THE DOUBLE AND THE OTHER

IDENTITY AS IDEOLOGY IN POST-ROMANTIC FICTION

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PAUL COATES
Assistant Professor of English
McGill University, Montreal

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Preface

The following book, like its author's other works, may well be criticised as lacking a centre. Its author could point to its title and counter this stricture by emphasising the degree to which the essays it contains constitute variations on the title's theme. He could argue that a unity of theme does indeed exist in the book: the unnamed point of intersection of the themes of projection, negation, the Double, transformation, the monstrous or Sublime, Utopia, the ideology of the *fin de siècle*, the relationship between the workings of imagination and those of cinema, of fiction as a 'good' projection as opposed to the malevolent projections of ideology. To do so, however, would be to agree with one's critics in maintaining the paramount importance of a monographic unity habitually blind to the social and intellectual processes out of which the monograph's subject emerges. The unity of the following book is not the centred unity of the monograph but the decentred one of the constellation of themes. It seeks to do justice to the intermeshing contradictions of individual and overall process by aligning works and writers in a series of dots the reader is required to join up in order to discover the hidden face of events. Unity is definable only by negation as it floats between the archipelagos of the separate particles of the perceivable. Its overdetermination should not be mistaken for acausality, however: a superimposition of causes may seem to generate a negative causality, for no single cause is fetishised as *the* cause, but this is in fact a more demanding reformulation of causality, opposed to all reductionism.

The author expresses his solidarity with the work of Pynchon or Adorno. For him, as for them, the unity of self is a pseudo-unity, achieved through an exclusion and projection of otherness that is really a mystification of self-knowledge, a denial of the actual fragmentation of the self in the modern era. The self is not a permanent unity but an accidental combination of the genetic kaleidoscope; it lacks the transcendental features of necessity. As

they seek to suggest a decentred unity that tolerates rather than proscribes the other, the following essays eschew the effort to speak last words on a subject. They do not open and shut a case in the manner in which the institution of the book, with its clear beginning and end, allows us to delude ourselves we can do: in a sense, this may be termed an anti-book. It may also be termed 'interdisciplinary' (its links with my work on cinema should be apparent to those who know that work) in its awareness of the arbitrariness of the division of labour within the academy: for in order to comprehend the multiple mediations that constitute our image of reality one has to puncture the partitions of 'one's own' subject, even if only speculatively, in imagination, never actually able to break down the walls but only to dream of their downfall and the advent of the true, withheld totalisation. Hence this book is very much about the impotent power of the imagination to translate one from 'here' to the place that is arbitrarily separated from it by its naming as 'there'. The speculative connections it draws initiate a process the reader is asked to continue. As it strives to transmit messages down the piping that leads to and from the academic cell known as 'its field', the following book is nevertheless all too aware that it does so in darkness, never knowing who inhabits the adjacent cells, or whether or not the code it raps out is deciphered anywhere. It is dedicated to whomsoever receives that message.

Here I would like to thank three persons who helped bring parts of this book to formulation: Fredric Jameson, whose invitation to speak at Duke University prompted 'On Imagination and Negation'; Stephen Winfield, who heard a shorter version of the Conrad section when I addressed a meeting of University of East Anglia postgraduates at his invitation; and Joel Black, whose stimulating talk on De Quincey's autobiographical biographies, given at the University of Georgia, alerted me to De Quincey's remarks on his *doppel-ganger*. 'On Imagination and Negation' and the Kuśniewicz section of the Hofmannsthal and Kuśniewicz essays first appeared in *PN Review* and *The Polish Review* respectively.

Contents

Introduction

THESES ON THE DOUBLE AND THE OTHER

1. Works of fiction exist in a space between the Double and the Other. To enter into a work of fiction is in a sense to transform the Other into a Double: to discover in the apparent foreignness of another person the lineaments of one's own aspirations and hopes. The manner in which this process of identification and transformation expands the sympathies can be seen as a concomitant of the centralisation and integration of society carried out during the modern era, when more fiction will be written than ever before.

2. In love, the other is one's double. It has been suggested that when selecting a partner we tend unconsciously to choose persons whose features echo our own – whose genes will reinforce our own and so render our own survival more likely. The charm is that of an otherness that secretes within itself the image of one's own selfhood, thus allowing one to hope that all the real others throughout the remainder of human society may prove to be one's brothers or sisters. When the similarity between self and other is so great, however, as to suggest identity, the feeling it generates is not love but the uncanny.

3. In writing of the Double, the author can be said to be writing of his own representative. The moment he detaches himself from his author and slips in between the covers of the book, however, the Double assumes independent life as the Other. Stamping one's own features upon the face of a character may be a fearful authorial manoeuvre intended to limit the dangers, posed by his or her otherness, of the character assuming independent, vampirical life. Of course even the Double can acquire this independence: this is the burden of the masterly short piece by Borges entitled 'Borges and I'. Writers of fiction appear to be people whose left hands are truly ignorant of what their right hands are doing – their narratives

the fruit of a deliberately induced, almost mediumistic, dissociation of the spirit.

4. Stories that deal explicitly with the Double seem in the main to be written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures: writers such as Conrad, balancing between Polish, English and French; Hogg and Stevenson, between Scottish and English; Henry James, between 'English' English and 'American' English; or Wilde, between English and French. Here the Double is the self when it speaks another language.

5. The emergence of the Double in literature is simultaneous with the invention of machines sophisticated enough to behave like humans. The link between the Double and the machine is first made by E. T. A. Hoffmann. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, mass production culminates in the genetic engineering of doubles. The genetic creation of these identical hordes translates into actuality the nationalistic ideologies of fascism: the nation as a hall of mirrors, endlessly prolonging collective narcissism.

6. The materialisation of the Double can be interpreted as a pathological attempt to replace the image of the other with that of the self: this process of projection is bound in with the mechanisms of colonialism and reflects the ease of encounter with other peoples made available by the age of rapid transport. Nevertheless, if the double mocks the self whose appearance it imitates, this indicates that the other retains a will of its own below the projections with which it has been overlaid. The Western clothes the subjugated tribes wear conceal incompatible beliefs. The very persistence of the Double is a sign of the unrepressed vitality of the Other, which the self continually strives to cocoon in projections. When the other is finally destroyed and the human double vanishes from our sight, the empty nature that confronts us becomes a new repository for a projection whose aim is no longer that of subjugating the other but that of continuing the human race.

7. The appearance of the Double in literary iconography at the beginning of the nineteenth century is perhaps connected with the Romantic belief that character is mutable rather than fixed: thus one can look into the future and see oneself as another person. And this, in turn, is surely linked to the enormous imminent changes that will sweep the world in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and the development of colonialism.

8. Paradoxically, the Double enhances the ideology of individualism: it puts the self in the place of the other. What is more, it

denies that the other who resembles oneself could be one's identical twin, and hence a real person existing outside the bounds of selfhood and its projections. Whereas twins are staple figures of comic literature, which feeds on the confusions their similarity generates, the Double recaptures the image of the twin for non-comic literature: the Double is the emissary of death.

9. If realist novelists fight shy of the image of the Double they do so out of a wish to protect the illusion of the actual existence of their characters: they seek to suppress their own knowledge of the degree to which every character is a distorted reflection, aligned in a fairground mirror maze, of the author himself. They strenuously defend the illusion of the world's untaintedness by the imagination.

10. If, as I have argued above, the preoccupation with the Double is common in bilingual authors, then the foreign culture is perceived as providing a space in which to live a secret, second life: the place of refuge that becomes increasingly alluring as the growing efficiency of surveillance in a centralising society leads one to feel one is watched wherever one goes. (The main instrument of this surveillance is the camera: our double sleeps by day in a dark box, on a roll of film, like a vampire, as meanwhile we live our troubled waking lives.) The use of foreign languages was to provide two female novelists in particular with the private spheres they required in which to be themselves: it was thus that French functioned for Charlotte Brontë, and German for George Eliot. The foreign tongue is the counterpart of the pseudonymous identities adopted by both authors: language as both the medium and the camouflage of thought. Mary Ann Evans and Charlotte Brontë are in fact their own doubles: their public names (George Eliot and Currer Bell) are masks. Long before Rilke, they realise that the fame that accrues to a name is a misunderstanding, a *méconnaissance*. In changing their names without forfeiting their single state they both pay lip-service to the official belief that it is a woman's destiny to change her name – to be married – and mock it, for they are married only in name and to a name they can divorce overnight.

11. Fear of the Double is fear of self-knowledge: the Romantic's fear of the feasibility of the self's total reification by science. In *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, science (the chemical formula) creates a Double that is nevertheless the hidden (Mr *Hyde*) aspect of the self. Hence the Romantics' attitude towards the Double is contradictory: they

oppose it as they do science, because the reflection echoes the self mechanically and presents the body as soulless mechanism; yet they have to embrace it too, for it is the unconscious.

12. As self becomes ever more dependent on other in an increasingly mediated world, rearguard actions are launched to redivide them. Hence the compensatory emergence of nationalism that accompanies the growth of the world economy. The attempt to expel the foreign element fails however: the implication of self and other is already too deep. Hence the foreign appears in the form of the self: outside it perhaps, but its Double.

13. Clinical studies have shown that the Double tends to appear at dusk, in the form of a floating face or a torso, and to be a momentary, colourless apparition. The Double in *fin de siècle* literature is thus the uncanny aspect of *the photograph*, which is similarly momentary and monochrome. The dusk at which it comes forth is the weary end of the century itself. The era considers itself for a final time in the moment of its demise. And if psychological studies of the experience of the Double indicate that when women see their own doubles, they tend to appear in masculine form, then perhaps this helps one to understand the nature of the crisis of the representation of sexuality initiated by the *fin de siècle*: woman's self-image was contaminated by that of man. Whence the rage of the bluestocking and the *femme fatale*, who looked in the mirror and failed to find their mental self-images confirmed. Or could it be that woman is so often represented as seated in front of a mirror because she seeks thereby to come to terms with the disparity between her mental self-image, an imaginary form contaminated by the prevailing male images of the patriarchal culture, and the actual fact of her difference?

14. In Dostoevsky's short story 'The Double' its hero on several occasions mistakes a mirror for a door. (Could it be that the Romantics who repeatedly saw doubles were making the same mistake – the mirror not yet having become so common a fixture in the home for one always to recognise it for what it was?) In so doing, he takes an imaginary opening for a real one. But the aperture, the other space it manifests, immediately closes. The sole exit from the claustrophobic present leads straight back to its heart, to madness.

15. The Double become Other is also, for the *fin de siècle*, a coded image of the wife who leaves her husband. In the words of Pózdnyshev, the jealous husband in Tolstoy's 'Kreutzer Sonata':

'what was terrible, you know, was that I considered myself to have a complete right to her body as if it were my own, and yet at the same time I felt I could not control that body, that it was not mine'. The violence of the sexual battles of the turn of the century is part of the convulsion dividing what previously had seemed to be 'one flesh'. The man who sees 'his own' body walk away from him is horrified. The woman's liberation tears him in two.

WRITING AND IDEOLOGY: THE IMAGINATION OF THE DIVIDED SELF

The term 'ideology' has generated such controversy in recent years that any text wishing to employ it must also seek to define it, either at the outset or implicitly, in the course of its development. It seems to me that the essence of ideology lies in the institutionalised bipartisanship of the imperative to 'see the other side of the question', which transforms the potential for change inherent in contradiction into a steady state of balance. Ideology socialises the individual by bringing him or her to internalise the dividedness of a class society in the form of the structure of 'objective, value-free judgement' – thereby enabling the system to rule the subject, by dividing it. The antithesis between the 'here' of the individual and the 'there' of others is translated into internal space. Perhaps its main agents are the media, which create a society that is all mediation and phantasmagoria, never encountered directly. An archaeology of their growth would include the introduction of printing, the spread of literacy and the industrialisation of production. Literacy enables one to keep a diary, Calvinistically weighing one's days against each other, fissuring one's language into that which is 'present' and spoken – 'here' – and that which is 'there' and alienable. The sense of identity is diffused, giving birth to the Hegelian philosophy in which the structure of identity involves inevitable alienation. 'Ideology' thus seems to be characteristic of the modern era, as it splits the written language from the spoken one (too many books circulate now for us to have the leisure to read out loud) or suffuses the mind with images from another world. In splitting the self it brings forth the Double. Imagination enforces the self-division whereby society retains the

subject in its subject position: the labour/leisure axis along which society is structured employs imagination as compensation. The process of mental self-translation into another place may pave the way for the diffusion of culture and identity through colonialism or through individual entry into a 'higher' social sphere (which one has learned of and learned to mimic, through books), but its immediate effect upon the individual is to split him (and I say 'him' because it is primarily the males of a society who are accorded the social and spatial mobility they require to enter the imaginary 'elsewhere' – as a result of which radical female novelists, such as George Eliot or the Brontës, have to adopt male pseudonyms). For one's mental translation will never be a complete one: the individual enticed away from his native sphere may find the sought-after real unattainable, or attainable only in part. A foot in each camp, heritage at odds with aspiration, he will lead a double life. His split nature will preclude real opposition to the system whose dividedness is replicated in him.

The structure of imagination is one of frustration. But if frustration evokes aggression as a response, the only aggression here is directed inwards, towards self-splitting. The overdevelopment of the sense of sight in the modern era is bound in with this frustration: you can look, but you cannot touch, it says (and as windows and shop-windows grow larger, one sees more and more untouchable goods). This process finally yields its own art-form: cinema. (The links between voyeurism and frustration in the cinematic look are the object of poignant meditation in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America*.) In cinema the laws of imagination coalesce with those of the advertisement: we no longer generate images in response to the verbal signs of the page, but are presented with them in pre-packaged form. These laws are those of universal deprivation and boundless, unsatisfied, consumerist desire. The impersonality with which these mechanisms function itself frustrates all revenge. The sole available object for one's anger is a self one furiously bifurcates.

1

Notes on Imagination and the Novel

ON IMAGINATION AND NEGATION

1. 'The most beautiful object is the one that does not exist', writes the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert. His phrase is paradoxical and suggestive: the beautiful object in question may be the Platonic form we never encounter directly in reality; it may even be thought by whimsy to be the product the Polish consumer never sees in the shops. In any case, it is privileged because it stimulates the imagination, the faculty which – ever since Romanticism, and Coleridge's formulation of the distinction between Imagination and Fancy – has been a primary organ of our perception of the world. Imagination was granted this role because of its capacity to overcome distance: in the early nineteenth century, as the world began to shrink beneath the tightening embrace of new transport and communications systems, Imagination provided advance notice of imminent new realities. It permitted one to domesticate the shock of the new – of the other cultures imported into one's own by the linked processes of industrialisation and colonialism. Imagination generated an art of prophecy, rendering the trembling of the rails in advance of the coming train. It introduced into the present the negative object (the temporal ghost of the flash-forward) that would shortly negate one itself through its real presence. It converted this object into a phantom, a figure of dread or desire, so that upon arrival it would pass through the perceiver, unhindered by the frictive resistance of his or her material presence. It anticipated the future in order to cancel it.

2. A classic example of imagination working in this way can be found in Michel Butor's *La Modification*. As he travels by train from Paris to Rome, the protagonist, Léon, who is the key Butor employs to wind up the imagination, describes to himself the things he will do upon arrival. He will visit his lover Cécilie and

tell her of the job he has arranged for her in Paris; they will plan their life together once he has divorced his wife. Imagination here becomes the modern traveller's impatience to arrive, a desire for speedier travel that is in fact a wish for travel through time. It becomes a pure form of prolepsis. But not only can Léon's picturing of the future be said to prevent it happening quite as he envisaged; it can also be said to prevent it happening at all. Léon's position is that of Oedipus: to foresee the future is in fact to be blind to it. (Hence Butor's novel becomes an essay on the differences in the tenses, which stand for planes of reality sealed off hermetically from one another.) One may imagine a future event assuming a particular form – perhaps so as to savour the surprise when it proves to be different, thus nourishing one's sense of the possibilities still inherent in reality – but also because the future event really is negative in that it embodies the future's hostility to the individual in a world of unpredictable change. To control the world in imagination is to fail to control it in reality. This renders inevitable the final 'modification' of Léon's plans. In him, imagination reveals its complicity with conformism: if imaginary revolt can be a dress rehearsal for real insurrection, it is also just as likely to forestall it, just as, according to Coleridge, Hamlet's deliberations absorb the energy he should reserve for action. Thus imagination allows one to enjoy the fruits of revolt with none of the discomforts of actual change (the protagonist's position on the train is hence very much akin to that of the reader of a novel, which is hardly coincidental, since novels are often used to kill time during journeys, and Léon himself takes one along on his trip). Butor's mode of writing is thus an ironic one; its protean *mise-en-abîme* encompasses the reader and the writer alike. The work can, however, be felt to be monotonous: the repeated references to Léon's view through the window become a somewhat mechanical form of punctuation; whilst the restriction to a single consciousness can engender taedium. One may feel that Virginia Woolf is more percipient in 'An Unwritten Novel', where she keeps the account of the speculative train journey relatively short.

The title of 'An Unwritten Novel' indicates the degree to which imagination and negation are linked, but it also shows that the writing of a short-story is also the unwriting (the refusal to write, the unravelling of the thread) of a novel: the two modes are opposed – the one expansive and empathic, the other intensive and diagnostic. The *donnée* may have been material for a novel,

but Woolf has left that novel unwritten. Just as Butor's Léon constructs lives for the people who share his compartment as he travels to Rome, so Woolf's narrator imagines a life for the person seated opposite in the train (there is an element of condescension in this, as if the only life the non-novelist could possess is the one granted him or her by the novelist), building up a detailed identikit from a series of clues, much in the manner of a detective. But 'An Unwritten Novel' is, among other things, an unwritten detective novel, since all the narrator's constructions are shown to rest upon sand. Although on the last page the narrator reassures him – or herself that 'Minnie [the name he/she has bestowed on the person opposite], though we keep up pretences, I've read you right, I'm with you now', the erroneous nature of the reading soon becomes apparent. For a few sentences later we find the narrator exclaiming: 'Well, but I'm confounded' and concluding 'That's not Minnie.' Nevertheless, the urge towards narratorial speculation proves irrepressible and the novelist, incorrigible to the point of comedy. The narrator rhapsodises about the woman and the man who has met her at the station: 'Mysterious figures! Mother and son. Who are you? Why do you walk down the street? Where tonight will you sleep, and then, tomorrow?' The conclusion (as in Beckett, the ending is a new beginning) is 'I start after them.'

For Gabriel Josipovici, the form of 'An Unwritten Novel' embodies the essential structure of feeling of the modernist imagination: an indulgence of fantasy finally rebuffed by the brute shock of a negating, unforeseen, incommensurable reality (Josipovici, 1971, pp. 286–311). He discerns this shock in 'Borges and I', and doubtless would also deem it present in 'An Unwritten Novel'. (Another example might be *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, itself an unwritten Pirandello novel born of his inability to know what to do with six characters he had conceived. Like the figures of *commedia dell'arte*, from whom they probably derive, they are a story looking for a stage on which to happen: revenants from an old, repressed form of theatre, invading the contemporary stage.) Josipovici, like Freud, conflates imagination and day-dreaming, a trivialisation of the imagination that may help indicate why his own fictions are so much less powerful than his criticism. The sentimental self-indulgence of the writer reveals its identity with the grimace of cruelty in the disillusioning denouement. In each instance – in Butor, in Borges, in Woolf – the fiction's dissolution concedes its arbitrary nature as an object that has been