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DOUBLES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

The origins of the mysterious figure of the *Doppelgänger*, the second self or double, are lost far back in time merging with the primitive theories of the soul and the ancient belief that heroes possess both a mortal and a divine nature. Yet it was not until after Jean Paul (1763 - 1825) introduced the term into the nineteenth century that it acquired an independent existence by being accepted into the literary terminology[1]. Since then the interest in the world of the double has moved side by side with the growing awareness of the complexities of a post - Freudian universe. The German Romantics, Dostoyevsky, Hawthorn, Melville, Poe and Oscar Wilde are some of the most frequently cited names in connection with the double. From the older literature, Classical Mythology, Greek and Roman drama, and Shakespeare are also fruitful sources. The area most neglected by criticism is Medieval literature. With the exception of *Tristan*, which is too obvious a case, practically no attention has been paid to the manifestations of this figure in other Medieval works. This is rather surprising considering that allegory and myth, both prominent features of Medieval literarure, are closely related to the process of literary decomposition and, hence, doubling.

There is, in fact, a wide spectrum of Medieval doubles that can be sorted out and classified with the help of the critical vocabulary that the present century has contributed to the study of the second self as a literary phenomenon.[2] For example, in the first part of the tale

1. The figure started appearing with great frequency in the works of the German Romantics up until Heine. The term also shows up in the title of E. T. A. Hoffman's story "Die Doppelgänger" (1821), as the apocryphal title of Heine's poem beginning "Still ist die Nacht" ("Der Doppelgänger", 1823), in Th. Storm's "Ein Doppelgänger" (1887), and in Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846).

2. Such works are: Frederick Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus* (New York, 1967)· Albert J. Guerard, *Stories of the Double* (New York, 1967)· C. F. Keppler, *The Literature of the Second Self* (Tucson, Ariz., 1972)· Wilhelmine Krauss, *Das Doppelgänger Motiv in der Romantik. Studien zum Romantischen Idealismus*, Ger-

of "Pwyll" in the *Mabinogion* there is a good example of a kind of *higher*, or *immortal second self*; in Marie de France's *Launfal* and *Yonec* the double emerges as *projection* of thec haracter's innermost dreams and desires; and in Chretien's works it comes to life in various guises: as *mirror of the courtly ideal* in *Erec and Enide*, as *secret sharer* in *Yvain*, and as *allegorical double* in *Lancelot*. This paper explores the function of these doubles in the context of the individual stories, and attempts to define their meaning as a whole in order to provide some basis for a further investigation of the significance of this figure in Medieval narrative[1].

The critics of the double concerned with the definition of its meaning and function in literature offer a variety of viewpoints[2]. However, as Keppler notes, behind the widely different approaches and attitudes of these works underlies a common theory: "The figure of the second self is created by its author, either consciously or unconsciously, to express in fictional form the division of his own psyche, whether caused by personal problems or by the wider problems of his culture or by both" (p. 189). There is also general agreement on the principles of the application of the double as a literary device. With slightly different terminologies most critics admit that literary decomposition is a process of doubling by which the author separates the components of a psychic entity and infuses it in various other

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manische Studien, Heft 99 (Berlin, 1930)· Otto Rank, *Der Doppelgänger, Psychoanalytische Studie* (Leipzig, Wien, Zürich, 1925) and "The Double as Immortal Self", *Beyond Psychology* (New York, 1958)· Robert Rogers, *The Double in Literature* (Detroit, 1970)· Claire Rosenfield, "The Shadow Within: The Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double", *Daedalus*, 92 (Spring, 1963), 329 - 344· Ralph Tymms, *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949). For a more complete bibliography of works on the double see Keppler, pp. 182 - 190.

1. I have used the following editions: *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (New York, 1975)· Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (New York, 1978)· Chretien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. W. W. Comfort (New York, 1977).

2. Keppler (pp. 182 - 190) gives a useful summary of the various critical approaches and perspectives: Krauss, for example, sees the double as a product of the writers of the German Romantic movement, signifying their "yearning after the infinite"; Rank's final position reflects "the Jungian view, which sees it as the desire for rebirth"; Rogers regards it from a clearly Freudian viewpoint; Rosenfield explains it as the result of a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious life of the writer, or his fear of the loss of identity; and Tymms surveys the phenomenon historically.

characters, and that there is a panorama of doubles that can be named according to function[1]. As for the term "double" inquiry has shown that it can be misleading for two reasons: it sometimes refers to a multiplicity instead of a duality as implied by the word; and it is easily taken as suggesting identical figures when most often it refers to antithetical ones. In dealing with the double one faces "the mystery of a contradiction, of simultaneous distinction and identity of an inescapable two that is at the same time an indisputable one" (Keppler, p. 1).

Such mystery shades the exchange of forms that takes place between Pwyll, the king of Dyfed, and Arawn, the king of Annwn (the Celtic Hades), in "Pwyll" of the *Mabinogion.* According to the story this exchange is a kind of punishment that the otherworld king imposes on Pwyll for having gravely offended him during a hunt. Thus, Pwyll in Arawn's guise undertakes to make amends by defeating the enemies of the otherworld kingdom, while Arawn as Pwyll rules successfully the latter's land; with this accomplished Pwyll is able to take his proper form and semblance. Arawn's function in the story expresses the split between a *lower* and a *higher kind of self* within Pwyll. He embodies Pwyll's idea of moral perfection, his super ego imposing restrictions on his faulty behavior and demanding expiation. The sense of guilt and shame that arises from Pwyll's confrontation with this higher kind of "I" is indicative of the split that divides him between what he perceives to be and what he thinks he should be. The exchange of forms that follows symbolizes the initiation of a process aiming at the re-integration of the divided parts of the hero's self.

At the end of the story the redeemed Pwyll not only develops a harmonious relationship with Arawn but their two personalities merge into one: "Pwyll, prince of Dyfed, fell into disuse and he was called Pwyll, prince of Annwn, from that time forth" (p. 9). The identification of Pwyll and Arawn as two aspects of an indisputable entity also alludes to the fusion of two separate selves —a mortal and an immortal one— in the primitive hero: according to Rank, in "The Double as Immortal Self", this concept evolved originally from the traditions built around the primitive man's belief in an immortal

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1. *Mirror image, secret sharer, opposing self, fair maid, femme fatale* in Rogers; *twin brother, pursuer, tempter, vision of horror, savior, beloved,* in Keppler.

second self. In the light of the folktale material of the *Mabinogion* it is tempting to view Arawn as the ageless part of Pwyll's self, his immortal soul, in conflict with his finite and earthbound counterpart. Out of the hero's encounter with this superior kind of second self —viewed either as an expression of immortality or as ideal self— emerges a new order that resolves all tensions and re-establishes harmony in his relationship with himself and the world.

A different kind of conflict underlies the creation of doubles in two of Marie de France's stories, *Launfal* and *Yonec*. These doubles are products of a tension between the characters' secret needs or desires and external reality. Marie's narrative art, often viewed as a kind of subjective realism, works with special results in the two stories mentioned: the inner conflicts of the characters are magically transformed into concrete forms projected into the visible world. The figures emerging are *wish fulfillment projections*, and they act as the characters' doubles assuming the role of the beloved. This kind of doubling strongly suggests a withdrawal into the realm of dreams and fantasy, and thus contrasts Pwyll's experience with his double which actually leads him into a fresh and positive accomodation within the world of objective reality.

In Marie's stories the protagonist, as a rule, meets true love, which eventually fulfills his innermost dreams. In *Launfal* the beloved appears for the first time, while the hero suffers emotionally from undeserved neglect and humiliation at court; she immediately bestows on him riches, honor, and love, acting as an important safeguard for his wounded ego. Something similar happens in *Yonec*: A lonely lady's lament for the lack of true love in her life is instantly answered with the appearance of a handsome knight magically transformed into a falcon. Here fantasy conjures up reality: the figure of the beloved is called to life from the darkest regions of the character's soul to fulfill deep psychic needs and desires. At the end of the first story Launfal runs away to happiness with his love, while the falcon-knight enriches his lady's life with a valiant offspring who avenges his untimely death. An aura of the demonic and the pagan mingled with the divine and the Christian envelops these apparitions in both stories. Just like Arawn in "Pwyll", they are otherworld figures, and their ambiguous reality further suggests the mystery of their origins in the first self.

It is difficult to trace the developments in thought that led to the view of the otherwold as a source of doubles — they should be sought in Celtic folklore and mythology, especially in related beliefs about a separate soul which is a visible counterpart of the human. It is easy, however, to see in the context of the above stories why the otherworld is a suitable birthplace for doubles: since the order of experience falls short of the character's plea the otherworld easily becomes the place of fulfillment and of the ideal. All three otherworld figures examined so far are concrete embodiments of the character's aspirations. Arawn is the perfected self, and the beloved in Marie's stories, the actualization of desires denied by objective reality. It is worth noticing that whenever reality meets with the otherworld disaster is at hand: a serious conflict arises after Pwyll meets his ideal counterpart, and the intrusion of actuality into the otherworld bliss costs Launfal his love and the falcon-lover his life. It is actually the conflict between this and the otherworld, denial and fulfillment or reality and the ideal that creates these doubles.

We find another dimension of the role of the beloved as double in Chretien's *Erec and Enide.* Erec's relationship with his double, Enide, indicates that the latter functions as the knight's *mirror of the courtly ideal.* Although Chretien is generally sceptical towards courtly love in *Erec* he capitalizes on the idea of the enobling power of love that inspires the lover to pursue the ideal for his lady's approval. In describing this aspect of courtly love, Goldin explains that since it was impossible to achieve the perfection of the courtly ideal the knight could at least hope to win its approval if that perfection appeared in the figure of the beloved:

> He embodies the word in the lady, and she becomes crucial to his identity. He can nevermore be sufficient to himself; he requires another to contemplate him... The aspiring lady, the lady who is the custodian of his ideal and the love that binds them together, are now one single being. As he is a courtly man he must make the world visible to the lady; he must be bound to a mirror of himself, reflecting his perfected image and judging his present condition, informing all his experiences and revealing the stages of his progress. The lady is the agent of his consciousness. (p. 239).

The metaphor of the mirror image is apt for Enide's function in the story: "In sooth she was made to be looked at; for in her one could

see himself as in a mirror" (p. 6). Enide is a reflector for Erec's self-esteem that spurns him towards knightly perfection. A case in point is his duel with Yder: "While he sat and looked at her, great strength was recruited within him. Her love and beauty inspired him with great boldness" (p. 12). One easily recognizes how conventional all these are in the context of idealized love, but Chretien puts an unusual emphasis on the fact that Enide is a vital extension of Erec's self. Their "oneness", in the writer's words, is manifested in mutuality of sentiments, and in likeness of quality, manner, and customs (p. 20).

This harmony is upset when Erec can no longer have Enide's approval — his mirror image has been clouded by the rumors about his "uxoriousness". Erec's controversial mistreatment of Enide during the difficult period he is trying to regain his reputation, makes some sense if seen as a result of the loss of his self-esteem. For their relationship becomes harmonious once again only after Erec is able to restore his ideal image in Enide's eyes. Chretien illustrated the same point in an antithetical way in the incident of the knight and his lady in the enchanted garden: this lady's role is opposite to Enide's for she has actually forced her knight into a long state of "uxoriousness". In this minor pair of lovers, which could be seen as Erec and Enide's foils, Chretien has depicted the negative possibilities latent in his protagonists' relationship.

The *secret sharer* is another kind of double. He is a character with a more or less autonomous existence on the narrative level, but at the same time he is also a fragment of one mind at the psychological level of meaning (see Rogers, p. 1). Gawain and Lunete, in Chretien's *Yvain*, function along these lines. An interesting situation is created here from the inter-relationships of four people: Yvain, Laudine, and their secret sharers Gawain and Lunete. Gawain's independence as a character in the story, which he earns on his own right, is undercut by a feeling that his existence is somehow inseparable from Yvain's. The ties that link Gawain to Yvain become visible in the similarity of their disposition and the deep friendship that binds the two as a single psychological entity. Gawain's involvement in Yvain's life is mysteriously connected with the latter's progress towards a state of self knowledge and maturity. Throughout the story Yvain struggles to straighten out problems created from his inability to use time correctly or keep promises, his loss of control —he goes mad— and his inexperience in handling matters of

chivalry and love in a balanced way. To a certain extent Gawain is very much alike; however, the mere juxtaposition of his life to Yvain's, works as a catalyst in forcing Yvain to face decisively his own weaknessess. The final adventure in which the two friends, without recognizing each other, fight in single combat, is significant for that. No man wins in the battle, and the reconciliation that follows the discovery of each other's identity marks Yvain's initiation into a new phase of wholeness and cognition.

Similar principles underly the relationship between Laudine and her confidante Lunete. Without underestimating the lively figure that Lunete —more so than her lady— cuts in the story, she also represents an extension of Lunete's personality. The easiness, for example, with which she persuades the recently widowed Laudine to accept Yvain as a husband, or to forgive him for his abandoning her later on, shows that her arguments are nothing less than the vocalization of her lady's own wishes. In addition, the overall design of Laudine's love story is clearly echoed in Lunete's case: at the begining there is a hint that Gawain develops an affair with her while Laudine and Yvain's love is flourishing; later on both men leave their ladies behind and eventually forget their promises — Yvain does not return at the fixed time and Gawain is far away when Lunete is in mortal danger (pp. 211 - 212). Thus, Lunete not only shares her lady's experiences in a most intimate way but their two lives merge into one, drawn by the unexplainable power that binds the first to the second self.

Chretien takes us to an entirely different area of the double in *Lancelot*: the figures resulting from the allegorical decomposition of the hero. Whereas the doubles encountered so far were products of the subconscious imaginatively projected into the objective world, the *allegorical double* is a product of the conscious mind, expressing ethical ideas as they exist in conflict in one person's mind, according to Tymm's distinction (p. 121). In these terms Meleagant and Gawain, both Lancelot's doubles in the story, are not so much fragments of the hero's psyche as they are abstractions of the good and evil potential in him. The method is still that of decomposition but the mode shifts from the psychological to the allegorical now. The conflict between good and evil inside Lancelot is taken out in the open and dramatized at a considerable distance from the hero. As a result the figures of the double in *Lancelot* are presented with greater autonomy

than in *Erec* or *Yvain*, for no psychic interaction takes place between them and the hero.

Criticism has long recognized that Lancelot's repeated subjection to the indignity of numerous incongruous situations questions Chretien's seriousness in depicting him as a hero and a courtly lover. The events leave no doubt that Lancelot is not the perfect hero —although he has the potential— for he is hampered by a monolithic self-interest in an adulterous affair with the queen that actually discredits him. In this highly ironic context, Meleagant, the demoniac force in Lancelot's soul, is presented as a treacherous and ferocious tyrant who lusts after Quinevere. Gawain, representing the potential for perfection, undertakes the same quest as Lancelot —the rescuing of the queen from Meleagant's hands— but his motivation has nothing of the lover's selfish interest in it. One almost expects the conventional ending of medieval allegory: a clash between the two figures resulting in the triumph of good over evil. It nearly turns out this way after Gawain offers to fight Meleagant in Lancelot's place at the final crucial episode; but Lancelot does not accept and slays the giant himself.

How are we to interpret this event? Ideally speaking, the killing of Meleagant should signify Lancelot's victory over the evil side of himself; yet, one can not accept this very easily. Even if this actually was what Chretien had in mind —which no one can claim, since the last part was written by Godefroi de Leigni— the events themselves flatly reject such an interpretation. For there is nothing that indicates any betterment in Lancelot so far, he remains unchanged throughout the story. Thus, the pull of irony is felt strongly at the last comment on Meleagant's death: "Nevermore will this man trouble him: it is all over with him as he falls dead" (p. 359). But is it really "all over"? The work as a whole questions Lancelot's ethos and demolishes all illusions of idealization in courtly love by exposing with relentless realism its dark sides[1].

With the exception of Meleagant, who is an allegorical representation of evil by definition, all the other doubles discussed so far are

1. Gottfried's *Tristan* suggests something similar— it has already received enough attention in connection with the double to need more than some notice here. In my opinion the story indicates that extreme idealism leads into the fragmentation of the object of idealization, forced by the gap that separates the actual from the ideal: the three Isoldes signify Tristan's inability to bridge this gap.

benevolent figures inspite of differences in face or function. Because of that, the modern estimation of the double, mainly as a representation of the "darker sides" of the self, appears contradictory. Keppler notes that this figure embodies the author's shortcomings —the empirical I, the narcissistic I, the mortal I, the finite I, the rejected primitive irrational, the restricting earth-bound rational, the homosexual father-hating mother-desiring I, the I that reflects the impossible complexity and contradiction of his age:

> Embodies the self that he really is as against the self that he would like to be, or at least would like to be thought to be: "pure", outgoing, ageless, immortal, infinite, enlightenedly rational, transcendentally irrational, wholesome, and whole. As a result, though occasionally the roles of the hero and his *Doppelgänger* may be reversed, in which case the latter becomes the *Schützgeist* or Voice of Conscience or some wish fulfillment character, predominantly the second self is a figure of menace and loathing who arouses shame, fear, and often murderous hatred in his counterpart, the first self, with whom the author tends to identify himself (pp. 189 - 190).

It is significant that our Medieval doubles are the exceptions to the rule — the role of the hero and his *Doppelgänger* is here "reversed".

To recapitulate, Arawn, from the legendary material of the *Mabinogion*, comes closest to the original view of the second self as immortal soul, and represents the hero's higher self acting simultaneously as voice of conscience and as redeemer. The otherworld lady and the falcon-lover in Marie's stories are artful expressions of the self's escape from the threats and deprivations of objective reality into the blissful realm of fantasy and wish fulfillment. With the charming Enide Cretien emphasized the narcissistic aspect in the relationship between the two selves, capitalizing on the psychological implications of the courtly view of the beloved as a secularized reflector of the knight's image of self perfection. And the friendly presences of Gawain and Lunete, sharers in the secret lives of the protagonists in *Yvain*, both

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Each Isolde may be taken to signify one aspect of the decomposed entity "woman" in the hero's mind— mother, virgin, object of passion or *femme fatale*, as variously suggested. Only at Tristan's deathbed— in Thomas' part— the maternal Isolde image merges with her daughter's as the healer of the hero; at the end, the virginal Isolde turns into a fatal presence that causes the lover's death.

witness and affect positively the latter's struggle with the complications arising from the demands of love and chivalry. These doubles are far from being embodiments of the undesirable or hated aspects of the self rejected outwardly, as the modern definition of the double wants it. They are rather benevolent, sympathetic figures, expressing the character's aspirations for self perfection, or personal fulfillment through the ideals of chivalry or love.

Such function links these doubles and what they have come to mean to a central belief in the Medieval worldview — the notion that the ideal permeates and gives meaning to the chaotic world of experience and appearances. To begin with, these Medieval figures are an understatement of the division between the two worlds: they suggest inner tensions created from the contrast between an aspired condition of the self and what really is. So far there is nothing unique about this; the same formula explains the way all doubles originate in their creator's mind. What sets these doubles apart as a group, however, is the part of the self that is finally projected through them. As already mentioned, there is a contrast with the host of negative doubles appearing in the literature of the last two hundred years: the Medieval doubles examined here are embodiments of that part of the self longing for the order and harmony implicit in the ideal, and for the self's restoration to its original wholeness[1]. The reconciliation between the warring elements of the self is shown to take place in the fictional reality of the stories in various degrees and ways.

The example of *Lancelot* seems to contradict all others, but only if it is not set into the right perspective. Any doubts that we may have about Lancelot as an exemplary knight, or the fact that Meleagant's death is far from persuading us that the hero ever achieves harmony within himself, should remind us that we are actually dealing with an ironically inverted situation aiming at presenting courtly love as a pseudo-ideal. Chretien is here criticizing a particular system of love with moral and socio-political implications; Lancelot's shortcomings, therefore, can not be taken as the writer's wider rejection of the ideals

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1. It is interesting to compare with Krauss' thesis: the double, a product of the subjective idealism of the German Romantics, originates from the conflict between the self's "yearning for the infinite," and opposing reality. But the situation is entirely reversed: it is always the hero that fights at the side of the Ideal while his double embodies some form of opposition of the Real.

of chivalry or love as sources of self realization and fulfillment. Besides other things, the function of the double in his "straight" works provides ample proof for that. In all then the examples but *Lancelot* —for good reasons— the events point towards a harmonious integration of the self as the result of its adventurous encounter with the second self. This "happy" outcome is an imaginative resolution of the underlying conflict between the ideal and the real within the self, and also what gives these Medieval doubles their special meaning.

In his famous essay "The Double as Immortal Self", Otto Rank concludes that the modern man's rejection of the irrational and instinctual life forces is mainly responsible for turning the double from a symbol of hope —expressing originally the primitive man's aspirations for an immortal existence— into an ominous figure of death and horror. The suggestion is that differences of meaning in the history of the double reflect profound differences in cultural perspective. For although all doubles commonly originate from some kind of conflict within the writer, their meaning is shaped in each case by the writer's mental attitude towards the realities of his life and times. This fact can not be ignored in any serious attempt to define comprehensively the meaning of the Medieval double and the relation it stands to its counterparts of later or earlier periods in literature. This paper has not covered enough ground to allow for more than a tentative conclusion; the need remains to look into more examples from the whole area of Medieval literature, and to settle many ambiguities before a case can be made about the general principles governing the appearance and the meaning of the second self in this period. There is one thing, however, that has become clear from the discoveries of this paper and which can be a lead to further investigations: apart from differences due to the idiosyncracies of individual writers, the doubling in "Pwyll", and in Marie's and Chretien's stories suggests a context in which contradictions within the self are resolved by being absorbed into a larger vision of ideal order. The Medieval writers' ability to sustain such a vision accounts for both the benevolent nature of their doubles and for the gap that separates them from the malignant figures that people the shattered worlds of later fictions.