



Shared Secrets: Motherhood and Male Homosexuality in Doppelgänger Narratives

As a rule, the literary motif of the doppelgänger constitutes a male phenomenon and its universe is characterized by the striking absence of women. This absence may be traced to the affinity found between the doppelgänger and the gestating and parturient woman. Arguably pregnant with the fantasies of male self-procreation and childbirth, the classic male doppelgänger narrative thus renders women and the maternal body obsolete. A corresponding exclusion of femininity, however, may also be related to the omnipresence of intense male homosocial and homoerotic bonds found in countless doppelgänger narratives. Enlisting Joseph Conrad's short story, "The Secret Sharer," among others, as both a paradigmatic yet self-conscious example, I examine the intersecting hotbed of these two strange bedfellows, motherhood and homosexuality, as well as the significance of gender in the male doppelgänger imaginary.

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The female double

Articulating the disquieting crisis of self-division and identity as alterity, the literary motif of the doppelgänger elicits an uneasiness from its readers that, moreover, takes on a gender-specific form: To cross the line demarcating self from other is to menace a stable sense of identity of which gender is also an essential specification. And since the doppelgänger categorically displaces identity, it cannot be presumed that its gendered identity remains unscathed. However, the doppelgänger apparently resists this gender trouble since it exhibits a peculiar feature: Critics claim that it belongs to the sole property of the male gender (see for example Alter, 1986: 1190, Weininger, 1903/2005: 269, and Webber, 1996: 19). Their strictures merit partial validity because when the female double appears, she is typically conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters. Often doubled or divided female personae speak to us more about male characters' fears and desires as well as man's split view of woman than about a female subject divided against herself.

We may ask why there are virtually no examples of a female subject hosting a doppelgänger. One answer could be that since the doppelgänger puts subjectivity at stake, this subjectivity is also mandatory in order to figure as a host for a doppelgänger. If only man has been privileged with the status of self, and woman has been designated as man's other, her subjectivity is not at risk; hence, she cannot logically figure as a female hostess to a doppelgänger. So it is not until female subjectivity is sanctioned and consolidated during the twentieth century that the female doppelgänger exceeds her role as the man's object double and is

assigned a hostess in her own right. The grounds for the male-oriented reign of the doppelgänger realm and the corresponding lack of both female doubles and characters, however, may also, oddly enough, be tied to a completely opposite reasoning; that is to say, it is only a woman who may potentially constitute a host to a double, namely in the form of the pregnant woman.

The pregnant doppelgänger: Lived

Incarinating a lived sense of the double, the pregnant and parturient woman upsets normative conceptions of self-identical, autonomous subjectivity, undoes privileged self/other dichotomies, and confounds the relationship between sameness and difference, unity and division, oneness and plurality. Before the umbilical cord is severed are there one or two beings? As Christine Battersby points out, her ambiguous being calls for an alternative model of subjectivity that allows for the confounding of self and other, yet where self and other are neither fully autonomous nor do they simply dissolve into one another – mother and fetus present a twoness that is neither divisible nor fused into oneness (Battersby, 1998: 38).

Furthermore, in contrast to the conventional accounts of subjectivity which presume a coherent subject constituted by the simple distinction between inner and outer, me and not-me, the pregnant body presents an interior discontinuity and thus turns spatiality on its head – by carrying the outside inside, spatial limits are made internal. Bodily integrity is not only undermined by immanent exteriority, but also by her growing body, the blurring of bodily edges, and fluctuating bodily boundaries which can no longer operate as physical markers of discrete individuality.



As Rosi Braidotti contends, the pregnant body has no fixed bodily form; it is “morphologically dubious” (Braidotti, 1994: 80). Pregnancy and childbirth entail not only the woman’s radical physical changes, but an inner psychic transformation as well. Pregnancy marks a transition to a new self: her postpartum identity. Not only is a baby born, but, as the title of Daniel Stern’s book attests, a mother is as well: *The Birth of a Mother: How the Experience of Motherhood Changes You Forever*. For Stern, “a mother has to be born psychologically much as her baby is born physically. What a woman gives birth to in her mind is not a new human being, but a new identity” (Stern, 1998: 3).

The pregnant doppelgänger: Literary

The pregnant woman articulates the customary attributes native to the literary doppelgänger motif. She houses a second self within, her body splits into two at childbirth, and she undergoes bodily and psychic metamorphosis as does many of her literary counterparts, which is demonstrated by, for example, Jekyll’s and Hyde’s transformations into each other, Dorian’s aging portrait, and the surreal metamorphosis of Kafka’s Gregor Samsa. One finds these natural and quotidian processes of conception, pregnancy, and parturition endured by the mother’s body “supernaturalized” into hyperbolic forms in the doppelgänger narrative.

These stories silently articulate yet also foreclose the “natural” doppelgänger: the maternal body. The mother’s real relationship to doubling is erased in classical doppelgänger literature since these stories depict a curious tendency: the sheer lack of women. This absence of women in conjunction with the observation that male acts of creation often constitute the dominating axis of these tales (for example the male creative omnipresence and omnipotence in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman* (1814), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and H. G. Well’s *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), just to enumerate a few) suggests a pertinent correlation.

That doppelgänger narratives are overrun by bachelor motifs and the fact that the gender of the primary host and double is almost invariably masculine have been observed by several critics, but they fail to question the oddity of this gender asymmetry. If female characters do enter the spectral scenes of doppelgänger fiction, they usually only play a minor role – most often as the love object precipitating the final confrontation between the rivaling male host and double. There are also occasional instances of a male host featuring a female double, but explicit female hostesses are the

most uncommon phenomenon. However, these degrees of infrequency, in particular the near-exclusion of the female hostess, are conspicuous observations in themselves that can be revealed to be symptomatic.

So why are there so few explicit female hostesses? As mentioned earlier, if woman’s selfhood is systematically denied, she cannot logically figure as host to a doppelgänger. However, the ubiquity of male hosts and doubles can also be a symptom of precisely an inverse rationale: Although we were all once our mother’s doppelgänger – only *one* sex can physically become a hostess to a double; in other words, it is only the female body that is capable of generating a second self. The doppelgänger tale, which almost invariably figures a male host, constitutes a masculine fantasy of what would be impossible outside the pages of fiction: the male body’s physical capacity to become two selves. Doppelgänger fiction is traversed by fantasies of miraculous male procreation. Just recall the fantastic birth of Frankenstein’s monster. This story has spawned numerous interpretations with pregnant echoes, and its birth myth has virtually been established as one of its deepest concerns. With Victor’s artificial creation of the monster, he displaces and appropriates female parturition powers, yet as an unnatural mother he perversely conceives an unnatural, fearful “abortion to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on” (Shelley, 1818/1996: 155).

Several scenes of repeated grotesque pregnancy and the birth process can also be discerned in Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The source of Jekyll’s division is ascribed to his “agonised womb of consciousness.” While Hyde lies dormant and “caged in [Jekyll’s] flesh,” which Hyde describes as the cavern in which he hides, Jekyll perceives Hyde as inorganic slime that “seemed to utter cries and voices” and he “hear[s] it mutter and felt it struggle to be born.” Jekyll’s butler, Poole, hears “it” crying and weeping. Moreover, after drinking his magic potion, his self-induced oral impregnation, a conventional primal fantasy, Jekyll’s metamorphoses into Hyde are constantly accompanied by nausea, convulsions, and pangs of labor. After the exhaustion of “nine tenths a life of effort,” alluding to the duration of intrauterine existence, he can give birth to a being “smaller, slighter and younger,” who is “less robust and less developed.” Reminiscent of the role of alchemy – its aspect of creative and transformative possibilities that mimics the changing pregnant body yet also renders this body redundant – Jekyll’s magic potion triggers not only monstrous pregnancy and birth but also death. By drinking his draught, Jekyll experiences “the most racking pangs ... a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death.” This



paradoxical fusion of birth and death is frequently portrayed in doppelgänger tales, the significance of which we will return to ensuing. To cite some examples, the titular characters in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" (1838) and "Morella" (1835) are born from the dead bodies of Rowena and Morella's mother and namesake, respectively; a birth from death that is likewise implied by Frankenstein's monster who is born and assembled from corpses. This cluster of imagery also finds its counterpart in the description of Dorian Gray's portrait in which pregnancy is incongruously linked with decay: "It was from within, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come. Through some strange quickening of inner life the leprosies of sin were slowly eating the thing away. The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful" (Wilde, 1890/1997: 109).

Stevenson's *Strange Case* depicts another, even more bizarre, birth scene, a sight so monstrous that it entails the death of doctor Lanyon: Hyde "put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp [...] and as I [Lanyon] looked there came, I thought, a change – he seemed to swell [...] and his] features seemed to melt and alter" (Stevenson, 1886/2003: 39-69). Not only does Hyde's transformation depict the deformed, swelling, and changing body of pregnancy heralding the birth of Jekyll, it is an uncanny birth scene in reverse in which the child is coerced back into the birth canal out of which it came – a scene conveying the horror of the mother's "lack of lack," i.e., the lack of separation from or reunion with the maternal body.¹

The Secret Sharer: Motherhood

Based on true events that took place on the *Cutty Sark* in 1880 in which the captain allowed the chief mate, who had killed a disobedient crewman following a storm, to escape resulting in the mutiny of his crew, Joseph Conrad's short story, "The Secret Sharer" (1909), likewise dramatizes a captain's ethical encounter in harboring a fugitive, as does Jekyll, who has killed a man at sea whereupon a command conflict ensues. While the surface content of the story centers on the crisis of the captain's authoritative leadership, the breach of maritime code and socio-legal order, and the question of moral undecidability in abetting a felon and the latter's crime, the imagery of gestation, birth, and mothering pervades the narrative. The doppelgänger, Leggatt, initially emerges naked from the dark sea of

uterine waters to be protected, nurtured, and loved by his motherly host, the unnamed narrating protagonist, newly appointed captain to an unnamed ship. Similar to Hyde, Leggatt initially appears as underdeveloped; before ascending the deck he is described as physically incomplete appearing as a "headless corpse," and is, moreover, characterized as "silvery, fish-like." Conveying the sense of a speechless *infans*, "[h]e remained as mute as a fish, too" (Conrad, 1909/1997: 29). Their immediate affection from the moment they meet and the excessive affinity between these two apparent strangers is less puzzling when considered in line with the private intimacy a mother shares with her unknown fetus or newborn child who is also a stranger. Bonnie Kime Scott supplements the reading of the captain as assuming the caring and procreative role of "a midwife or even a mother" – his seizure of the maternal reproductive function may indeed "be the whole intent of the work" – with her attention to the tale's prenatal and yonic metaphors.² The ship's rope side ladder is an umbilical cord by which Leggatt embarks on "the voyage from the ovary, in a wash of seminal fluid, to the womb." Concealed in the hot, dark, and cramped enclosure of the "womb-shaped stateroom," Leggatt recurringly "assumes a fetal position," and attired in the captain's sleeping garb, he is "clad for dormancy" (Scott, 1997: 205-6). The gestation period reaches full term in the eleventh hour when the stowaway escapes through a birth canal, the ship's porthole, and the captain successfully steers his ship away from danger. Like Stern's newborn mother, Conrad's narrator also becomes a transformed man after his successful "delivery" of Leggatt onto the shores of Koh-ring. Confidently embracing his newfound maturity and assuming nautical command, for which he was previously ill-equipped, the captain enables his own delivery or rebirth, and like his double, he will be "striking out for a new destiny."

Diverging slightly from Scott's interpretation of "The Secret Sharer," the prebirth scenario may already be traced to and anticipated in the opening scene. The narrator's sweeping gaze surveys a tranquil setting at "the Gulf of Siam" where his ship is anchored, yet this tranquil landscape is informed by loneliness and marked by an acute absence of humans and life: He imagines the network of fishing-stakes as "abandoned forever by some nomad tribe [...] for there was no sign of human habitation as far as the eye could reach;" the bleak, "barren islets, suggesting ruins of stone walls,

¹ A similar claim is also put forth by William Veeder who argues that "[i]n drink, as in 'the sea of liberty,' Jekyll seeks the ultimate oneness, amnoetic, maternal. To 'spring headlong into the sea' [...] suggests reverse birth, as the 'impenetrable mantle' of Hyde suggests the womb where Jekyll's 'safety was complete'" (Veeder, 1988: 148).

² See also James F. White who argues that "The Secret Sharer" proceeds through the stages of a romantic encounter, conception, gestation, birth, and afterbirth; and thus like Scott, also observes the text's prebirth imagery.



towers, and blockhouses" are not conducive for habitable human existence; also, "nothing lived, not a canoe on the water, not a bird in the air, not a cloud in the sky [...] far from all human eyes." Accordingly, with the absence of living creatures, there is also an absence of movement and sound. In this desolate, deserted scenography, everything is "still and stable," without an "animated glitter" or "imperceptible ripple;" even the sea looks "solid." In spite of the isolation and inhospitality of this world, a cosmic placidity pervades these passages evoking the sense of a blissful prelapsarian condition.

In this pristine environment, before the fall into differentiation, privation, and mortality, the sea and shore are symbiotically joined with "perfect and unmarked closeness;" accordingly, the sea is also implicitly equated with land as a result of the resemblance the barren islets carry to buildings for which the blue sea acts as solid foundation. This uniformity extends to the vast and "monotonous sweep of the horizon" where earth and sky intersect. To explore it, the captain adds, is a "vain task," which echoes the "mysterious system" of fishing-stakes that is "incomprehensible in its division." This incertitude attached to recondit limits – the horizon and fishing-stakes – forming spatial unities in spite of division, not only implies the "unmarked closeness" between mother and fetus, it also proleptically references the narrator's futility in marking the limits of his self and discriminating whether the self and other coalesce or are dissociated; where does one stop and the other begin?

The ship, like its surroundings, is "very still in an immense silence ... There was not a sound in her." Indistinguishable from the silent and motionless environment enveloping her, she forms an integral part of this world's undifferentiated totality. Analogously, the captain discerns a tug in the distance fusing with Mother Nature when it disappears into "the only fault in the impeccable joint," receding into the birth canal of the "mouth of the river Meinam" and ultimately lost behind a "mitre-shaped hill" "as though the impassive earth had swallowed her up without an effort." In contrast to the tug's regressive direction, the captain's ship leaves the river mouth in its "first preparatory stage" of its journey, at the "breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage," that is, at the early and latent stage of labor, thus, the necessity at this point to measure their fitness for the "long and arduous enterprise" of childbirth.

Coveting the profound harmony the ship shares with its indiscriminate surroundings, the narrator attempts his own communion with the ship. However, he is interrupted by an unspecified "something" – it is

not until later that we learn that he is referring to the mastheads of the neighboring ship, the *Sephora*, on which Leggatt is the chief mate and from which he escapes – that "did away with the solemnity of perfect solitude," and subsequently, "the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good." The combination of communion and solitude is an incongruity rendered possible in the mother-infant bond. This indefinite "something" triggers life and permits the possibility of movement. The personified natural elements which formerly pertained to the "impassive earth," immobile ship, and sky and sea as inactive "spectators and judges" are now replaced by darkness and stars, twilight entities bespeaking the phase of transition and nature's change of aspect. They are described in terms of dramatic and aggressive activity which converts the previous delicate solitude into a teeming multitude: "The *tide* of darkness flowed on *swiftly*; and with tropical *suddenness* a *swarm* of stars came out above the shadowy earth ... all that *multitude* of celestial bodies *staring* down at one."

In spite of the disturbance, the narrator still pursues a fleeting intimacy with his ship through physical touch – "I lingered yet, my hand resting lightly on my ship's rail" – and retarded movement implied by his resting hand and delay, as if unwilling to participate in the new environment. However, when the personified natural objects and phenomena are replaced by human agency, the disruption of the former stability and permanence is amplified, and the auditory register shifts from the heavy silence of nature at peace with itself to the loud, "disturbing sounds" and animated motion caused by the human bustle and turmoil aboard the ship: "voices, footsteps forward; the steward flitted along the main-deck, a busily ministering spirit; a hand bell tinkled urgently under the poop deck."

Regardless of the lack of human habitation observed in the beginning, the natural scene is harmoniously replete, reminiscent of Freud's plenitude of "oceanic oneness;" or perhaps it is serenely consummate, not in spite of this human absence, but exactly because of this fact. In contrast, human presence is associated with the uncomfortable social life aboard the ship; it is one of reservation, avoidance, mistrust, and suspicion. The captain's capricious actions breaching the conventions at sea engender the crew's surprise, qualm, and distrust as when he decides to take the anchor watch, shift the ship to the inland tack, and by sailing perilously close to the shore. Despite human interaction, there is no intimate contact. It seems that it is verbal communication in itself which hinders sympathy, solidarity, and fellowship; it consists of empty and insincere language merely expressing everyday banalities, exemplified by the chief mate's habitual



inane remarks, such as “Bless my soul, sir! You don’t say so!”

The narrator’s experience of estrangement brings to mind Lacan’s split subject which has also been a popular candidate for explaining the bridge between the double and nascent selfhood. According to Lacan’s account of the mirror stage, the infant’s self-concept is established at the onset of the child’s entry into the Symbolic order, the field of signification shared by all subjects, when the child misrecognizes the reflection in the looking-glass as itself – a self-division or duplication of self that contradictorily gives rise to its subjectivity. Not only does Lacan’s subject identify with its specular other, but he also internalizes, yet never fully assimilates, the otherness of the Symbolic, which is radically other in the sense that it is anonymous and intersubjective. For Lacan, this twofold self-alienation necessary for subject constitution entails the psychic separation from the maternal pre-oedipal realm of imaginary plenitude and undivided integrity of being, a pre-abstracting existence anterior to the origin of the individuated ego. Split subjectivity thus engenders not only the subject’s internal difference and self-alienation but also a chronic dissociation from the external world and the maternal of which he was once part. And as the captain himself asserts, he is a stranger to the crew, his ship, and himself. Yearning the lost sense of prenatal unity, the primal state of pure nature, he strives to retrieve the lost intimacy with his ship, but his attempts are continuously prevented: He “has hardly seen her yet properly” since she is “littered like any ship in port with a tangle of unrelated things, invaded by unrelated shore people;” and when dismissing the crew so that he may be alone with and “get on terms with the ship,” he is interrupted by the arrival of Leggatt (Conrad, 1909/1997: 24-60; added emphasis).

Unwilling to let go of his maternally identified communion with the ship, the mother-infant union between Leggatt and the narrator acts as a substitute for the former, in which he may successfully preserve or reinstate his fantasy of originary oneness where self and other are united. “Both bonds [with the ship and Leggatt, respectively] are called a communion,” Joan Wexler states, and “both are accomplished in silence” (Wexler, 1991: 605). The latter bond is at the cost of disrupting and supplanting the former – and the latter repeats with success the failed attempt of the former, but now, notably, the roles are reversed: Leggatt is viewed as the naked, endangered dependent in need of the safety, care, and refuge provided by the surrogate mother, the narrator. Leggatt becomes a figure for the narrator’s former unborn or infant self, a consequential detail to be expanded ensuing. Leggatt, like the former still setting, is characterized by his passive and fixed

postures: “His immobility seemed to have been never disturbed;” and he is consistently found in an inert, fetal position: “sitting rigidly on the low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, his head hanging on his breast – and perfectly still” (Conrad, 1909/1997: 40-1).

Moreover, the confused clamor of human noise drowning the previous silent landscape is appropriately reversed by the narrator’s insistence on their faint whispers and sparse speech, their silent and secret understanding, and wordless communication by way of touch, glances, and gestures. According to Wexler’s Lacanian reading, the captain rejects “the Symbolic for a more primitive kind of connection with Leggatt,” namely, a connection brought about in his regression to the preverbal register of the mirror stage. Successful communion and communication by means of language falls short but may be achieved through linguistic transcendence: “The moment of perfect understanding is nonverbal” (Wexler, 1991: 600-605). Upon their first encounter, the narrator instantaneously senses a “mysterious communication” established between them. Their immediate and tacit understanding is mutual; they each alternate between being the one understood and the other affirming the other’s understanding (Conrad, 1909/1997: 52-55). Their telepathic understanding demonstrates their absolute communion in which they may communicate the incommunicable and where intention, meaning, addresser, and addressee effortlessly coincide. They are joined in an uncanny telepathic union that makes the contradiction of sharing private secrets – without rescinding the secret, which, in principle, cannot be shared – possible. By virtue of their unmediated communicative exchange they are unhindered by the imposition of language, its arbitrary breaches between acoustic signifier and mental signified, and thus its failures to unify.

Within the tale, maternally identified relationships are associated with pre-symbolic silence. Within doppelgänger fiction more generally, the maternal body is mute and unrepresented yet forms its very structuring facet. Since it is only the female body that can literally figure as hostess to a double, she must be displaced from representation in order to usurp her generative principle and safeguard a realm of male self-sufficiency and self-reproduction. While this argument explains the scarcity of the female hostess, it does not account for the rarity of the female double. If woman has traditionally been perceived as man’s other and the bearer of difference in Western history, would she not then be the most suitable double for a male host?

Since the doppelgänger categorically displaces identity, it cannot be presumed that its sexual



specificity remains unscathed. But the almost exclusive male-orientation in the doppelgänger tale is exactly a token of precautionary measures taken to secure a stable sexual identity in spite of a definitive subversion of identity. Since we are all, as the title of Adrienne Rich's book asserts, "Of Woman Born," the male child was once an indistinguishable component of his mother; the lack of distinct borders between them would then necessarily threaten the masculinity of the male child; as Kelly Oliver rhetorically asks: "How can he become a man when 'he' was once a woman? He was once part, now the expelled waste, of a woman's body" (Oliver, 1993: 61).

However, what is peculiar about doppelgängers, and other fictional supernatural creatures, heroes, and deities, are that they are, for the most part, not of woman born. In this respect, Braidotti asserts that [c]lassical mythology represents no founding hero, no main divine creature or demigods as being of woman born. In fact, one of the constant themes in the making of a god is his 'unnatural' birth: his ability, through subterfuges such as immaculate conceptions and other tricks, to short-circuit the orifice through which most human beings pop into the spatio-temporal realm of existence (Braidotti, 1994: 84).

What these myths and narratives consistently illustrate is the assumption that if one is not born of woman, one is not born into mortality – as Simone de Beauvoir says: "From the day of his birth man begins to die: this is the truth incarnated in the Mother" (Beauvoir, 1949/1989: 198). And, more significantly, if one is not born of woman one's gender identity is secure.

The doppelgänger cosmos is subject to fears diagnosed as endemic to its homosocial context: matrophobia. According to Adrienne Rich, "matrophobia" is not the fear of one's mother or of motherhood, but "the fear of *becoming one's mother*" (Rich, 1986: 235; original emphasis). Evocative of Hyde's reverse birth scene, matrophobia articulates the fear of losing one's individual separate being (and separate gender) by repeating the infantile, engulfing interaction with mother – thus compromising one's gender identity as male.

The male double curbs his matrophobia by means of his patrophilia, by instating a surrogate male mother: By conferring the procreating function onto a self-engendering father, the sonly replica thus avoids a troubling gender displacement, alleviates his fear of a maternally identified death, and thus anticipates the promise of eternal life, which is also implied in re-creating oneself through one's offspring. Furthermore, women are rendered superfluous in a realm in which men are self-reproducing, which would accordingly

explain the noticeable lack of women – and the few female doubles assigned to a male host.

The Secret Sharer: Homosexuality

Naturally, the maternal fiber does not exhaust a text that over the years has been weaved by scholars with virtually every critical strand. It would be especially unwise to deny the convincing readings of "The Secret Sharer" as concerning forbidden male-male desire, and, moreover, the significance and overwhelming presence of troubled masculine homosociality and homoerotic tension that may be detected in countless doppelgänger narratives.³ But what makes Conrad's overdetermined short story interesting in relation to the present discussion is its dual treatment of and, arguably, its conflation of seemingly incompatible themes: motherhood and homosexuality. A similar claim can be made of other doppelgänger classics, such as *Frankenstein*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and *Dorian Gray*, which also incorporate a divided focus on both the mother's procreative powers and homoerotic love. Before discussing the shared secret in which the readings of homoeroticism and motherhood converge, however, a brief digression addressing the significance of the doppelgänger's homoerotic content is required. All characters within these stories seem to share the common trait of bachelorhood; heterosexual relationships are generally avoided while male intimacy seems natural, is endorsed, or even encouraged; and finally, the minoritizing role or erasure of women is perhaps not unrelated to the male bonding and homosocial economy of this masculine universe.

³ Hypercharged male bonding or homoerotic elements can be discerned in other doppelgänger narratives, such as William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), Shelley's *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Poe's "William Wilson" (1839), Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1853), Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), *Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal* (1893) authored by an anonymous ensemble and commonly attributed to Wilde, Bari Wood and Jack Geasland's *Twins* (1977) that inspired David Cronenberg's film adaptation, *Dead Ringers* (1988). Overtly lesbian doppelgänger characters can be found in Alison Bundy's "Tale of a Good Cook" (1990), Haruki Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart* (1999), Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) and most recently, Darren Aronofsky's film *Black Swan* (2010). Poe's "Ligeia" (1838) and Sheridan Le Fanu's lesbian vampire tale, "Carmilla" (1872), which also contains elements proper to the doppelgänger tale, constitute pre-twentieth century exceptions that allude to same-sex desire among women doubles.



Reflecting the culture in which it reemerged, a period when sexuality became identity, the doppelgänger's *fin de siècle* revival is characterized by a greater visible preoccupation with deviant subjectivities and sexualities, in particular with the by then appearance of a new discrete category of sexual identity: The modern male homosexual whose discursive birth, in Foucault's illustrious thought, was brought about by powers producing what it merely purported to represent and prohibit. The social articulation, classification, and labeling of the homosexual's identity in the fields of science, medicine, sexology, and law proved instrumental, not only in rendering him intelligible and identifiable, but their role in constructing and shaping the concept of homosexuality ultimately served as a means to control and contain this sexuality that it came to pathologize and illegalize as seen in, for example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing's taxonomy of sexual disorders in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) and the legislation reforms and new legal measures which Wilde's trial and conviction near the century's close under the terms of the Labouchère amendment to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment act is a well-known instance of.

The criminalization of homosexual behavior necessitates its attendant secrecy; accordingly, in *fin de siècle* doppelgänger tales, we also witness how secrecy on the whole repeatedly subsumes the buried secrecy of sexuality. With Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in mind, for Elaine Showalter, doppelgängers and male homosexuality form a natural alliance, given that the Victorian homosexual world had evolved into a secret but active subculture, with its own language, style, practices and meeting places. For most middle-class inhabitants of this world, homosexuality represented a double life, in which a respectable day-time world often involving marriage and family, existed alongside a night world of homoeroticism. Indeed, the *fin de siècle* was the golden age of literary and sexual doubles. (Showalter, 1996: 106.)

Double life figures as master trope for concealed sinful pleasures and illicit sexual activities that is realized and symbolized spatially. Within the reclusive confines of domesticity, in the private sphere of crammed cabin spaces, lurid Soho underworld cityscape, furtive brothels, and opium dens, or in the name of "Bunburying" visits to a country estate, Conrad's narrator, Jekyll, Dorian, as well as Jack/Ernest and Algernon in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899) may cultivate a hidden, secret life as distinct from the decorum and outward conformity of their exterior public persona. Jekyll, Dorian, Jack/Ernest, and Conrad's narrator all conspicuously closet their secret selves and secret practices within secret localities.

It is critical commonplace that the secrets shared and a secret sharer concealed in compact enclosures point to a "night world of homoeroticism" in "The Secret Sharer." In addition to being closeted in the private and close quarters of the bedroom and bathroom and invariably wearing sleeping suits, the physical intimacy between these two male bodies frequently takes place by or in the bed; as the captain confesses, "[a]t night I would smuggle him into my bed place, and we would whisper together," whispering "things to each other which were not fit for the world to hear" that makes Leggatt exclaim, "It's very wonderful."⁴ Whatever is secretly communicated between them, "not fit for the world to hear," and whatever the undefined "it" of Leggatt's comment, "it's very wonderful," refers to, consistently transpires amid silent, furtive, physical gestures (Conrad, 1909/1997: 49-52).

The secret understanding between Leggatt and the narrator serves not only as the site of their unmediated communion; it is also where, as Wilde's famous aphorism declares, "the Love that dare not speak its name" is to be found – given that the "unspeakable" is "the most famous code word of Victorian homosexuality" (Showalter, 1996: 112). "Our eyes met; several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out;" the mysterious wordless communication between Leggatt and the narrator, which may be identified as the mother attuned to her infant's unspoken needs or as a communion in prenatal silence and darkness, could also easily signal the language of forbidden homoerotic love. The mutual comfort they provide for each other, their physical proximity, groping, gripping, mingling of glances, clasping of hands, the fact that they converse "only with our eyes," and sleep together in the same bed can refer to both a homoerotic interaction and mother-infant configuration (Conrad, 1909/1997: 46-56).

While the exact nature of Dorian's and Hyde's crimes is only obscurely hinted at, their closeted secrets are ajar as they lend themselves to be read as being of a criminalized sexual nature. In Conrad, in contrast to his *fin de siècle* predecessors, the closet door is unmistakably open: The secret of homosexuality and references to the double are ubiquitous, thinly disguised, and oddly revealing; they present a showy secret, which regardless of its superficial entanglement in ambiguity and equivocation, plainly summons a queer interpretation. The unrepresentable and

⁴ Other works combining doubles and conspicuous nightly bedroom scenes include Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (*Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 1815), Hogg's *Confessions*, Poe's "William Wilson," Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Double: A Petersburg Poem* (1846), and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.



unspeakable signaled by its prohibition and informed by an unspoken understanding seem less multivalent and rather singularly and decidedly homo-esque. For Barbara Johnson and Marjorie Garber, the motif of the double “is more like a nervous tic than a secret” (1987: 629). Likewise, Frederick R. Karl asserts that the “constant parallel descriptions of the two men, the use of doubles, doubling, second self, secret self, and so on, are tedious” (Karl, 1969: 231). And as James Phelan observes, “the hypothesis that the authorial audience is supposed to recognize the secret of the homosexual attraction is quite pervasive. The text abounds in evidence – some overt, some not so covert – that invites us to catch on to the secret” (Phelan, 1996: 124). Indeed, establishing and flaunting a fundamental link between a secret self and a secret sexuality, Conrad’s story seems to make overt what was implicit in earlier doppelgänger narratives thereby self-consciously commenting on and departing from the conventions of the doppelgänger device, most notably in its revision of the doppelgänger’s traditional fate. Accordingly, for Brian Richardson, Conrad’s self-conscious narrative strategies anticipate later modernist treatments of the double, which are characterized by the self-reflexive appropriation and parodic play with the motif. Hence, “‘The Secret Sharer’ is not a last, tired reworking of the by-then rather hackneyed theme of the *Doppelgänger*,” but Richardson suggests, “a skeptical parody of this familiar Romantic topos” (Richardson, 2001: 317). With reference to *Dorian Gray*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that from our twentieth-century vantage point where the name Oscar Wilde virtually means ‘homosexuality,’ it is worth reemphasizing how thoroughly the elements of even this novel can be read doubly or equivocally, can be read either as having a thematically empty ‘modernist’ meaning or as having a thematically full ‘homosexual’ meaning. And from the empty ‘modernist’ point of view, this full meaning – any full meaning, but, in some exemplary representative relation to that, *this* very particular full meaning – *this* insistence on narrative content, which means the insistence on *this* narrative content, comes to look kitsch (Sedgwick, 1990/2008: 165-166; original emphasis).

Her remarks can be equally extended to Conrad’s readerly text whose very flamboyant stress on the loud secret of the doppelgänger and its almost too conspicuous queer nature evokes a kitsch or even parodic quality making a “full ‘homosexual’ meaning” suspect. Observing and conceding the narrative’s “modernist” texture as being evacuated of meaningful content in favor of form, the story’s secret, in effect, discloses little, rather it stages and highlights its own status allegorizing its own interpretive impossibility. The text’s own inscribed insistence on such a “full”

meaning, rather than concealing the actual poverty of meaning or its infinite undecidability, mocks such a “full” meaning and its illusion of presence seeing that it also neglects the subtleties of meaning and halts its endless deferral.

In Conrad’s arguably modernist treatment, with tongue-in-cheek, the captain is possibly characterized as a hopeless Romantic escapist. Since he employs the rhetoric of “early nineteenth-century romantic authors and critics,” such as “my double,” “my second self,” and “ghost,” Richardson speculatively infers that the narrator “has simply read too many Romantic works” (Richardson, 2001: 315). In accordance with the Romantic persuasion, he yearns to recover the lost primordial unity with nature as well as the union between subject and object as evinced in the opening scene, yet he finds himself displaced to, unable to cope with, and tormented by a contemporary modern human condition of alienation as seen in his personal ache of estrangement. Troubled by insecurity, feeling inferior to the task of nautical command at hand, isolated, and misunderstood, the captain shares more in common with Frankenstein’s creature and Melville’s inscrutable Bartleby than with his closer literary predecessors: Contrary to the nurturing friendships, habitual strolls, and dinner parties of Jekyll’s circle of gentlemen as well as Dorian’s entourage of male aesthetes and dandies frequenting salons and theaters, bachelor life at sea does not guarantee fraternal bonding and warm feeling. A Romantic creed proffers the solipsistic individual’s imagination as the proposed remedy to solve forlornness and social anxiety which, here, takes the form of the timely, convenient arrival of an exceptionally understanding secret sharer. It is nevertheless open to doubt whether they miraculously succeed by means of their seemingly absolute communion in overcoming the void between self and other as well as between signifier and signified whereby the full presence of meaning may be received by its recipient unscathed. They fail to consider that they might possibly have gotten their signals crossed or misread the mutuality of their understanding when taking into account that what their silent understanding exactly consists of is never made explicit by either partner. In their blind refusal to recognize the slippage and thus the failure of language, the derision of full meaning and its illusion of presence takes place on both the level of reading and narrative plot.

Not only is their positively infallible communication suspect, but for Mark Ellis Thomas, “Conradian doubling is a red herring, a false hermeneutic trail” (Thomas, 1995: 230). Always conversing tête-à-tête, the captain, in keeping with customary doppelgänger practice, expresses a flickering doubt of whether



Leggatt truly exists or is a figment of his imagination: “an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine?” Although Leggatt is never seen by the captain’s crew, there is no basis for assuming that Leggatt is anything but an actual character inasmuch as the narrator and his crew learn of a felon who has escaped custody from the *Sephora* whose captain, Archbold, visits the narrator’s ship in search of Leggatt. Whether or not Leggatt’s material existence is called into question, the more interesting query is whether Leggatt is even truly his double since the captain confesses: “He was not a bit like me, really” (Conrad, 1909/1997: 51, 34). As both Richardson and Cesare Casarino agree, the captain’s dogged obsession in affirming their shared identity for which there is no textual grounds together with his inflated idealization of Leggatt suggests that he employs the latter as a blank yet mirroring surface on which he may project his ego ideal (Richardson, 2001: 312; Casarino, 1997: 222). And this ideal is indeed envisaged prior to his encounter with Leggatt: “I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one’s own personality every man sets up for himself secretly” – a secret ideal that is subsequently detected in or rather attributed to his double and thus implicitly in himself by proxy. Hence, Leggatt is constructed “not merely as just *any* double,” as Casarino points out, “but, specifically, as a morally excusable and honorable one, on the one hand, as well as an imprisoned and secret one, on the other” (Casarino, 1997: 220; original emphasis).

Described by the captain as having a “strong soul,” being “perfectly self-controlled, more than calm – almost invulnerable,” Leggatt proves to be a handy source for facilitating the captain’s courage and strength. His identification with Leggatt compensates for his felt experience of self-doubt and lack of confidence in measuring up to both his own and his crew’s expectations which is, for example, seen in his assertion: “The self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself.” Hence the need to reject unfavorable views of Leggatt – “I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit” – while credulously and unconditionally accepting Leggatt’s biased account of the incidents aboard the *Sephora*, one that is even additionally furnished with the captain’s own reasoning that he killed the disobedient sailor in “a fit of temper” (Conrad, 1909/1997: 26-48). However, the captain’s

dignified description of Leggatt clashes not only with Archbold’s version of the homicide, which he dismisses as not worth recording, but also Leggatt’s own in which he inadvertently portrays himself as lacking self-control and self-possession in his outburst of rage and momentary loss of consciousness and recollection during the killing. Limited to a notoriously unreliable naive narrator and his first person perspective along with an equally untrustworthy story given by Leggatt, Richardson contends that we know “exactly what the narrator wants Leggatt to be, but we can never know what he is in himself,” although “we can be sure that he is not nearly as good as the rather Byronic story he provides for himself” (Richardson, 2001: 314).

The narrator’s lack of surprise at Leggatt’s mysterious appearance and “the celerity and nonchalance with which the narrator starts referring to Leggatt as his own double, as if this were a most unremarkable conjuncture in the natural course of narrative events” rather than a supernatural phenomenon shaking the foundations of reason intimates that Leggatt is possibly a false double or at least one whose arrival has been expected (Casarino, 1997, 219); and thus, as Richardson suggests, “The Secret Sharer” may be akin and looking forward to later modernist works which sarcastically jab at the doppelgänger motif, such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Invitation to a Beheading* (1934) in which Hermann Karlovich, the self-satisfied unreliable narrating anti-hero, chances upon his double in the drifter, Felix, who he murders in order to secure his own life insurance by which he assumes that he has committed the perfect murder. Caricaturing “Dusty” Dostoevsky and inversely repeating the surprise ending in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* consisting in the shocking discovery (for its contemporary nineteenth century readership) that its titular protagonists issue from a single divided self,⁵ Hermann’s conviction of his physical resemblance with Felix proves erroneous since this double looks nothing like him. The humorous insincerity of the modernist ascription aside, the glaring role played by the double and homoeroticism in Conrad ultimately prompts the question as to why they are coupled.

Shared Secrets: “If you’ve met a gay man, you’ve met his mother”⁶

Before unraveling the knot that binds motherhood with homosexuality in doppelgänger fiction, we may inquire as to why homosexuality is so pervasive in doppelgänger fiction. Although evidently begging a

⁵ One that has since then been repeated in e.g. Chuck Palahniuk’s film, *Fight Club* (1999).

⁶ Present-day gay idiom quoted from Dean, 2001: 122.



multifaceted answer, it seems that the prevailing cause stems from the simple conflation of homosexuality with sameness and the stigma of narcissism – a conflation that Otto Rank, in his discussion of *Dorian Gray*, also takes for granted: “the homosexual love object was originally chosen with a narcissistic attitude toward one’s own image” (Rank, 1925/1971: 75). Heavily circulating during the authoring of notable doppelgänger classics, this discourse, in which homosexuality is inscribed within the pathologizing narrative of narcissism, was also propounded by Freud who notoriously stated that “[h]omosexual object-choice originally lies closer to narcissism than does the heterosexual kind ... A strong libidinal fixation to the narcissistic type of object-choice is to be included in the predisposition to manifest homosexuality” (Freud, 1917/1963: 426-7).

This association, however, is challenged by the very myth of Narcissus; as Michael Warner informs us: Both girls and boys alike are spurned by Narcissus. Ovid’s myth does not confound the boys’ love of Narcissus with Narcissus’s self-centered love; seeing that these boys and the homosexual are “interested in others in a way that is not true of the narcissist in general,” he goes on to ask, “Why should gender amount to alterity *tout court*?” (Warner, 1990: 193; original emphasis). The homosexual’s love of the same sex, then, has consistently been misread as love of self; loving another man is confused with loving oneself. Hence, the supposed narcissism of homoeroticism, as well as the doppelgänger’s homoerotic aspect, is ultimately imbricated with the systematic equation of sexual difference and heterosexuality with the distinction between self and other since narcissistic homosexuality is predicated on the faulty assumption that the love-object is always a woman.

This pairing of homosexuality with narcissism helps to illuminate why so many doppelgänger tales are imbued with an aura of homoeros. The double’s narcissism is superimposed with the alleged narcissism of same-sex desire, and both reasonably form an obstacle to the love of women. That it is essentially narcissism rather than homoeroticism which pertains to doppelgänger fiction may be accounted for by way of its literary origins in Romanticism. Romanticism, accompanied by a stress on genius, introspection, aesthetics of originality, and the individual correspondingly subsumes its ugly inverted mirror image, namely in the *dark* Romantic motif of the double whose duplications displace singularity. Placing an undue value on an idealized self, the inherent narcissism and deep self-reflexive attitude within Romanticism takes on a pathologizing aspect with regard to the doppelgänger resulting in a solipsistic and

megalomaniacal ego swelling from its own excessive desirability inflated to the point at which it self-implodes. Doubtlessly liable to semantic changes, this motif cannot be fully comprehended independent from its respective social context, power structures, and the changing face of the Other – ineluctably lingering in the shadow of Romanticism, *fin de siècle* doubles perpetuate their predecessors’ Romantic ideology in its morbid aspect but supplement and charge it with the late nineteenth century obsession with sexual anomalies and aberrancies of which homosexuality is branded as its most eminent and visible trademark. Conrad, in turn, also continues the subversion of the Romantic ideal, however, rather than exhibiting its tragic implications and merely turning its wrong side out by way of inversion as pathological perversion, he enlists ironic exaggeration and adds a comedic touch to the ballooning ego which spots in every direction its own mirror image.

In Freud’s essay on the uncanny, he emphasizes how the double epitomizes narcissistic self-love. Its appearance is related to infantile primary narcissism: It was originally a narcissistic wish-fulfillment “against the destruction of the ego, an ‘energetic denial of the power of death’ [which] sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love.” Acknowledging the reality of death presents the greatest injury to the narcissistic subject. There is, after all, a fundamental difficulty in seriously entertaining the idea of one’s own demise. The fatality of death is rendered innocuous by the double who cheats death since a second self entails a second life. However, Freud says that once “this stage [of primary narcissism] has been surmounted, the ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud, 1919/1955: 235).

Returning to the question of how the double’s maternal facet is compatible with the omnipresence of homoeroticism, Freud, in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, traces the roots of homosexuality to a child’s excessive attachment to his mother that must subsequently be repressed:

[H]e puts himself in [the mother’s] place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love. In this way he has become a homosexual. What he has in fact done is to slip back to auto-erotism: for the boys whom he now loves as he grows up are after all only substitutive figures and revivals of himself in childhood – boys whom he loves in the way in which his mother loved *him* when he was a child (Freud, 1910/1957: 100; original emphasis).

Assuming a maternal position while seeking a love object in whom they can rediscover a younger version



themselves, both Jekyll and Conrad's narrator conform to Freud's explication of narcissistic homosexuality. As previously discussed, the captain, evincing a strong maternal fixation and unable to relinquish a symbiotic relation with the maternally identified ship and its surroundings, strives to restore this relationship in his bond with Leggatt. Desiring a substitute of his infant self from a mother's perspective on whom he can bestow the maternal love he once experienced, the captain reverses the former mother-infant roles.

This theory of homosexuality, in which the homosexual identifies with his mother and loves himself, is also implicitly connected to our first premise on the doppelgänger's relationship with the pregnant and parturient mother; that is, the doppelgänger who adopts a maternal role and births himself seeing that this fantasy of doubling which assures life by reproducing it is also a symptom of self-love. As mentioned above, the desire to revoke the finality of death that the double expresses "sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love." A maternal identification cemented with narcissism informs both the doppelgänger's homosexual and maternal aspect, and both express the same underlying framework: a narcissism whose integral elements include a desire for immortality and a corollary compulsion to recreate one's being albeit it may take the indirect form of securing loved "substitutive figures and revivals" of a childhood self.

For this reason, however, we may wonder why all doubles and their hosts, with a few exceptions, time and again meet their untimely end at the climax of tale. How does this correspond with the notion of the double as a guarantor of everlasting life which is also implied in the double's rejection of being of woman born? It seems that the uncanny womb-tomb figures as the doppelgänger's own uncanny repressed content that returns as a harbinger of mortality since the fear of uniting with the double symbolically accords with the fear of uniting with and becoming the mother; both entail the death of the male protagonist. And this is also what we witness in most doppelgänger narratives: The final confrontation between host and double typically consists of a homi-suicidal scene in which, for example, the protagonist stabs or shoots his double and suddenly discovers that he has thereby lethally wounded himself – as witnessed in *Dorian Gray*, Poe's "William Wilson," Stellan Rye's famous 1913 German silent film, *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student of Prague*) – the reunification between host and double is complete as confirmed by the double's disappearance and their

simultaneous death.⁷ According to Rank, the "frequent slaying of the double, through which the hero seeks to protect himself permanently from the pursuits of his self, is really a suicidal act;" however, it takes "the painless form of slaying a different ego: an unconscious splitting-off of a bad, culpable ego – a separation which, moreover, appears to be the precondition for every suicide" (Rank, 1925/1971: 79). Seeing that self and other are confused, inextricable, and interchangeable, this doomed self-defense from a persecuting self in which murder is tantamount to suicide may also be transposed such that the host intentionally attempts suicide in order to eliminate the double – as, for example, Hogg's *Confessions*, Guy de Maupassant's "Le Horla" (1887), and Palahniuk's *Fight Club* make evident. These two homi-suicidal scenarios are nevertheless discrepant: While the murder of the double often results in the accidental corollary of suicide, and thus is not by definition suicide proper, the suicide with the purpose of murder is witting and deliberate.

Although the blighted end in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* plausibly relates a murder by suicide rather than a suicide by murder, the question of who commits suicide and/or murder is nevertheless enveloped in obscurity. Storming Jekyll's laboratory, Utterson and Poole discover the body of Hyde dressed in ill-fitting garments: "[T]he cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone; and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer." Implying a suicidal Hyde, Utterson's observation nevertheless conflicts with Hyde's "love of life" and "fear of death." Conscious that he is "co-heir with [Hyde] to death," Jekyll yields the "power to cut him off by suicide," a power he knows Hyde fears. Considering that Jekyll's "horror of being Hyde" comes to weigh heavier than his "fear of the gallows," and foreseeing an imminent irrevocable change whereby he will no longer be able to assume his original form, Jekyll possibly destroys himself, as implied by his name, in order to vanquish Hyde. In addition, his confessional letter resembles a suicide note whose last sentence – "as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" – may ambiguously refer to the end of the narrative or self-murder. Assenting to Utterson's assumption, it is Hyde,

⁷ Films featuring suicidal hosts and/or the ambiguous murder of the double include, among others, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* (2001), Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1999), Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006), Sean Ellis's *The Broken* (2008), Phedon Papamichael's *From Within* (2008), and Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010).



not Jekyll, who is found on cabinet floor, and it is Hyde's voice which Utterson identifies behind the door. Furthermore, Hyde also has a motivation to commit suicide since he depends on the "city of refuge" that the guise of Jekyll provides, which, if irretrievable, condemns him to the scaffold. But even this very refuge itself paradoxically implies suicide albeit it is reluctantly tolerated when not absolute: His "terror of the gallows drove him continually to commit temporary suicide." This uncertainty of Hyde's suicide is even present in Jekyll's last confessing words in which he wonders whether Hyde will "die upon the scaffold? Or will he find courage to release himself at the last moment?" – a speculation which indicates that Jekyll leaves the decision of self-killing to Hyde (Stevenson, 1886/2003: 44-70).

Other doppelgänger suicides include Frankenstein's creature who, upon learning the death of his maker, vows to "ascend [his own] funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames" (Shelley, 1818/1996: 156); comparable to the self-destructive end Nathaniel faces in Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, Robert Wringham in Hogg's *Confessions* likewise eyes an approaching indistinct yet menacing object that drives him to jump into his death: "who is yon that I see approaching furiously, his stern face blackened with horrid despair!" (Hogg, 1824/1997: 165); the signature statement of Herman Melville's scrivener, "I would prefer not to," eventually leads to his choice of preferring not to be via self-starvation; and the clergyman Rev. Mr. Jennings in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "Green Tea," who according to his conceited physician, Dr. Hesselius, suffers from a "hereditary suicidal mania," is compelled to violently take his own life by his stalking spectral demon-monkey (Le Fanu, 1869/1964: 207).

Nearly all of these examples illustrate that inseparably one in life, they must necessarily be inseparably one in death. Doubles are caught in their own vicious circular logic with disastrous ends, mainly as a consequence of the fact that their fear and desire proves to be inextricable inasmuch as their divided will combines Romantic desire with Gothic fear, which also takes the shape of fearing unacknowledged desires. Because of the discursive alliance between the mother's sex and death, doubles deny maternal origins; and as unmothered beings, doubles stake a claim to indestructible and unending life. They displace the mother by becoming her, and thus anticipate eternal life that is also ensured by way of self-birth. But by becoming her, they ironically reinstate the very threat of death they sought to dodge in the first place. This circularity also suggests that perhaps the double is not unrelated to the death drive and its affiliation with the

repetition compulsion. As controversially claimed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*Jenseits Des Lustprinzips*, 1920), for Freud, the aim of the death drive is to restore an earlier state of things; thus, the longing for the end invokes a longing for the beginning (Freud, 1920/1955: 36). In this sense, an inordinate fear of death may bespeak of the fear of unavowably desiring this end which is inviting inasmuch as it resembles the beginning. This also correlates with the uncanny fear posed by maternal sex organs, "the entrance to the former *Heim* of all beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning." Since the uncanny signals the transgressive return of something "familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression," our once intimate relationship with the *heimlich* womb – an inanimate state of rest and wholeness anterior to life – returns as a reversion of the repressed, thus becoming frightening and uncanny (Freud 1919/1955: 241-5). And as we have already witnessed, the final scenes in doppelgänger fiction often involve the return of the mother's loving face as other in the *unheimlich* imagery of maternal re-engulfment and womb-tombs. Just as the double depicts a reversal of aspect, his maternal identification also involves its repetition as other. On the one hand, the double's maternal identification expresses a narcissistic desire to defy death. On the other hand, this maternal identification may be desired not in spite of death but because of it.

"The Secret Sharer" begs the question of whether it observes this double desire to elude and succumb to death since its happy ending seemingly constitutes an anomaly given that the protagonist, in contrast to his literary peers in earlier doppelgänger stories, evades death. "I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us [...] the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command;" considering the narrator's final reunion with the maternally identified ship, how is it that he survives? Indeed, by revising the ill-fated doppelgänger finale, Conrad's ending self-consciously reproduces with a decisive difference the conventions of the doppelgänger device. Even so, the images of maternal incorporation that frequently accompany the closing scenes in doppelgänger fiction are also present in "The Secret Sharer;" in fact her dual countenance is weaved into its very structural texture.

Echoing the opening scene in which the tug receding out of the narrator's sight does so in such a manner that it is as if "the impassive earth had *swallowed* her up without an effort, without a tremor," the closing scene depicts the captain's ship precariously engulfed by the towering and "enormous mass of *blackness*" of Koh-ring



whose mountain, in addition, recalls the “mitre-shaped hill” behind which the tug disappears: “Was she close enough? Already she was, I won’t say in the shadow of the land, but in the very *blackness* of it, already *swallowed up* as it were, gone too close to be recalled, gone from me altogether.” But there is also an additional intermediate scene in which a ship is similarly imperiled, namely, the struggle the *Sephora* faces “amongst those mountainous seas that seemed ready to *swallow up* the ship itself and the terrified lives on board of her.”

Just as the captain’s union with Leggatt inversely mirrors his bond with the ship, imagery, action, ending, and beginning, are consistently repeated in a chiasmic fashion. The incidents occurring on the narrator’s ship correspond to those of the *Sephora*: Both Leggatt and the narrator save their ships from the calamitous weather of a devouring maternal nature, both, as several critics agree, confront and shake a mutinous insubordinate opposing their command, and both sacrifice a man to the sea; but while it is the stormy tempest and “mountainous seas” that terrorize the *Sephora*, it is the still and becalmed nature – whose waters are characterized by a “sleeping surface” and “glassy smoothness” – that permits the captain’s ship to nearly run aground. This climatic moment, moreover, echoes the “sleeping water,” “glassy shimmer of the sea” at the beginning of the tale as well as the tug consumed by earth impassively, “without a tremor” and without apprehension yet this echo includes a minimal difference. The opening silent, still scenery returns to haunt the ending since it is this very stillness – now described as “intolerable” – and the motionless waters and ship that endanger the captain and his crew. In other words, the opening scene is doubly duplicated but nevertheless inverted in the howling gale and stillness releasing destruction on the *Sephora* and the narrator’s vessel respectively. As opposed to the prior serene silence, the captain takes command of his voice and combats the treacherous stillness with his “shouting” and “loud,” “raised,” “stern” voice which contrasts with the “unsteady” and “quavering” voices of his crew. Significantly, in the scenes of maternal engulfment, land and sea imagery merge: The tug is swallowed by both a river and “the impassive *earth*,” the *Sephora* is menaced by seas that are “mountainous,” and the captain’s ship is likewise threatened by the calm sea and the “dark loom of the land,” or rather, by a “blackness”: the inability to discern a boundary or dividing line between land and sea that also corresponds to the opening scene (Conrad, 1909/1997: 25-58; added emphasis). The *heimlich* mother providing a pleasing prenatal existence distinguished by the lack of life and human presence, a condition in which self

and environment remain indistinguishable, returns in its hostile aspect as a maternal black oblivion compelling the self’s return to its undifferentiated origins. And as we will see, the intricate triangular configuration constituted by the scenery in the beginning, the events surrounding the captain’s ship and the *Sephora*, in which each constituent doubles and transposes each other, repeatedly dramatizes this combined birth-death complex.

The analogy between the narrator’s maternal bond with Leggatt and that of his ship is likewise iterated in the deadly threat posed by a maternal reunion seeing that a fusion with Leggatt also proves to be pernicious. Notably, Conrad’s narrator and Leggatt ultimately part ways; it is an act which secures the narrator’s impunity and indirectly saves him and the ship from the swallowing uterine seas and mother earth. Although the captain succeeds in divorcing himself from his double and thus survives, the conventional final collapse between host and double and its resultant casualty nonetheless transpires within the story: Unable to detach himself from Leggatt, the insolent crewman on the *Sephora* is throttled to death. This blackguard and Leggatt are “jammed together;” the crew, as Leggatt remarks, “had rather a job to separate us.” Tenaciously refusing their separation, Leggatt engenders his death. “It’s clear that I meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face;” even after his death, the crew must wrench the “carcass of their precious shipmate” out of Leggatt’s unyielding fingers. Their merger involves not only the negation of sailor’s identity as evinced by his death and black face, but it also annuls Leggatt’s. While these antagonists struggle, Leggatt is seemingly unconscious. Unable to recall the event, he must have it told to him. This memory lapse signals a loss of self-possession in which Leggatt’s identity is suspended inasmuch as this event also occurs before, as Leggatt says, “I came to myself.”

Their fusion indicates that Leggatt not only functions as a double to the narrator but also to that of the dead seaman. Their shared identity is suggested by Leggatt’s corpse-like appearance which, in addition, reinforces the idea of their homi-suicidal unification. The captain’s first vision of Leggatt as a floating naked, “headless corpse” submerged in a “greenish cadaverous glow” evokes the strangled dead body of the recalcitrant sailor – a body nearly decapitated, since Leggatt relentlessly refused to release his grip on his throat – with its black face covered “with a bit of bunting.”⁸ Consonantly,

⁸ In the original event that inspired the tale, the murdered crewman in question was black; however, “[a]lthough Conrad thoroughly elides the racial context of the murder,” Michael



lacking self-control, Leggatt loses his head and kills the sailor in a fit of rage. The sailor, "half crazed with funk," similarly loses his head both figuratively and literally.

The fatal struggle and physical contact between Leggatt and the shipmate is repeated and climaxed in the narrator's and Leggatt's last night together when they scuffle in the sail locker.

I snatched off my floppy hat and tried hurriedly in the dark to ram it on my other self. He dodged and fended off silently. I wonder what he thought had come to me before he understood and suddenly desisted. Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second. ... No word was breathed by either of us when they separated.

In contrast to Wexler who contends that the captain's parting gesture of proffering the hat is a "symbol for his perfect communion with another person" (Wexler, 1991: 605), I argue that, although temporarily and physically united, here, a moment of discord and confusion comes to pass in which, presumably for the first time, their telepathic unity is broken since the hat occasions their evident misinterpretation of each other's intentions. It is the fortuitous sight of the hat – the significance of which has puzzled so many critics – abandoned by Leggatt which enables the captain to successfully maneuver the ship so that an imminent collision with the island is prevented. Representing detachment, the hat symbolically saves the narrator in several senses; for not only does the floppy hat convey their divergence and the eventual separation from a deadly double, the enigmatic hat is the saving mark by which the captain now can perceive a division between land and sea, which formerly was characterized by their "perfect and unmarked closeness," and thus preclude maternal blackness.

Although intended to protect Leggatt's "homeless head," the hat instead proves to save, by substitution, the narrator's head. Accordingly, parting with his hat instead of his head, unlike the unfortunate sailor, he avoids losing his head. "I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it violently;" as several critics note, the narrator's act of shaking the chief mate's arm is analogous with the scene in which, in the attempt to save the ship, Leggatt has the unruly sailor "by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat." Unlike Leggatt, however, who injures a mate's head, the narrator protects it. And unlike Leggatt and the chief mate, the narrator keeps

his head by demonstrating self-command and self-possession saving other heads in the process.

The hat's defensive function as a surrogate for the captain's head is further corroborated by a strange reiterated detail in the story's opening and final scenes: "I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue suddenly from the naked body of a man ... The phosphorescence flashed in the swirl of the water all about his limbs." This flash of phosphorescence that accompanies an initially unrecognizable white floating object proves to be the luminous, silvery body of Leggatt; later, however, the unidentified object enveloped in phosphorescence comes to designate the white floppy hat: on the shadowy water I could see nothing except a faint phosphorescent flash revealing the glassy smoothness of the sleeping surface ... All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship's side. White on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing? ... I recognized my own floppy hat.

Just as Leggatt's pale floating body resembles the dead seaman's carcass, the identity between cadaverous body of Leggatt and the floating floppy hat suggests how the latter doubles for the corpse the narrator would have been.

Inversely doubling the sailor's dead body launched into uterine seas which signifies a return to maternal origins, Leggatt's ejection is portrayed as a birth scene in which he and the narrator may live. This final delivery doubles with a difference yet another birth scene besides from that of the dead sailor. Leggatt has already once been launched into maternal waters; accordingly, he has already experienced a gestating period onboard the *Sephora*. Just as Hyde is born after Jekyll lives "nine tenths a life of effort," Leggatt asserts, "[a]fter the life I've been leading for nine weeks, anybody would have got out of condition." Yet his escape from the *Sephora* constitutes a kind of stillborn death; as Leggatt confesses to the narrator: "It would never do for me to come to life again." In launching Leggatt anew, the captain offers him "a new destiny" and himself a newborn identity separate from Leggatt's. The captain somehow manages to reverse the reversal of the maternal beginnings as well as birth as a kind of death in such a way that the corpse of Leggatt can be resurrected (Conrad, 1909/1997: 28-60; added emphasis). The cutting of the umbilical cord enables Leggatt's and the narrator's independent existence, autonomous subjectivity, and individuation as distinct from the prior lack of boundaries between self from m/other implied in the doppelgänger relationship. Adopting a

Levenson observes, "it nevertheless leaves its mark on the tale" in terms of the sailor's strangled black face (Levenson, 1997: 164).



leadership and authoritative role, the narrator expects to consolidate his masculinity. This newly acquired identity is enabled by sacrificing his secret self, Leggatt, which amounts to the rejection of his other secret selves, be they infantile, maternal, or homosexual. Replacing his narcissistic affection for his double with the “perfect communion” with his ship, the narrator engages in what has been identified by several scholars as a heterosexual relationship. This recuperation and triumph of heterosexuality as the only sanctioned form for desire bespeaks of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms homosexual panic. Just as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* “can most persuasively be read as a fable of fin-de-siècle homosexual panic, the discovery and resistance of the homosexual self” (Showalter, 1996: 107), Conrad’s narrator conforms to a heteronormative mandate by dissociating himself from Leggatt.

The doubling which returns as other that pervasively informs Conrad’s text as both a motif and structural makeup even expands out beyond its textual borders to encompass the historical reality of the crime committed on the *Cutty Sark*, which is incorporated yet altered in the fictional events surrounding the narrator’s vessel and the *Sephora*. For Conrad, according to Michael Levenson, the *Cutty Sark* episode reflected “the large-scale social failure” haunting contemporary Europe, more specifically, “the impasse of modernity”: the dilemma of choosing between the political maladies of the old tyrannical “autocracy,” on the one hand, and the social “disorder,” bureaucracy, and weak leadership of the modernist capitalist state, on the other, as represented by *Cutty Sark*’s first mate, Sidney Smith – who murdered the crewman, John Francis, on account of failing to comply with orders – and its captain, J. S. Wallace – against who his crew mutinied, respectively (Levenson, 1997: 164). In order to move beyond the stalemate of these sinking ships – social prospects which both beget miscarriage as suggested in the stifled sailor’s and Leggatt’s expulsion from the *Sephora* – Conrad’s “central revisionary gesture,” Levenson points out, offers an alternative of auspicious possibility in its “decision to split the *Cutty Sark* and its captain Wallace in two by creating another ship with a second captain (the story’s narrator)” by which the adverse aspects of the impasse of modernity are displaced onto the *Sephora*’s inept captain, Archbold, a weak tyrant whose “spiritless tenacity” relentlessly insists on turning Leggatt over to the law and on legal, moral, and social formula; nonetheless, he remains cowed by and yields to the law, his crew and wife. In contrast, redeeming qualities are attributed to Conrad’s narrator, whose hospitality and liberal-minded sympathy for Leggatt includes the consideration of “the moral singularities that cannot be resolved via the prevailing

system of guilt and punishment ... [that is,] he repudiates the universalizing claims of the modern social order” (Levenson, 1997: 165-6); albeit the captain’s exoneration is dubious given that by abetting Leggatt he shirks his responsibilities as a captain, unnecessarily endangers his crew, and might be behaving according to an agenda that is not disinterested. Even though he permits Leggatt’s release, he still succeeds in mastering command over crew and ship – unlike Wallace who also let a criminal escape but foundered at the latter as well as Archbold who refuses the former while also failing at the latter. Accordingly, by sending Leggatt off anew, the captain offers not only Leggatt but also historical, political, and moral shipwrecks “a new destiny.”

The repetition with a difference existing between the tale and its source is, as anticipated, in keeping with their respective outcomes: Conrad’s text renders not only the inimical end met by most doppelgänger “a new destiny” but also the original incident since, here, the dishonored captain committed suicide by jumping into the sea. However, although both the narrator and Leggatt come through, the motif of suicide is not absent from the tale. For example, Captain Wallace is reflected in Leggatt who both literally and idiomatically jumps ship. When he dives into maternal waters, Archbold and crew upon the *Sephora* assume that Leggatt has committed suicide – but being an adept swimmer, he admits: “It’s not so easy for a swimmer like me to commit suicide by drowning.” Suicidal tendencies, however, are nevertheless equivocally detected in Leggatt: “Let them think what they liked, but I didn’t mean to drown myself. I meant to swim till I sank – but that’s not the same thing.” The communion the narrator so eagerly coveted with the ship in the beginning and with Leggatt is what proves near fatal in the end. In steering the ship recklessly close to the island and towards his own destruction so that Leggatt may swim to safety, the captain betrays an ambivalence since Leggatt’s aptitude for swimming is repeatedly stressed by both Leggatt and himself. Upon their first encounter, the captain, sighting a mysterious man in the water, curiously declares: “You must be a good swimmer;” Leggatt himself mentions that he “had a prize for swimming [in his] second year in the Conway” to which the captain responds, “I can believe it.” Why must the narrator unnecessarily “shave the land as close as possible” considering that Leggatt is an “amazing swimmer” (Conrad, 1909/1997: 30-57)? It seems that the narrator’s *thanatos* and desideration for the maternal *heim* secretly persists till the end.

Darkly mirroring the longing for a “unity of being” within Romanticism, an impulse still present among decadent *fin de siècle* doubles, the doppelgänger



embodies the fear of (and repressed desire for) unifying with the other. Granted this Romantic desire for unity is parodied in Conrad. However, Conrad's chaffing treatment of the double, in which the narrator's unreliability reasonably dispels the double's supernatural aspect and calls into question whether Leggatt is truly a double, proves inconsistent with the fearful features of the double, that is, its deadly unity and accompanying imagery of maternal engulfment that albeit are portrayed as realistic events nevertheless haunt the narrative. Resisting and confronting Conrad's playful mockery, the double's disconcerting aspect is not so easily expelled. Given that the tale's final imagery of near fatal reunification reintroduces the desire (and fear) for unity which formerly was belittled and laughed away, Conrad's text finds itself caught between two incompatible attitudes being at once flippantly insincere and deadly serious. This fear of unity refers not only to the fear of a deathly maternal reunion, but it also concerns the fear of knowing another man too intimately. Hence, just as the desire to become the mother is undergirded by an unshakable matrophobia, the doppelgänger imaginary could be defined more properly as homophobic rather than homoerotic. The doppelgänger emerges here as a conservative phobic response to and masculine unease with the womb and another man as a site of at once alarm, attraction, and envy.

To conclude, on the face of it, the doppelgänger only appears in male form; and arguably this thorough male-orientation does its utmost to preserve and guard a sameness of gender, to maintain a fixed distinction between the sexes and sexual identities. But as mentioned earlier, the doppelgänger as concept jeopardizes this permanence of sexual self-identity. Under the frail veneer of double's outwardly male face, there exists a multiplicity, mixing, and destabilization of gender and sexuality which is intimated by the double's secret identification with feminine, maternal, infantile, and homosexual roles. Dramatizing and alternating between the tenacious consolidation of masculinity and its crisis, the doppelgänger illustrates, in Showalter's words, "that masculinity is no more natural, transparent, and unproblematic than 'femininity'" (Showalter, 1996: 8). However, by undermining boundaries and distinctions, and thus also crippling social order, the doppelgänger ambiguously serves as a vehicle for not only subverting boundaries but may also reinforce them. It makes stable the very same boundaries and cultural norms it threatens as evinced by its homosexual panic; and thus it helps preserve, is indeed in service to, a masculine symbolic order. However, this order cannot remain static. Wherever the boundaries of gendered identity are

threatened, sexual borderlines are strenuously reinforced which, in turn, gives rise to renewed counter-efforts that upset these borderlines, but for each time these boundaries are assembled anew, a minimal difference is introduced slightly dislocating the structures of gendered identity so that rather than simply servicing a masculine symbolic, the doppelgänger may ultimately merely be paying lip service.

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