

## *Freud's Uncanny: The Role of the Double in*

### *Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights*

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Many literary works employ the theme of the double or doppelganger, a device which enables us to examine and explore the conflicts of the personality. The double expresses the opposition between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, reason and instinct. Freud argues that, through the double, one is able to extend oneself; having a doppelganger meant that one was indestructible. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason acts as a double for Jane, representing two sides of one Self; similarly, Isabella Linton's docile and meek character casts her as a double for the passionate Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*. Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay, "The Uncanny," offers important insights on this topic; as a direct response to the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," Freud explores Hoffman's *The Sandman* as an archetypal source for both literary and psychological doubling. The uncanny is associated with a series of related topics such as telepathy, double or doppelganger, death, madness, animism, and claustrophobia. Freud argues that "the uncanny" occurs when something alien is presented in a familiar context or setting or vice versa. For the purposes of this discussion, the terms "doubling" and "alter ego" are interchangeable.

The double refers to a representation of the ego that can assume various forms: shadow, reflection, portrait, and twin. The figure of the double dates back to primitive civilizations, as shown in legends and literature (Zivkovic 122-23); it is essential to Freud's concept of the uncanny, "which appears in every shape and in every degree of development" (Freud 371). Freud borrows an explanation of "the uncanny" from Otto Rank's investigations of "the connections which the double has with reflections in

mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death" (370).

Freud believed that the double often stems from some kind of repressed thought, thus it is an emotion far different than that of fear and deserves another name; by choosing "the uncanny," he associates the experience of the double with the ego's evolutionary development. This is based on the idea that, from man's evolutionary beginnings, the ego has developed in humans gradually, and through this evolution it has developed the double in many forms to protect itself from dying off. In terms of the alter ego, Freud believed that this early stage of psychological evolution was one of overbearing narcissism, the "old surmounted narcissism of earliest times" (370). The ideal being was in love with itself, thus it created the double in a futile denial of the power of death. As humans evolved, the double, rather than protecting against death, reversed itself and became the "harbinger of death" (372), and it is this dynamic that is associated with "the uncanny." According to Freud, man is subconsciously aware of his mortality and finds expression for its inevitability through arts and letters. Thus, in literature, the reason for the use of a mirror to develop the double becomes apparent. The image reflected in the mirror satisfies the soul's narcissistic cravings for a double in order to defend itself from dying out.

### *The "Other Woman" as doppelganger in Jane Eyre*

The literary double was a common phenomenon in the Victorian Age, most famously seen in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Using a double or foil "serves to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament of the protagonist" (Abrams 225); it also implies that there is a deeper level, a hidden side, to the protagonist that the double possibly embodies. A divided self composed of a true self hidden from society and a false self displayed to society is an idea which doubling might lead to: "As Clair Rosenfeld points out, 'the novelist who consciously or unconsciously exploits psychological Doubles' frequently juxtaposes 'two characters, the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self'" (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 360).

It is in *Jane Eyre's* red room episode that the issue of doubling is first explored. That Jane has a counterpart who acts out her own mental tumult is foreshadowed in the passage when she is looking into the mirror (Gilbert and Gubar 340). As she gazes at herself in the dim light, Jane muses: "I had to cross before the looking glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed" (Bronte, *JE* 9). Jane is treated like a "mad cat": "If you don't sit still, you must be tied down" (7), Bessie warns—an admonition having a deeper meaning than is obvious at first. Literally, if Jane does not calm down inside the red room, Bessie will have to tie her down; but the deeper meaning hints that if Jane does not calm down throughout the rest of her life, society will metaphorically tie her down. Such is the case with Jane's double, Bertha Mason Rochester, who is locked up because she cannot "sit still."

Throughout the novel, there is a mysterious presence in Thornfield Hall that creates an eerie atmosphere of secrecy and concealment. A woman's laugh is described by Jane as "curious...distinct, formal, mirthless...as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard" (Bronte, *JE* 92-93); when Rochester's bed is set on fire, the laugh is "demoniac...low, suppressed, and deep" (129). Richard Mason, injured while visiting his sister in the mysterious attic room, is nursed by Jane while Rochester fetches the doctor: "She bit me," cries Mason, "She worried me like a tigress" (208), an image recalling Jane's earlier depiction as a "mad cat." Later, Mason says "she sucked the blood; she said she'd drain my heart" (209). Halfway through the novel, it is finally revealed that there is a "madwoman living in the attic" of Thornfield Hall (Gilbert and Gubar 355), and that this woman is none other than Rochester's wife. Bertha Mason Rochester, a once beautiful and wealthy Creole, has been declared insane and locked in the attic by Rochester, who hopes his secret will never be revealed.

The function of Bertha Mason in the novel is a complex one. It seems likely that Bertha Mason is meant to be Jane's alter ego. She can be viewed as both an external double and a projected double to Jane (Lewis); she is what Jane could be if she marries Rochester on unequal terms. Milica Zivkovic asserts, "as an imagined figure, a soul, a shadow, a ghost or a mirror reflection that exists in a dependent relation to the original, the double pursues the subject as his second self and makes him feel as himself and the other at the same time" (122). By using Bertha Mason as Jane's double, Charlotte Bronte



explores Jane's struggle against the entrapment of marriage and her relation to madness. The main confrontation in the novel is not between Jane and Rochester but between Jane and Bertha: when the two come face to face, Jane must confront her own "imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion, and rage'" (Gilbert and Gubar 339).

The maniacal Bertha Mason actually personifies that part of Jane's personality that longs to live free but is oppressed by society. Drew Lamonica notes, "in many ways, Bertha is the adult personification of the child Jane at Gateshead: she is the passionate dependent who must be restrained; the 'bad animal' who must be locked away; the 'heterogeneous thing' Jane sees in the mirror before her wedding, which recalls Jane's own distorted image in the red room's mirror" (83). Throughout her young life, Jane lives under some form of tyranny. Whether she passes her days as an abused and unwanted ward, a mistreated pupil, or a subdued governess, she never feels truly free. Although she outwardly accepts her lot in life, she often wonders to herself why she must endure pain and why people oppress her; locked in the red room, she asks herself why she is "always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned" (Bronte, *JE* 10) and asserts that her treatment is unjust. Unfortunately, she cannot escape oppression but only alter its form by moving from place to place, each subsequent spatial environment reflecting her internal evolution and psychological maturation.

Bertha Mason's life epitomizes oppression. Locked away in Thornfield's third storey, her only freedom comes when her caregiver, Grace Poole, falls into a drunken sleep, and she can sneak around the house. Bertha is locked as tightly in her secluded room as Jane is locked into her subordinate role; Drew Lamonica states, "while Bertha is victimized by the Rochesters and the Masons for her money and imprisoned in the third storey of Thornfield, Jane is comparably victimized by the Reed family because she has no money, imprisoned in the red room of Gateshead" (84).

Bertha is obviously meant to contrast with Jane dramatically and, in Rochester's vivid description of the two women, the distinction is made clear: "Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk" (Bronte, *JE* 290). According to Pat Macpherson, "By juxtaposing these two women [characters], Bronte creates subliminal comparisons, connections, even communications between them, and the reader feels or intimates these as the delicious tension of the

gothic, the extraordinarily pleasurable fear called the uncanny" (11). For Rochester, Jane is everything that is rational, pure, and good, whereas Bertha is passionate, tainted, and beastly. Or, as Gilbert and Gubar explain: "Jane, after all, is poor, plain, little, pale, neat, and quiet, while Bertha is rich, large, florid, sensual, and extravagant" (361). The two women are opposites in many ways, yet Bertha is also Jane's double: she represents Jane's urge to give in to passions, to rebel, to act like a mad cat and not to live up to Rochester's expectations. Bertha also represents the loss of self that Jane fears. The double acts as a representation of a divided self: primarily, it is this sense of the divided self that is reflected in the pervasive image of the doppelganger. In other words, the use of a double for a character symbolizes the idea that the protagonist is somehow internally divided and that this division is mirrored in the (external) double (Zivkovic 123-24). Thus, Bertha's extravagance and Jane's repression are tested through the medium of anger:

Every one of Bertha's appearances...has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part. Jane's feelings of "hunger, rebellion, and rage" on the battlements, for instance, were accompanied by Bertha's "low, slow, ha! ha!" and "eccentric murmurs." Jane's apparently secure response to Rochester's apparently egalitarian sexual confidences was followed by Bertha's attempt to incinerate the master in his bed...Jane's anxieties about her marriage, and in particular her fears of her own alien "robed and veiled" bridal image, were objectified by the image of Bertha in a "white and straight" dress. (Gilbert and Gubar 360)

This passage makes a central claim: that disguised or latent feelings in Jane are made manifest through Bertha. If Jane can be perceived as an angel in the Thornfield house, Bertha represents its demon; both rebel against their containment within "family enforced prisons." Bertha replays Jane's childhood rebellion, when she rebuked Mrs. Reed "like something mad, or like a fiend"; the mad Bertha burns Rochester's bed and house "in defiance of his control." Both Jane and Bertha draw blood from their blood relations,

Jane in her retaliation against John Reed and Bertha in her attack on her brother Richard (Lamonica 84).

Bertha represents Jane's repressed self, "Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead" (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Jane is torn between her love for Rochester and the social conformity required of a "good" woman; but after the encounter with her doppelganger Bertha, Jane knows that she cannot stay at Thornfield Hall and leaves Rochester and the madwoman behind. Here, Jane behaves rationally, refusing either to compromise her integrity through bigamy or to be the mistress of this "sultan." She fears ending up like Bertha—if not literally trapped in an attic then in the red room of Victorian patriarchy as Rochester's mistress. At the end of the novel, after Thornfield and Bertha are destroyed, Jane is financially independent, and Rochester is symbolically castrated by blindness, the two can finally marry. In other words, the patriarchal house of Thornfield Hall and the madwoman trapped inside must be destroyed before Jane can marry Rochester on equal terms. Like the chestnut tree split by lightning, Jane remains rooted in her own integrity by refusing to compromise herself—even, perhaps especially, for love. "To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company" (Bronte, *JE* 445-46)—indicates that the couple are soul-mates, an aspect of doubling more fully developed in *Wuthering Heights*.

### *The Soul-mate as Double in Wuthering Heights*

In the same year as *Jane Eyre*'s publication, Charlotte's sister Emily published *Wuthering Heights* under the pseudonym, Ellis Bell. The novel with its Gothic aspects plays with the idea of doubles throughout the story. The rich and lavish world of Thrushcross Grange inhabited by the Lintons offers a dramatic contrast to the stormy and intense world of *Wuthering Heights* where Heathcliff and Catherine grow up. In the words of Gilbert and Gubar, "People with decent Christian names (Catherine, Nelly, Edgar, Isabella) inhabit a landscape in which also dwell people with strange animal or nature names (Hindley, Hareton, Heathcliff)" (259). Likewise, Emily Bronte distinguishes between the passionate and strong-willed Catherine Earnshaw and the ostensibly meek and docile Isabella Linton. Along with the use of doubling in the novel,



Bronte employs the idea of madness to show Catherine's mental deterioration once separated from her other half, Heathcliff.

As a child, Catherine is compared negatively to her counterpart, Isabella Linton. Despite Isabella's docile characterization, the window scene at the Grange is notable for her frantic hysteria, as she and Edgar quarrel over their pet dog. The absurdity of the scene and the two spoiled children's reaction is commented on by Heathcliff: "The idiots!...We laughed outright at the petted things, we did despise them!" (Bronte, *WH* 43). This scene contrasts dramatically with Catherine's reaction when the Linton's bull-dog attacks her: "She did not yell out—no!" Heathcliff admiringly tells Nelly. "She would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow!" (43). Here, Bronte establishes a radically different image of the two girls than is generally assumed: Isabella is hysterical while Catherine remains dignified; Isabella is weak and spoiled while Catherine is strong and brave. It is also interesting to note that on both occasions, a dog is involved, an animal Isabella later associates with Heathcliff, "the mad dog." As Catherine's double, Isabella "serves to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament" of Catherine (Abrams 225).

When Isabella's rebellious streak prompts her to elope with Heathcliff, Catherine knows that she will never be able to deal with him nor could Heathcliff ever love someone like Isabella. "Isabella's bookish upbringing has prepared her to fall in love with (of all people) Heathcliff" (Senf 92) but not to deal with the consequences. Once again, Bronte shows us the difference between the two women: Isabella is fragile, with fine manners; she is shy and timid in the presence of Heathcliff and represents civilization, while Catherine is wild, cruel, and represents untamed nature. Isabella can be tamed by Heathcliff; Catherine will not.

Catherine's self is torn between what she desires and what she obtains. When Edgar proposes to Catherine, she accepts and tells Nelly that the reason she loves Edgar is because "he's handsome, and pleasant to be with...And because he's young and cheerful...And, because he loves me" (Bronte, *WH* 74). Finally, one of her main motives for entering into a marriage with Edgar is revealed: "And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband" (74). As Nelly quickly realizes, Catherine's motives are completely superficial,

and her love for Edgar is shallow; but Catherine also feels she is making a wrong decision by marrying Edgar: "in whichever place the soul lies—in my soul, and in my heart, I'm convinced that I'm wrong" (76)—wrong because of her love for Heathcliff. She significantly differentiates between the two men by saying that her love for Edgar is "like the foliage in the wood. Time will change it," while her love for Heathcliff "resembles the eternal rocks beneath." Dramatically, Catherine exclaims: "Nelly, I am Heathcliff!" (77).

Clearly, the Catherine who dies is not the Catherine from the beginning of the novel; Nelly tells Heathcliff, "I'll inform you Catherine Linton is as different now from your old friend Catherine Earnshaw, as that young lady is different from me" (Bronte, *WH* 143). By marrying a man she does not love instead of running free on the moors with the man she does love, Catherine Earnshaw is divided into two people. She has a double identity: what Edgar and Isabella see is a kind and polite, sweet and caring woman; what her family sees is one always ready to hurt. If someone thwarts her, she wants to properly punish that person. The Lintons never see this rougher side to her, except for one occasion, when Ellen Dean does not leave the room quickly enough: "supposing Edgar could not see her, [Catherine] snatched the cloth from my hand, and pinched me, with a prolonged wrench, very spitefully on the arm....She stamped her foot, wavered a moment, and then irresistibly impelled by the naughty spirit within her, slapped me on the cheek: a stinging blow that filled both eyes with water" (61). Although Edgar has been forewarned by this display, he fails to take the hint.

As a result of her progressive madness, Catherine is subject to frenzies; after a confrontation between Heathcliff and Edgar, Nelly finds her on the bedroom floor: "There she lay dashing her head against the arm of the sofa, and grinding her teeth, so that you might fancy she would crash them to splinters...her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck, and arms standing out preternaturally" (Bronte, *WH* 114). Catherine isolates herself in her bedroom and refuses all food in protest of Edgar and Heathcliff's behavior towards each other. Her theatrics seem staged to provoke a reaction out of Nelly and Edgar. Yet, at times, real madness does overtake Catherine, as in the scene in which she does not recognize her own face in the mirror. When she asks Nelly, "Don't you see that face?" Nelly tries to reason with



her; but "say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl." Despite Nelly's attempt to cover the object of distress, Catherine continues to be upset about the face in the mirror: "It's behind there still!...And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone!" (119).

The scene is reminiscent of Jane's inability to recognize the white face in the mirror in the red room and later, at Thornfield Hall, to distinguish her bridal reflection. The face that Catherine "sees in the mirror is neither Gothic nor alien—though she is alienated from it—but hideously familiar, and...proof that her madness may really equal sanity. Catherine sees in the mirror an image of who and what she has really become in the world's terms: 'Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange'" (Gilbert and Gubar 283). In other words, Catherine does not recognize herself because Edgar's wife is not truly who she is; her sense of who she is—the other half of Heathcliff—is not reflected in the mirror.

While Catherine, led by social ambition, marries a man that she does not love, Isabella marries Heathcliff to spite Cathy and take possession of Wuthering Heights. Drew Lamonica states, "Isabella's marriage and movement from Thrushcross Grange to Wuthering Heights parallels Catherine's: the two families exchange their daughters/sisters, though Isabella's marriage is not approved by her brother as Catherine's is approved by Hindley" (109). The theme of a divided self is emphasized throughout, even to the end of the novel, where we read that three headstones can be found on the slope of the moor: Edgar's and Heathcliff's, with Catherine's in between—in death as in life, her soul divided between the two men who broke her heart.

The character Bertha Mason represents Jane's repressed self and manifests her anger against Rochester. This doppelganger finds expression when Jane's "darkest" double is replaced by another kind of double: Rochester as her soul-mate. Similarly, if Heathcliff can be considered the main protagonist of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Earnshaw is the dominant female spirit that haunts the novel. But as a double for both the ill-fated Isabella Linton and for her own soul-mate, Heathcliff, Catherine's divided self never achieves satisfactory resolution.

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