njihovu potencijalno subverzivnu ulogu.