The Double in Twentieth Century Women's Poetry

by Jean Mallinson

A study of the Double or Doppelganger in literature written by women would properly begin with Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and proceed through Emily Bronte's poetry, Wuthering Heights, Goblin Market and on into the twentieth century. However, I have chosen to limit this essay to the Double as it appears in twentieth century poetry written in English by women and to speculate about the possible reasons why, for the woman as woman and more particularly for the woman as writer, the figure of the Double should occur with obsessive frequency.

The Double or Doppelganger has its origins in folklore as shadow, twin, tempter and became prominent in literary modes with the Romantic movement. I shall take it as axiomatic, because it cannot be proved, only demonstrated, that the Double in literature stands for unlived life, for the unmanifest side of one's nature: the latent or unexpressed embodied as Other. The relation with the Double can be one of conflict, fascination, pity, repulsion, fear, sometimes, though rarely, co-operation. The Double is always a numinous figure, a focus of power. My thesis is that even now in the late twentieth century the complex woman-as-woman, socially defined, is in conflict --in idea and often in actuality--with the notion of artist, poet, writer, and that the prevalence of this conflict leads to the appearance of the Double

in the poems of an astonishingly diverse number of poets. The fact that the Double is consciously manifest, is a sign that the awareness of her presence is growing. The poems considered here embody the possible creative artistic use of a dilemma and, by making it manifest, suggests its possible resolution.

There are a number of familiar psychoanalytical terms for the other in the self: in Freudian parlance, the id or alter ego, or idealized self-image; in Jungian, the shadow or anima--in the case of a woman, the animus. No rigorous use of either of these systems is employed here, but a dream sequence recorded by Eleanor Bertine, a disciple of Jung, illustrates in a graphic, albeit somewhat simplistic, manner the conflict which is the subject of this paper:

> The dreamer, a beautiful woman, both intelligent and emotionally intense, was a physician who had given up practice in order to fill the obligations of wife and mother. She tried to fit all of herself into the limits of a conventional home and family but soon became restless and neurotic. She dreamed:
>
> 'A woman dressed in cerulean blue, followed by two beautiful children, went into the portal of a sort of feudal manor house and up the wide stairway to a large sun-room. Presently I saw a woman in black, with a deeply tragic face, enter the house and go up to another room. As I watched she went over to a window, hesitated a moment before it, and then deliberately threw herself out into the stone courtyard below.'

Here we have a picture of idealized motherhood. The cerulean blue in which the first figure was robed suggests the sky, making her the Mater Celestis, the Heavenly Mother. The children were beautiful, the room large and sunny, and it would seem that all was well. However, we must note that the house was a feudal manor house. It does not belong to the life of the present but of a past era. The dreamer associated it with a conventional form of marriage, in line with her being-ing up; that is, in limiting herself to the four walls of the house, she had not allowed scope for her very active intelligence. An essential part of one's nature cannot be denied without serious consequences. This repressed side is shown in the tragic woman who commits suicide. A second dream occurred a few years later after the dreamer had gone back to a modified form of marriage, combined with some medical practice, which she found compatible with the just claims of her family. It ran as follows:

'I was in my own house. A woman in a blue jerkin came in, then another friend in a red jerkin. I like both of them immensely and was happy to have them in my house.'

> In this later dream she was in her own house, her individual adaptation, rather than in a feudal manor house. To her, blue represented spirituality, thought, and the friend who wore the jerkin of that colour was another woman physician of whom she was very fond. Red, she said, is the colour of fire and blood. It is warm, alive, emotional, sensuous. The friend in the red jerkin was happily married and had several children. Again two women, as in the previous dream, represent the two aspects of herself; but now they are together with her in an atmosphere of congeniality and friendship. The conflict between them has entirely disappeared. Now they are both complementary parts of her own individuality, and she adjusts the claims of each in accordance with her unique and essential selfhood.(1)

Successful case histories are like fairy stories with happy endings; they are perhaps the romances of the middle class. The one above turns out rather pat and begs certain questions such as what the "just claims" of a family may be said to be. But it documents in another context a pattern which appears frequently in poetry.

As suggested earlier, the woman as Double is an old presence in European literature --in folk tales, romance and, later Romantic fiction. Typically she appears as the maiden: beldame or temptress: virgin, occasionally embodied in one form, as in Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale, but more often as a dyad-- Odette-Odile, Christabel-Geraldine. But all these instances are projections of female qualities from a male point of view. What is interesting in literature written by women is that the Double is experienced as a presence or presences within one psyche. The Double is sometimes a temporary figure, recurrent or transient, but more characteristically it is always present, either manifest or latent. The prototype of the Double in mythology is Persephone, who combines the bright and the shady lady, queen of the day and night by turns; Kore, maiden, in the light of day, and Dis, queen of the night.

There is one example of late nineteenth-century fiction, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper, which embodies in an exemplary manner the dilemma of the woman and her Double. One cannot speak of "invention" in the traditional literary sense with regard to this story, because it has the authenticity of spontaneous experience. But in the light of the feminist critique of psychotherapy, I would like to view the story not as an example of pathology, but as a delineation of coping or survival techniques, through fantasy and projection, by a woman whose attempts to become whole were viewed as pathological by a society whose definition of womanhood had grown cramped and small.

The projection, in this story, of the

"other" onto a pattern in the wallpaper is particularly poignant because even now interior design, "decor," is one of the areas of minor--because domestic--creative expertise in which women are both permitted and enjoined to become adept. There are many women, I suspect, who first project themselves into, and eventually feel imprisoned by, their wallpaper, their rugs, their patterned sofas. The Yellow Wallpaper is tersely narrated in the first person by a woman suffering from what would now be called a post-partum depression, called in the fiction a "temporary nervous depression--a slight hysterical tendency."(2) She suffers from extreme fatigue, caused, in her view, by her resistance to the strict regimen imposed by her husband, a physician, and by the subterfuge she must resort to, to write without her husband's knowledge, and by her efforts to control herself in his presence. He installs her against her will in a room which she detests and she becomes fascinated by the images in the delapidated wall paper, which is patterned in "lame uncertain curves" which "suddenly commit suicide--plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions." (3) "There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down." (4)

> But in the places where it isn't faded. . . I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.(5)

Gradually she begins to perceive the amorphous shape as "a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern."(6) The surface pattern is partly a strangling fungoid growth and partly bars, which the imprisoned woman behind shakes in her efforts to free herself. The woman telling the story begins an exciting, secretive project: to strip the paper in order to set the woman free:

> As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.
> I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper. (7)

Finally she locks herself in the room and finishes her task, in effect becoming the woman, deformed by her imprisonment, now freed from the strangulating patterns on the wall:

> I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!
> It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!(8)

When her husband discovers her she keeps on creeping and defies him:

> "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"(9)

The denouement is poignantly ironic: the teller of the story thinks herself to be free at last, but she is in fact,

within the fiction, reduced to a state of apparent insanity which makes her even more completely a victim. In this tale, the Other, the woman imprisoned in the wallpaper, represents not the unlived life of the persona, but a projection of her desperate predicament, her enslavement and subservience. She has stripped away the surface pattern of pretence, of pleasing and conforming, and has visibly become what she inwardly knows herself to be. But since this is private knowledge, not knowledge sustained by the authority of social consensus, her acting out of what she feels to be her real condition is viewed not as an authentic statement but as a symptom of madness.(10)

In most of the poems considered here, the identification with the Other is not so devastatingly complete as it is in The Yellow Wallpaper, but many of the elements in the story--feelings of imprisonment or immobility, the discrepancy between appearance and reality, the sense of secret, unshared knowledge, ambivalence about identification with the Other, the death or destruction of the unmanifest self occur in many of the poems. The narrator in The Yellow Wallpaper is a frustrated writer and many of the poems I have chosen reflect the conflict in the woman as artist. But this is implicitly a prototype of the potential conflict in any woman, occasioned by the arbitrariness of the social imperatives which define for her both her nature and what she must and may not do. The fact that these imperatives have been by and large interiorized by her forms the basis for her experience of the conflict as inner rather than as an opposition to a force set over or against herself. As Erica Jong says in "Alcestis on the Poetry Circuit:"

> The best slave
> does not need to be beaten.
> She beats herself.
>
> Not with a leather whip,
> or with sticks or twigs,
> not with a blackjack
> or a billyclub,
> but with the fine whip
> of her own tongue
> & the subtle beating
> of her mind
> against her mind.
>
> For who can hate her half so well
> as she hates herself?
> & who can match the finesse
> of her self-abuse?
>
> Years of training
> are required for this.
> Twenty years
> of subtle self-indulgence,
> self-denial;
> until the subject
> thinks herself a queen
> & yet a beggar--
> both at the same time.
>
> . . .
>
> Though she is quick to learn
> & admittedly clever,
> her natural doubt of herself
> should make her so weak
> that she dabbles brilliantly

in half a dozen talents
& thus embellishes
but does not change
our life.

If she's an artist
& comes close to genius,
the very fact of her gift
should cause her such pain
that she will take her own life
rather than best us.

& after she dies, we will cry
& make her a saint.(11)

Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own, points to this dichotomy as an historical disjunction between fact and fiction:

> Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean: splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; . . . . But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten, and flung about the room.
> A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger.(12)

In exploring these dimensions of the Double as they are expressed in contemporary poetry by women I wish also to draw attention to some women poets, and they are legion, whose work might be better known. One of these poets is Dilys Laing, a poet born in Canada in 1906, a precocious writer who spent her adult life in the United States. Three of her poems explore the Double in various guises. In "Venus Petrified" the poet is both herself and the immobilized, crumbling statue of Venus in the garden:

Swept by the fury to go through that door
I try to move, but stand from foot to brow
rigid. My blood has run and left no stain.

I am that statue at the garden's end
which, crazed, and scarred with lichen, keeps the form
of Venus startled, hands poised to defend
what nothing threatens. I struggle to unbend
arms that the noonday sun can never warm.(13)

She has become for a nightmare moment not lithe and quick but lithic and rigid, anachronistic, archaic, yet unable to change. In Dilys Laing's poems the Double is always sinister, a threatening presence which can entrap, but which can only be glimpsed, not faced, as in the numinous poem "Ego":

Vague, submarine, my giant twin

swims under me, a girl of shade
who mimics me. She's caught within
a chickenwire of light that's laid
by netted waves on floor of sand.
I dare not look. I squeeze my lids
against that apparition and
her nightmare of surrounding squids,
her company of nounless fright.
She is the unknown thing I am
and do not wish to see. In flight
I swim the way my comrades swam
and hide among them. Let me keep
their safety's circle for a charm
against that sister in the deep
who, huge and mocking, plans me
harm.(14)

The Other in this poem is the shady twin, unspeakable, who cannot be faced or named, who lives in the deeps. Protection from her can be sought by conforming, by swimming "the way my comrades swam." In "The Double Goer" a woman takes "a train/away from herself;" she "futures on/away from her own presence." She dreams of moving into adventure, strength and glory, but when she arrives at "her station" her family is there to meet her.

She faced the crowd and cried:
I love you all but one:
the one who wears my face.
She is the one I fled from.

They said: you took her with you
and brought her back again.
You look sick. Welcome home.(15)

The Double as mask, persona, "the one who wears my face," cannot be escaped, cannot be loved. The woman is imprisoned in her, she is what others recognize and welcome, the outward and visible form, the woman who, in Laing's poem, "Lot's Daughters" has hardened into salt.

As in "Ego," the Double is most often embodied as sister, twin, complementary or contrasting, or related by symbiosis. Denise Levertov's poem "In Mind" begins:

There's in my mind a woman
of innocence, unadorned but

fair-featured, and smelling of
apples or grass. . . .

. . . and she

is kind and very clean without
ostentation--
but she has
no imagination.

In contrast to her is the:

turbulent moon-ridden girl

or old woman, or both,
dressed in opals and rags, feathers

and torn taffeta,
who knows strange songs--
but she is not kind.(16)

The two women dress differently: one is a "utopian shift," the other in opals, rags, feathers, torn taffeta. One has no imagination, the other "knows strange songs." But the crucial difference is that one is kind and the other is not kind. She is not unkind, she has no malevolence, she simply is not at the disposal of others. She will not be accommodating or nourishing, she will not play the role of the Dame Kindness of Sylvia Plath's poem(17)or of The

Angel in the House of Virginia Woolf's essay.(18) A similar dichotomy is described in Levertov's poem "The Woman:"

It is the one in homespun
you hunger for
when you are lonesome;

the one in crazy feathers
dragging opal chains in dust
wearies you
. . . Alas,
they are not two but one,

pierce the flesh of one, the other
halfway across the world, will
shriek,
her blood will run. Can you endure
life with two brides, bridegroom?
(19)

The bride as Double turns up in Adrienne Rich's poem "A Primary Ground:"

And this is how you live: a woman,
children
protect you from the abyss
you move near, turning on the news
. . .

It all seems innocent enough, this
sin
of wedlock: you, your wife, your
children
. . .

Protection is the genius of your
house
the pressure of the steam iron
flattens the linen cloth again
. . .

Emptiness
thrust like a batch of letters to
the furthest
dark of a drawer
But there is something else:
your wife's twin sister, speechless
is dying in the house
You and your wife take turns
carrying up the trays,
understanding her case, trying to
make her understand.(20)

Carol Rumens' "Houses by Day" explores the theme of "A Primary Ground:" the manifest wife who conforms and the real woman, the buried self, who is confined to an attic:

I have lived here an impenetrable
year
with only a mirror to smile at and
a hot water system
for an echo. . . .

when I woke in our junk-shop double
bed
from a broken dream to an indisso-
luble law.
The tight ring dragged on my thick-
ening finger.

The trauma of marriage swallowed me.
I became
a ghost whose buried rage hoists
furniture,
whose stultified self rattles in
the attic.

Adjusted now, I have learned my
role is to wait
for the key in the lock, to serve
the first clean kiss
and light up at a flick of my
clitoris.(21)

"Ad," another sinister little poem by Carol Rumens, uses the idiom of popular advertising to describe the imitation or ersatz woman, the magazine image who stands in for the real woman:

> Depressed, dispirited,
> tired of trying?
> . . .
> Don't despair!
> Now you can make
> your own amazing
> Krazy Kathy;
> all you need
> is in this chic
> zip-fashioned, jet-propelled,
> super deluxe,
> persona kit.
> Look into it, there's
> riches for you.
> A genuine girl
> from a peel-pack, she'll
> rise and shine.(22)

This dream girl also carries the destructiveness of buried rage:

> Radiant, smiling,
> she will rise up,
> reach out her arms
> and clasp you tight,
> radiant, smiling,
> and you will freeze
> as she starts to devour you
> like perfect peas.(23)

In Denise Levertov's "An Embroidery," as in her two earlier poems, the dichotomy is not between the authentic and the spurious, but between two sides of one nature, both of which make a genuine claim, though the poet seems fairly clearly to identify more with one side than the other. The two aspects are embodied in the folk tale images of Rose Red and Snow White: Rose Red, preparing suppers of "honey and apples, curds and whey," has an "ardent, joyful, compassionate heart;" she banks the fires and dreams of babies. Snow White has grey eyes and looks deep into the dark forest. Rose Red marries the prince who will step from the bear's hide; Snow White waits for "that other, her bridegroom," an ambiguous presence whom her longing will call forth in response to itself. (24)

Sometimes the Double appears in poetry in the guise of a figure from mythology, as in Gwen MacEwen's "Lillith:"

> Have no doubt that oneday she will
> be reborn
> horrendous, with coiling horns,
> pubis a blaze of black stars
> and armpits a swampy nest for
> dinosaurs.
> But meanwhile
> she lurks in her most impenetrable
> disguise--
> as me--
> trying to make holes in my brain
> or come forth from my eyes.
> And I have felt
> her mindless mind within my mind
> urging me to call down heaven with
> a word,
> avenge some ancient wrong against
> her kind
> or be the crazed Salome who danced
> for blood.(25)

Lllllth, in this poem, is the Double as possessor, in-dweller, using the living woman as vehicle. In Sylvia Plath's "Lorelei," the sirens are sisters, muse figures, promising death and wholeness:

They sing
Of a world more full and clear

Than can be. sisters, your song
Bears a burden too weighty
For the whorled ear's listening
Beyond the mundane order
Your voices lay seige. You lodge
On the pitched reefs of nightmare,

Promising sure harbourage;
. . .

O river, I see drifting

Deep in your flux of silver
Those great goddesses of peace.
Stone, stone, ferry me down there.
(26)

Plath's poem "Two Sisters of Persephone" presents a variation of the Rose Red-Snow White pair:

Two girls there are: within the house
one sits; the other, without.
Daylong a duet of shade and light
Plays between these.

One has a root-pale, meagre frame, the other is "bronzed as earth." "Lulled near a bed of poppies," she "Freely becomes sun's bride" and "bears a king." The other, "Turned bitter/ And sallow as any lemon," "goes graveward with flesh laid waste, /Worm-husbanded, yet no woman."(27)

The conflict between the maiden and the whore embodied in one woman is described in Plath's "Strumpet Song:"

With white frost gone
And all green dreams not worth much,
After a lean day's work
Time comes round for that foul slut:
Mere bruit of her takes our street
Until every man,
red, pale or dark
veers to her slouch.
Mark, I cry, that mouth
made to do violence on,
that seamed face
Askew with blotch, dint, scar
Struck by each dour year.
Walks there not some such one man
As can spare breath
To patch with brand of love this rank grimace
Which out from black tarn, ditch and cup
Into my own most chaste eyes
Looks up.(28)

The Double can appear as the in-dweller who speaks through the poet's mouth, as the wife upstairs or the maiden in the tower, as the Other who stares back from reflecting surfaces, as the sister who is born with us, as the muse-temptress, or, as in Erica Jong's "Why I Died" as the elusive, fugitive, figure who disappears from rooms just as we enter, whose voice is overheard just as we open the door:

She is the woman I follow.

Whenever I enter a room
She has been there--
. . .
She is no virgin & no madonna.
Her eyelids are purple.
She sleeps around.

Wherever I go I meet her lovers
Wherever I go I hear their stories.
Wherever I go they tell me
different versions of her suicide.
. . .

She is the woman I follow.
I wear her cast-off clothes.
She is my mother, my daughter.
She is writing this suicide note.(29)

In some poems about the Double there is a sense of balance, actual or potential, or of escape, through identification with the free one, but often, especially in the poems of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, there is a feeling of impasse, a struggle to the death. In Sexton's poem, "The Other," the Double is not sister, it is masculine or neuter, it is malevolent and consuming:

Under my bowels, yellow with smoke,
it waits.
Under my eyes, those milk bunnies,
it waits.
. . .
Mr. Doppelganger. My brother. My
spouse.
Mr. Doppelganger. My enemy. My
lover.
When truth comes spilling out like
peas
it hangs up the phone.
When the child is soothed and rest-
ing on my breast
it is my other who swallows lysol.
(30)
My other beats a tin drum in my
heart.
. . .
My other cries and cries and cries
when I put on a cocktail dress.
. . .
It is a thumbscrew.

It's hatred makes it clairvoyant.
I can only sign over everything,
the house, the dog, the ladders,
the jewels,
the soul, the family tree, the
mailbox.

Then I can sleep.

Maybe.(31)

Sylvia Plath's "In Plaster" begins in impasse:

I shall never get out of this!
There are two of me now:
This new absolutely white person
and the old yellow one,
And the white person is certainly
the superior one.
She doesn't need food, she is one
of the real saints.

The two-in-one exist in a macabre symbiosis, the one adding vitality to the other's tidiness and calmness and patience, until the "good" one gets uppity and decides she can make it on her own. They are mutually dependent in a destructive way:

it was a kind of marriage,
being so close.
Now I see it must be one or the other
of us.
She may be a saint, and I may be ugly
and hairy,
But she'll soon find out that that
doesn't matter a bit.
I'm collecting my strength; one day
I shall manage without her,
And she'll perish with emptiness then,
and begin to miss me.(32)

P.K. Page's "Nightmare" describes a similar dark symbiosis, mutual dependence, mutual destructiveness:

In the white bed
this too-dark creature nests,
litters her yelping young
upon my breasts.

Dreams are her thicket
in them wearing masks
of my familiar faces
she dissembles.

Trembles in every image
calls my falcon
which falls, a feathered stone
to her white wrist bone.

The Double in this poem, the sinister half of the dyad, is an anxious alchemist, a night walker filled with bitter wishes:

Sometimes she smiles at me
as if I were
her own face
smiling in a mirror
. . .

Yet should I sleep forever
she would eat
my beating heart
as if it were a plum

did she not know
with terrible wisdom
by doing so
she would devour her own.(33)

The split between the two <u>personae</u> who coinhabit the one presence has to do with formal perfection versus vitality, the socially acceptable against the outrageous, the sham against the real. The situation is always precarious, often threatening and potentially disruptive, but it sometimes suggests the upsurge of creative energy, and possible equilibrium. The Other or Double can be the bearer of meaning, the necessary other half of a promised wholeness. In Adrienne Rich's "Women" the familiar triad of sisters are now embodiments of healing and hope:

My three sisters are sitting
on rocks of black obsidian.
For the first time, in this light,
I can see who they are.

My first sister is sewing her costume for the procession.
She is going as the Transparent Lady
And all her nerves will be visible.

My second sister is also sewing,
at the seam over her heart which has never healed entirely,
At last, she hopes, this tightness in her chest will ease.

My third sister is gazing
at a dark-red crust spreading
westward far out on the sea.
Her stockings are torn but she is
beautiful.(34)

Sometimes the Double in its more positive aspect appears in the guise of an angel. In Anne Sexton's "The Fallen Angels," the angels are "both saved and lost." They "keep me company."/ They wiggle up life./ They pass out their magic/ like Assorted Lifesavers." The poem ends with an appeal:

O fallen angel,
the companion within me,
whisper something holy
before you pinch me
into the grave.(35)

Pat Lowther's remarkable "Angel" invokes the Double as indwelling muse, at once incubus and inspiration:

That frowning angel toys with me,
hides in the eddies of my mind,
lurks beneath the babble of bubble syllables,
waits behind protozoan-chain of thought.

If I, riding a dolphin-joyous metaphor or clinging to swift shape
of memory, shaft into darkness
that monstrous angel rises
sudden as a shark
and spreads his arms before me.

He is beyond my governing and my evasions, he is a creature
neither born nor spawned
but grown like a coral,
secretion of infinite lives and deaths
into this sudden dumb integrity,
this stark angelic incubus.

I have worked rites of exorcism
against him, have made magic
lattices, rings, pentagrams,
have wished for a bubble of safety
to carry me through food and bed and poetry.
I have performed the most potent exorcism, I have assimilated
spring, freckled my skin with chlorophyll,
opened my thighs to gold,

And have not banished him, he . . .
mocks me in mirrors,
. . .

His eyes are holes beyond which there no horizons;
they have not pigment, muscles, lids;
they are organs of pure perception,
ravenous, engulfing.

And those eyes tear the floating web of words
I have created;
they break the delicate shells I have secreted,
slowly, painfully,
to house my loves.
And always, like Eden's fiery-sworded guard,

he damns me for my sin
of growing lids

and muscled iris in my eyes.(36)

This angel is the ground of her being, judge, speaker of imperatives: clairvoyant, uncompromising, insatiable, stark incubus, he is that against which all things are measured, the one who possesses her who is possessed.

In Adrienne Rich's "Diving Into the Wreck" the poet is both diver, looking for "the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth," and "the drowned face always staring/ toward the sun;" she is "the mermaid whose dark hair/ streams black" and "the merman in his armored body:"

> We circle silently
> about the wreck
> we dive into the hold.
> I am she: I am he
>
> whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
> whose breasts still bear the stress
> whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
> obscurely inside barrels
> half wedged and left to rot."(37)

She is both the seeker, diving into an alien element, and the sleeping guardian of the neglected treasure.

Kay Johnson's "In the Kitchen of My Spirit" describes, through a domestic metaphor, an androgynous wholeness in which animus and anima, the male and the female, live together in harmony in one being:

> I'm a woman and a man
> and I live alone together
> in wedded bliss
> after a hectic courtship.
>
> when someone comes over
> to where I am working or meditating,
> which is the man in me,
> I get right up to put the fire
> under the coffee pot,
> which is the woman in me.
>
> Now in my household
> where once no fire was lit,
> the woman cooks the food,
> the man eats it.
>
> But when the Holy Ghost shall come
> to grace his household,
> we are one.(38)

It is idle, I think, to object to the sex-role typing in this poem: the poet has simply used traditional images of the function of man and woman to express the healed dichotomy in her own spirit.

"Novella," by Anne Szumigalski, presents a jocular image of androgny, of a complementary two-in-one:

> the thin man with the stooping young shoulders and
> stick shanks and bony wrists unfolded himself
> he stepped out of the fat lady
> kop kop on his neat feet
> he went down the stairs to the street.

The fat lady collapses into an empty mass of flesh without her animating spirit, who is walking briskly about the city, "selling things door to door," "eating at

a crumbly counter:"

seeking a fair and easy woman
pinching a thin rump and making a date
and breaking the date
to come running back to the fat lady
. . .
the thin man and the fat lady swing his/her/their strong
legs side to side in the bed kicking
off the covers laughing
under the tumbled quilt.(39)

Vera B. Williams' recent story, "An Account of a Skirmish,"(40)is a sprightly, tender, decisive account of a woman's struggle to the death with her temperamental, indecisive, self-indulgent, guilty Other Self who is preventing her from living out her vocation as writer, artist and independent, resourceful woman. The narrative, which takes the form of a letter, is prefaced by this comment:

. . .The following is an account of one of the millions of very minor skirmishes now being fought within the middle class on the North American continent. . . . From a historical perspective, it might, with many, many others, be massed under the heading: SOCIAL HISTORY, LAST QUARTER OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY . . . a chapter that might end with the words (or something like them) ". . . We have given these depressing matters their due as, hopefully, the last gasps of a dying order. . . ."(41)

There is some irony in these remarks, but they also serve the serious purpose of placing a very personal account in a contemporary social context which makes it, if not typically exemplary, a cautionary tale. A poem by Vera Williams, "Love Letter to Myself," published not long after "An Account of a Skirmish," is a lyrical celebration of the hard won and long last coming together of the Self and the Other in mutual nourishment, acceptance and knowledge:

I am a better wife to myself
than to anyone.
I am a house that shelters me . . . .
. . .
and I crave the repose of it,
the sweet thirst-quenching milk of
the teat of self;
the deep-sucking peace
of one's own queer straightness;
the late twilight of one's own perceptions
that sum the day of one's longest acquaintance;
the enduring companionableness
of inner wee and giant personages;
the longed for recognition of my double/twin/ & confidant
Dear Hazel-Eyed Friend. . .
Forgive my unfaithfulness
Accept my long detours;
my sojourns with strange men
in strange lands
and welcome me home to my own heart/hearth and kingdom.
Open the gate
and let me in.(42)

To conclude, the Double in various guises both haunts and enriches the poetry of this century written by women. The Double as unlived life, as the spectre who rises to fill the gap between the actual and the potential, as a focus of both conflict and power, in an image of a significant part of the truth about women's lives, as persons and as artists, that truth of which Muriel Rukeyser said:

> What would happen if one woman told
> the truth about her life?
> The world would split open. (43)

NOTES

1. Eleanor Bertine, Jung's Contribution to our Time (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 104-105.
2. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Yellow Wallpaper (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1973), p. 10.
3. Ibid., p. 13. 4. Ibid., p. 16. 5. Ibid., p. 18.
6. Ibid., p. 22. 7. Ibid., p. 32. 8. Ibid., p. 35.
9. Ibid., p. 36.
10. Dorothy E. Smith in her essay "Women and Psychiatry" discusses the systematic invalidation of women's genuine responses to their situations, through the interpretation of the responses as "symptoms." See Dorothy Smith, and Sara David (eds.), Women Look at Psychiatry (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1975).
11. Erica Jong, Half Lives (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1971), pp. 25-26.
12. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), pp. 65-66.
13. Dilys Laing in Joan Goulianos (ed.), By A Woman Writ (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 324.
14. Ibid., p. 328. 15. Ibid., p. 326.
16. Denise Levertov, O Taste and See (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 71.
17. Sylvia Plath, "Kindness" in Ariel (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 83.
18. The phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I caller her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. . . . I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken--she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own. . . .

    Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," in The Death of the Moth (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1942), pp. 236-37.
19. Denise Levertov, The Freeing of the Dust (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 53.
20. Adrienne Rich, Diving into the Wreck (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 38.
21. Carol Rumens, A Strange Girl in Bright Colours (London: Quartet Books, 1973), p. 91.
22. Ibid., p. 86. 23. Ibid., p. 87.
24. Denise Levertov, in Laura Chester and Sharon Barba (eds.), Rising Tides (New York: Pocket Books, 1973), pp. 108-110.
25. Gwendolyn MacEwen, Magic Animals (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 95.
26. Sylvia Plath, The Colossus (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 22-23.
27. Ibid., pp. 63-4. 28. Ibid., p. 51.
29. Jong, pp. 20-1.
30. The reference to the "other who swallows lysol" concerns the remarkable but neglected English poet Charlotte Mew, who killed herself by swallowing lysol.
31. Anne Sexton, The Book of Folly (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 20.
32. Sylvia Plath, Crossing the Water (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 30-2.
33. P.K. Page, Cry Ararat! (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), pp. 58-9.
34. Adrienne Rich, Leaflets (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 41.
35. Anne Sexton, The Awful Rowing Toward God (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), pp. 22-3.
36. Pat Lowther, This Difficult Flowering (Vancouver: Very Stone House, 1968), pp. 25-6.
37. Adrienne Rich, Diving into the Wreck, pp. 23-4.
38. Kay Johnson, Human Songs (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1964), p. 23.
39. Anne Szumigalski, Woman Reading in Bath (Toronto: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 52-3.
40. Vera B. Williams, "An Account of a Skirmish" in Room of One's Own, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Vancouver: The Growing Room Collective, 1975), pp. 4-11.
41. Ibid., p. 4.
42. Room of One's Own, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 14-15.
43. Muriel Rukeyser, "Kathë Kollwitz," in Rising Tides, p. 73.