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Author(s): NEHAMA ASCHKENASY

Source: *Prooftexts*, Vol. 8, No. 1, The Representation of Women in Jewish Literature (JANUARY 1988), pp. 113-128

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20689201>

Accessed: 30-01-2017 20:12 UTC

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NEHAMA ASCHKENASY

**Women and the Double
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Berdichewsky/Agnon,
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THE EARLIEST FORMULATIONS of the nature of the Female reflect man's perception of woman as dual-natured. Since ancient times, the male mind generated for the woman an extremity of images. The life-giving and nurturing "Great Mother," who freed the fetus from her dark womb, had her counterpoint in the dangerous, death-dealing "Terrible Mother," who refused to release her child into the light of life. Similarly, the fecund "Mother Earth" brought forth life and crops, but she could also become the grave, devouring all living things back into herself.¹ The "Great Goddess" was double-faced; she was the source of warmth, light, and lucidity but also the goddess of disastrous floods, nocturnal darkness, and the "negative unconscious." In the male-authored Judaic texts the two faces of womanhood were reflected in Shekinah and Lilith: Shekinah was the supernal mother and Lilith the satanic baby killer, Shekinah the divine bride, and Lilith the illicit seductress. Furthermore, the Kabbalists' imaginative mind projected into the Shekinah herself a perplexing dualism: she is described as both chaste and promiscuous, motherly and bloodthirsty, a queen endowed with celestial beauty and a female-monster of cosmic proportions.²

This dualism reflected the dialectical position of woman in the male-dominant Western culture, where she was always either less than man or more than man. Socially, culturally, and often also legally, woman was the powerless, insignificant "second sex," to use Simone de Beauvoir's phrase. Yet as man's progenitor the woman possessed

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mysterious and awesome reproductive abilities, and in her sexual role she had the power to seduce man and deprive him of consciousness.³ In her otherness, woman came to epitomize for man the two poles of human existence. The sublime image of the female, the heavenly Shekinah, for instance, was a promise of man's higher possibilities. And woman in her negative aspects—from the "Strange Woman" in Proverbs through the phantasmic figures of seductive females in the Midrash, to Lilith of the Kabbalist mind and a number of female figures in Hasidic tales—came to represent man's dark double, the inner *sitra aħra'*, that cosmic and psychological element that attempts to pull man to hell and damnation and that stands in the way of man's eternal journey to redemption.⁴

The plot thickens when we enter the modern era. As the woman gradually comes to the fore and becomes a central character in male-authored works, she eventually sheds her literary function as a symbolic configuration of man's fears and anxieties, and from the literary "other" she becomes the Subject, the "I." In Hebrew literature, starting with Haskalah writings, the female protagonist, though still sifted through the vision of the male creator, gradually becomes autonomous in her fictional status and represents the female destiny, or sometimes even the entire Jewish destiny, rather than man's "other" side. Writers like Berdichevsky, Brenner, Kabak, and Agnon begin to focus on the woman as a literary protagonist worthy of occupying a pivotal position in the literary work, and as an individualized fictional persona, whose inner life and motivation should be explored and reflected.

Yet if the woman protagonist gradually inches towards equality with the male protagonist in her claim to the reader's attention, she is still fathered by the male author, and as such, her duality continues to exist for the male writer, though he now uses it for different purposes. A new element is introduced into the age-old image of the dual-personality female: she no longer serves as man's dark alter ego, the feminine side of the Janus-faced human that God initially created according to the ancient legend, but is now seen as creating her own double and as battling with her own self.⁵ Indeed, modern Hebrew literature abounds with examples of female protagonists who adopt a second self, or fabricate a double for themselves, very often a mad double, or who resort to the fantasy of the "other self," or who deliberately split their own psyche and project themselves into multiple other corporeal images.

Within feminist literary criticism, the creation of a mad foil of the female protagonist has been seen as a subterfuge used especially by nineteenth-century women writers plagued with the female version of the "anxiety of authorship," and forced to subdue and suppress their

rebellious, anti-patriarchal impulses.⁶ But the phenomena of the duplicate self, the protagonist who suddenly and unexpectedly confronts his own double, coming from unknown depths of his psyche, and of the characters who are twin images of each other, causing the confusion of mistaken identities, as well as of the shadow who comes to life and assumes an existence independent of that of his prototype, are universal literary motifs. Starting with the pioneering work of Otto Rank, which was followed by other studies of the double, myriad examples have been cited of the prevalence of this theme in literature.⁷ If women writers projected into the double some of their own anxieties, so did men writers; it is impossible to argue that the double is a literary technique that is exclusive to female writers.⁸ What is of relevance to the present discussion is the undeniable prevalence of female doubles in modern Hebrew literature, and the many examples of women protagonists, in the works of male writers, who live through a second self or create a duplicate self. Rank's contention that the creation of the double attests to a writer's own dual conception of himself and of reality may provide one clue to the understanding of this literary phenomenon. The schizophrenic female protagonist may also be seen as a carry-over of the deeply-ingrained male conception of female duality, as well as the modern male writer's emerging awareness of the new psychological theories that give validity and significance to the double-motif. A common denominator to all early modern female protagonists who resort to the splitting of the self is their furious attempts to escape patriarchal imprisonment and the strictures of old-world morality. In contemporary works the fabricated double is an expression of female rage directed, many times, at the human condition itself, and resulting in self destruction; it often signals existential, rather than social anguish. Both male and female authors have used the female double, but for different purposes. The present study focuses on several examples of the double-phenomenon in the works of four male writers.⁹

A striking early example of a woman creating a mad double as a strategy that is exclusively female in its origin is that of Naomi, Berdichewsky's heroine in "Klonimus and Naomi."¹⁰ Naomi's original double is her own stepbrother, whose suitability as Naomi's spouse is first noticed by Naomi's mother and then sanctioned by the entire shtetl community. As Berdichewsky describes the young man Klonimus sitting at his desk and studying and Naomi leaning over him, it becomes clear that these two young people are soul-mates, destined for each other and reflecting a twinship that in early Judaic sources is the mark of the true mates: Adam and his sons, as well as Jacob's sons, were each created with his own female twin that they later married. Berdichewsky cleverly assigns Klonimus as Naomi's stepbrother, so

that incest is not an issue, and at the same time the family kinship reverberates with the Judaic echoes in which the sister is the divinely-ordained bride ("my sister, my bride" and "my sister, my love, my dove," Song of Songs, 5:1, 2).

When Klonimus becomes betrothed to another woman, acquiescing to the forces of convention that dictate arranged marriages and disregard the individual's emotions, Naomi, arbitrarily separated from her true mate, loses her mind. The ensuing events prove without a doubt that Naomi's mad self is a double created by the heroine as a form of protest and as an attempt to manipulate reality. The dehumanized Naomi, who now leads the life of an animal, is not seen as passively descending into insanity; rather, she becomes a transmitter of madness and emits the spirit of insanity that infects the man who is the cause of her mental agony. A short time before his wedding, Klonimus becomes restless, and confesses to his friend that he has lost his faith. The friend is shocked, the community is scandalized, and Klonimus's prospective in-laws break their daughter's engagement to him. Klonimus now starts a course that runs parallel to that of Naomi. Like her, he is beaten into submission; like her, he tries to escape into the open spaces, and then withdraws into himself. In analogy to Naomi's loss of speech, Klonimus, who used to like debates and learned discussions, stops talking. Yet when Klonimus becomes possessed by "evil spirits" Naomi rids herself of her own private demons. Naomi starts to show signs of partial recovery, returning to cooked meals, then trying to sit up and walk, and finally regaining her speech. Although she never returns to her former self, Naomi returns to normalcy; "her soul is healthy now," says Berdichewsky, "but she has lost her soaring spirits." Klonimus marries Naomi in a ceremony that looks more like a funeral, and the young people now lead a life of perfect strangers, each enclosed in his own dark mental cocoon. Their parents' hopes have been shattered: the brilliant Klonimus becomes tutor for the children of the poor, and the lovely and charismatic Naomi, who used to sing and dance, now fusses a bit in the kitchen and then stares aimlessly at the blank wall.

Self-destruction and regression to the animal level mark Naomi's attempts at rebellion. At the same time, madness gives Naomi the freedom that she has craved. Naomi's mad double articulates Naomi's wish to have Klonimus, a wish that the sane woman could not express within a puritanical society. Furthermore, the mad double also assumes demonic powers that contaminate Klonimus and trigger his own restlessness and, finally, his mental disintegration.¹¹ The dehumanized double achieves for Naomi what she could not accomplish as a gloriously pretty woman: it brings about the cancellation of Klonimus's wedding. Naomi's derangement can consequently be seen as the result of the feminine habit of suppressing anger, and, at the same time, as a

partially conscious strategy that, in a perverse manner, allows the woman to have her own way.

Naomi's emergence from madness is seen as both a compromise and an ironic victory. Paradoxically, Naomi gets what she wanted, because she is now married to Klonimus; yet she had to pay a steep price with the shrinking of her own and Klonimus's former brilliant selves. At the end of the story, both Naomi and Klonimus have become pale replicas, impoverished doubles, of their older selves.

The two female protagonists of Agnon's "In the Prime of Her Life," Tirtza, the first-person narrator of the novella, and her mother Leah, also resort to the creation of doubles as a form of protest against feminine oppression.¹² Tirtza falls in love with her middle-aged schoolmaster, Akaviah Mazal, when she learns that he was her late mother's true love who was found unsuitable by Leah's parents to become their frail daughter's husband.

Baruch Kurzweil saw in this story a study of the "generational strife" that plagued the shtetl Jews at the turn of our century, as they found themselves at a historical and cultural crossroad. The old, traditional Jewish values, together with bourgeois morality, are rejected by Tirtza, who dares to choose her own lover and marry a secular man on the margins of the Jewish society which, in the small towns, was still largely pious. Obviously, Tirtza repeats her mother's history with a difference, realizing Leah's hidden desires for Akaviah, and defying the rigid values of her middle-class Jewish environment for whom Akaviah is undesirable because of his lack of financial as well as social status (his ancestors converted to Christianity). Tirtza assumes the role of her mother's "double," permitting herself where her mother denied herself, and thus becoming, ostensibly, a less frustrated, more fulfilled replica of the former generation.

The theme of the double, reality and its mirror image, consequently becomes one of the major themes, as well as literary techniques, of the story.¹³ On the face of it, by becoming her mother's double, Tirtza rectifies the injustice done both to Leah and to Mazal, and therefore creates harmony where there was once lack of harmony, union, where there was separation, and consummated love, where there once was physical and emotional denial. Yet the reader soon begins to realize that the theme of the double involves falsehood, the negation of the real self, and worse, the splitting of the self into different, even conflicting entities. Ultimately, the double becomes a creator of anarchy and an emblem of souls at war with themselves as well as of a society unsure of itself.

The motif of the double is enhanced by the pair of twins, frequently mentioned in the story, as well as by the many references to mirrors and to shadows. The theme of imitation and doubleness, the genuine

original and its pale reflection, extends both to the emotional lives of the individual characters and to the social questions that the story touches on. Thus the validity of reality itself is questioned: are Tirtza's feelings genuine, or is she just forcing herself to feel what her mother felt? Are Mazal and Tirtza's father rivals, or are they the two sides of the same man? Conversely, could Mintz replace Mazal and make Leah happy, or would Leah be happy only with her original lover, Mazal? Did Tirtza find in Mazal a husband and lover, or just another paternal figure, in the image of her own father?

The social questions are a variation of the personal questions. They apply to the validity of the old Jewish mold; is it a vital, enduring existence, or just an illusion, a dream that will soon fade away? Akaviah Mazal has found in his archeological research that this town is built over an old cemetery; thus his findings question the very being of this world, which still, in many ways, adheres to the old pious traditions: Is the old Jewish world alive or is it founded on graves, on dead, obsolete ideas, and disintegrating before our very eyes? Similarly, Tirtza's Hebrew, which is an imitation of the language of the *maskilim*, who themselves imitated biblical cadence and vocabulary, raises questions with regard to modern Hebrew: Is it going to be just a pale, artificial reflection of biblical language, or will it possess an independent vitality, enriched by Biblical Hebrew but not overshadowed by it? And, in a broader sense, is the modern, secular Jewish culture, which the Enlightenment is attempting to bring about and promote, going to strike roots and become a valid existence, or will it be just a diminished reflection of the old world of tradition? Will it be able to offer vital and viable ideas in the place of the old, rejected ones?

Yet the main function of the theme of the double is to illuminate and signal the female strategy in a story where Agnon has departed from his usual custom of filtering reality through the male eyes and allowed a woman to tell her own story. Leah's strategy of dealing with the loss of her true love and marrying a man she did not choose for herself is to create a double which is a shadow of her old self. She gives her shadow to the man that she is married to, but her real self, the young and pretty woman who once knew the intensity of romantic love, is submerged under the facade of resignation and acceptance. The sick double is a subterfuge for Leah, allowing her to lie in bed, divorce herself from everyday life, and avoid sexual contact with her husband. But the mask that hides the old self is sick and has lost the will to live, and once it departs from this world it marks the death of the original woman too.

After Leah's death the phenomenon of the double begins to pervade her daughter's existence. When Tirtza meets Akaviah Mazal for the first time, not yet aware of his past role in her mother's life, she

sees in him a reflection of her mother. And, without realizing the connection between her father and Mazal, she views the two men as mirror images of each other.

The discovery of her mother's love for Mazal shakes Tirtza's sense of identity. She begins to see her father and Mazal as both victims and victimizers. The previous generation submitted to powers of conventional wisdom and social mores, but at the same time they betrayed both themselves and those they loved. Tirtza resolves to adopt a strategy for survival that will be the polar opposite of her mother's, by marrying the choice of her heart. Tirtza represents the transition from a tradition-oriented society to an inner-oriented society in which the private desires and preferences of the individual take precedence over social conventions and proprieties. Tirtza's name, that enfolds in Hebrew the verb "to will," also points to the young woman's strong will and her determination to act upon her private wishes and exercise her own volition. Ironically, for Tirtza to correct the damage that was done in her mother's generation and to act in opposition to her mother's passive submission, she has to repeat her mother's life, fall in love with the man her mother loved, and marry him.

Tirtza does not realize that asserting her will would paradoxically entail the surrender of her will. For Tirtza is not genuinely in love with Mazal; her infatuation with Mazal is part of her fascination with and resentment of the past. By trying to depart from past attitudes and forms of behavior, Tirtza now has to relive the past. Tirtza's love for Mazal soon fades, and her married life with Mazal resembles her own mother's life with Mintz, Tirtza's father. Like her mother, Tirtza is now planning her own death, praying to God to give her an infant girl who would tend to Mazal's needs after her own untimely death. Tirtza is now emulating the strategy of her mother Leah, who chose to die, leaving Tirtza behind as a comfort, and perhaps a token of appreciation, to the man that she married but towards whom she felt no passion.

In the relationship between Mazal and Tirtza, the woman is the aggressive pursuer and the man the passive object of pursuit, as is the case with most of Agnon's couples. In terms of the times, Tirtza is daring and forward in her pursuit of Akaviah. The scene in the forest, when Tirtza terrifies Mazal by pretending to have been bitten by a dog, is rife with erotic tension.¹⁴ Yet when her more "modern" methods of luring the man do not work, Tirtza resorts to her mother's strategy: she becomes very sick. Again we see the irony where the freer, more "liberated" Tirtza, intent on correcting her mother's mistakes, has to emulate her mother. In her feverish condition, Tirtza slips into another identity, that of her mother's and, in imitation of her mother's ailment, she sighs from her "heart." The dead Leah is now a dybbuk that possesses her daughter's body, lives through her, and even gives the

young woman her own weak heart. As his daughter's illness intensifies, Tirtza's father, too, decides not to repeat the mistakes of the past. He apparently talks to Mazal, and when Tirtza finally wakes up from her fever, she sees both Akaviah and her father standing at her bedside and beaming at her. It seems that each of the persons involved in the past drama of unfulfilled love now tries to correct the damage that was done many years ago, yet fails as miserably as he did the first time; Tirtza is no happier with Mazal than her mother was without him.

When Tirtza recovers, the two selves, that of Leah and that of Tirtza, coexist within her, while the two men in her life merge into one person and become indistinguishable one from the other. Tirtza realizes that they both love her in the same way: *vis-à-vis* Tirtza both men are fathers, and *vis-à-vis* Leah, both are lovers. Thus Tirtza can win Mazal as a lover only if she stops being Tirtza and becomes Leah.

Tirtza's struggle for independence, for asserting her own individuality and shaking off social conventions, ends unhappily. As in Berdichewsky's world, the deterministic laws that govern human life are more powerful than the individual's fierce wish for freedom. Tirtza is doomed to live someone else's life rather than her own. With all her "progressive" ideas and schooling, she is no different than her mother, resorting to the same subterfuges and paying with her health and the loss of her identity. The sick self, which was both real and invented, was an excuse for Leah not to fight against the social order of things; for Tirtza the sick self is devised as an instrument of manipulation, yet in the end she has only manipulated herself into an unhappy, unfulfilled life.

For the women protagonists in both Berdichewsky's and Agnon's stories, the mad fury and the psychic fragmentation are simultaneously caused by forces beyond their control and self-induced, a means of manipulating a reality that is otherwise not controllable and gaining the freedom not afforded within a constrictive universe. Naomi chooses madness as a form of protest, and she catapults herself out of it when she sees the possibility of getting the man that she wanted. Tirtza, too, while never clinically insane, voluntarily ruptures her psyche into two selves and lives the life of her double, instead of her own. The mad double or the gravely sick double are forms of female duplicity, a tactic to circumvent and fool the ferocious powers of fate and social authority. But freedom and self-destruction, the two extremes of the double-edged sword of feminine strategy, become at the end one and the same. Berdichewsky's mad Naomi gained the freedom that she craved at the expense of her sanity and brilliant personality. Agnon's Leah is released from an untenable situation through the sick double, which is doomed to die young. Tirtza wills her mother's self into overtaking her own life, but she pays with the loss of her former

individuality, and with the constant knowledge that the man who acts as if he loves her, does not really feel passion for her, the young Tirtza, but for the Leah that she has become.

The fragmentation of the feminine self into different entities, and the divorce of the woman from the real life around her culminate in the story of Hannah, the first-person narrator of Amos Oz's *My Michael*.¹⁵ Hannah's life with the plodding young scholar, Michael, is quite peaceful, banal, and normal on the outside, yet tumultuous, fantastic, and adventurous inside. The novel records Hannah's gradual mental departure from the world around her, as she sinks inwardly, into complete psychic disintegration and emotional chaos. Hannah feels imprisoned within an oppressive, hemmed-in existence, and the main pursuit of her inner life—and gradually, her sole preoccupation—is devising strategies of escape and flight. If for Berdichewsky's and Agnon's heroines the main oppressor is the shtetl society, for Hannah it is time in its existential as well as historical aspects. Hannah is at odds with time and regards it as her worst enemy (274). The routine of her married life clashes with Hannah's inner being that strives for a life not bound by commitments and obligations, and not dictated by the clock and calendar. For Hannah time is a destructive mechanism, causing regression into nothing, and she is sarcastic about Michael's view of time as a medium of healing and progress (264). Man's fear of time and its ravages is an archetypal human emotion, commemorated in poetry since early history; thus Hannah's particular circumstances as a woman with a rich inner world of fantasy, caught in a life of ordinary routine and strict conformity, intensify her antagonism towards time. As a woman who takes pride in her beauty, Hannah naturally sees in the passage of time a destructive force. Moreover, as an acutely sensitive person, Hannah, like many modern protagonists and anti-heroes, views time, to use Hans Meyerhoff's words, as "a source of suffering and anxiety and a reason for despair."¹⁶

Time and history are weighted with a special significance in the context of modern Jerusalem, a city charged with past memories and looking towards renewal and change. The city Jerusalem is a place where, perhaps more than anywhere else, an impressionable person like Hannah might experience the oppression of history, the sense that the individual is called upon to harness his energies and commit his whole life to an idea rooted in history and transcending the individual's need for personal happiness. Gershon Shaked is right in arguing that while *My Michael* is not a social novel, the historical and social circumstances that underlie it are an inextricable part of the very fabric of the novel.¹⁷ Hannah's hostility towards time as the ultimate oppressor is imbued with social-political undertones as well. Hannah's childhood

friends, the Arab twins, are now enemies and therefore have become mythic figures playing a major role in Hannah's fantasies.

Hannah's main strategy for existing simultaneously in the world of the here and now, on the one hand, and in a romanticized sphere of total freedom and unbridled desires that knows no laws and constrictions, on the other, is to invent for herself several alter egos that are the complete opposites of her own "public" self. As Otto Rank explains, in the light of the Freudian theory of Narcissism, the double represents elements of morbid self-love; yet at the same time, the double can be the antidote to this element of self-love, bringing about destruction to the divided individual. Thus the double embodies simultaneously the self's wish for immortality, for freedom from the shackles of time, and its suicidal tendencies.

Hannah's youngest double, the girl who is sometimes dressed in a blue coat, points to Hannah's strong infantile tendencies, and to her stunted mental growth, a characteristic common to many female literary characters.¹⁸ The little girl appears in the midst of a domestic scene, when Hannah sits at the Sabbath table with her husband and son (168). The peaceful, idyllic family scene turns into a nightmare when Hannah is suddenly severed from her surroundings and sees herself mirrored in the little girl, who beats feebly and desperately on the window. At the end of the paragraph describing this scene, syntax and sentence disintegrate, as Hannah is now no longer able to construct fully coherent sentences. Otto Rank's comments on the paradoxical nature of the double are fully exemplified here. While the girl stands for the world of freedom and impunity, the experience itself is one of complete terror. Hannah both craves to become the little girl again, and yet knows that it is impossible, and so the girl beats "feebly" on the window pane, and gradually disappears. The alter ego's despair indicates both Hannah's disappointment at not being able to fully return to childhood's paradisaic state, and at the same time her terror of regressing into mindless infantility, and into the state of feminine defenselessness of which her father warned her (274).

The imaginary little girl is intertwined with a children's tale that Hannah evokes, and that has at its center a little girl named Hannah and a charcoal-seller (98,99). The charcoal smudges that smear Little Hannah's new dress are life's brutal experiences. The mythic charcoal-seller, who turns childhood innocence into nightmare, reappears in different versions throughout the novel, and Hannah frequently evokes the partly real and partly demonic old men who roam the streets of Jerusalem. These are uncanny figures, grotesque and often sinister, representing "Old Father Time," Hannah's foe. These terrifying old men bring to mind similar figures of doom in *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*, two other novels that revolve around unhappy female protago-

nists. In each of these works, a mysterious old man meets the female protagonist, Anna and Emma respectively, at a crucial point in her life, and then one last time before the woman takes her own life. Unlike Anna and Emma, our heroine is destroyed not by physically killing herself, but by dividing herself into so many splinters of being, that the real Hannah is finally thinned out of existence.

Yvonne Azulai, the sensuous, hot-blooded Sephardic woman, is another alter ego, personifying Hannah's libidinous, lustful nature, her seething eroticism and her impulse to break down the moral and sexual taboos (197-8). Another phantasmic visitor from Hannah's inner self is the Princess who, unlike Yvonne, is not a figure from the contemporary Israeli landscape, but rather an exotic European image. The Princess allows Hannah to escape her temporal and geographical confinement, and journey through wide, open horizons to unknown places, to other times, and to different climates. In Hannah's hallucinations, the Princess belongs to the city of Danzig (198). Danzig is appropriate as the backdrop for the image of the Princess since it has been historically a divided city, where two nationalities, German and Polish, converged and sometimes clashed; and thus Danzig, the twofold city, reflects Hannah, the divided woman. The little girl is too feeble and, therefore, not enticing enough for Hannah to wish to fully merge with her, and Yvonne is too feminine, and thus at the mercy of her desires. However, the Princess, in her spatial and temporal freedom, is a figure of complete strength, mastery, and self-control, releasing Hannah's frustrated wishes to control men, as well as the rapidly progressing time, and the fast moving life and people around her.

Responding to the growing chasm between her tempestuous inner life and her seemingly untroubled outward existence, Hannah projects the duality of her being into the outside landscape, perceiving a twofold reality in the world around her. Hannah sees under every ordinary scene a certain hidden violence or tumult (43). Even Michael's scientific research points to the twofoldness of nature (16). The Arab twins, who play the role of Hannah's wild playmates and lovers, also reflect the duality of Hannah's existence. The twins are figures from Hannah's childhood, but in their status as the social "others," and in the savage and primitive image that they project in Hannah's fantasies, they embody the political as well as the personal dualism in Hannah's existence. As Hannah becomes more estranged from her dull husband, the Arab twins appear with more intensity. They are military terrorists, reflecting Israel's explosive geopolitical situation as well as Hannah's attraction to the cultural and political antinomian, and to the breaking of the political as well as sexual taboos. They are also forces responding to Hannah's volcanic inner self, and messengers from her furious netherland, awakening and sharpening her sensibilities:

"Silently the pair of them float over the neighborhood at the end of the night. . . . They have been sent to wake me. Someone imagines I am asleep" (119).

But the ultimate double is undoubtedly the city Jerusalem itself, which becomes closely identified with Hannah the protagonist, and which, in its historical and political reality, contains a twofold existence.¹⁹ In the 1950s, when Hannah's memoirs are being recorded, Jerusalem is still divided into the old city, occupied by the Arabs, and the new city, inhabited by the Israelis. Jerusalem is enigmatic, resisting any attempt to comprehend it with the aid of reason and human senses, resembling Hannah, who does not allow anyone into her inner reality. The city has a clearly feminine nature, and the woman that it stands for is, like Hannah, fragile, vulnerable, and constantly aware of the alien reality that threatens to overpower her: "Villages and suburbs surround Jerusalem in a close circle, like curious bystanders surrounding a wounded woman lying in the road" (111).

As a place burdened with the weight of history and imbued with the sense of the past, Jerusalem itself stands for Time and is therefore often perceived by Hannah as an evil pursuer, intensifying Hannah's sense of the oppression of history. Hannah complains that there is no escape from Jerusalem, that is, from the claustrophobic sense of enclosure that dominates the city as well as the whole country. If Hannah resembles Emma Bovary in her taste for sentimental novels and extravagant shopping, she is still inseparable from her particular historical moment and geographical location. Hannah's acute awareness of political as well as existential loneliness now prevents her from resisting the dangerous but alluring charm of her inner life that relieves her of the constrictive and confining nature of her exterior reality.

Ultimately, Hannah becomes *homo ludens* par excellence, retreating from the world to the timeless moment of the play.²⁰ *Homo ludens*, that archetypal self buried in all of us, is Hannah's double that she allows to come to the fore and take over. The ludic sphere frees Hannah from the oppression of time and history by enveloping her in the timeless moment or the eternal present. The play world also allows Hannah to assume different roles and break through the temporal and spatial barriers that constrain her movements. Sinking further into the ludic sphere and severing contact with the world, Hannah loses her vocal chords and experiences difficulties in talking, thus relinquishing communication with the world. The memoirs would finalize her departure, since by putting everything in writing, she in a sense exhausts her language reservoir and is now ready for the life of wild instinct, characteristic of the savage Arab twins, who use body language rather than verbal expression in order to communicate. As Hannah divorces

herself from the life around her, she travels away from the world that progresses in synchrony with the watch and the calendar. Her mad double—an amalgam of all her various alter egos—now takes over completely and embarks on a journey inward, spiraling rapidly and uncontrollably into the subconscious where language, time, and civilization are rendered obsolete.

The mirror image can sometimes become a double that takes on the woman's undesirable qualities, leaving the illusion that the original woman has been left intact, along the lines of Oscar Wilde's famous story of Dorian Gray. Batya, the old kibbutz member who lost her young husband many years ago in the Spanish Civil War, has become a bitter, grotesque-looking witch, "Baba Yaga" to the kibbutz children.²¹ Her present looks reflect years of suffering and decline, during which the proud and beautiful young widow turned into a loose woman, becoming the laughing stock of her friends and neighbors. Batya, painfully aware of the duality of her existence, views her ugly and mean-spirited self as a double, which she constantly tries to chase away: "I told you not to be crazy," she says to herself (148). When looking at her reflection in the mirror she dismisses the image that she sees as an unwanted double that can be warded off; "For an instant she caught a glimpse in the mirror of the old witch the children called Baba Yaga, but at once she was replaced by a noble, lonely woman unbowed by her suffering" (163). The fabrication of the double is a strategy and a defense mechanism that allows Batya to retain her self-image of a beautiful, aristocratic-looking woman, and ignore the bitter truth about the hopelessness of her life.

For another of Oz's heroines, Geula in "Nomad and Viper," the sudden, unexpected confrontation with her double spells the girl's doom.²² Feeling estranged in the kibbutz community whose collective male voice has passed a cruel and fatal judgment on her femininity, Geula goes out to the field where she encounters a Bedouin. In a brief moment of closeness, saturated with heavy sexual tension, Geula comes to realize that, in a strange way, the Bedouin is her double. Both are outcasts, unattractive and unattached, and both seeth with unfulfilled erotic desires. The recognition that the physically revolting nomad, in his primitive existence, is a reflection of her own raging, uncontrollable self, fills Geula with nausea. The social other suddenly becomes a mirror in which Geula faces the bitter truth about herself. She sees no other choice but to destroy herself.

Naomi, The schizophrenic matriarch of A. B. Yehoshua's *A Late Divorce* serves, in the duality of her existence, as the mental seismograph of a family divided and a society at conflict with itself.²³ If Hannah resorts to the splitting of her ego as a response to the geopolitical as well as existential anguish, Naomi's duality is a reflection

of her creator's conception of the modern Israeli family as torn and at war with itself, and of the society at large as being in the grips of collective hysteria. For her husband Yehuda, Naomi is no less than "mother country" herself. When Naomi tried to kill him, Yehuda deserted both her and the land, and started a new life for himself in the United States. Yehuda makes the connection between his disappointment with his wife and his disillusionment with the country explicit when he says: "Homeland why can't you be a homeland. No fantasy then she wanted to kill me" (348). Drawing on the age-old identification of woman and land, Yehoshua elevates the mad old woman—who, significantly, has both Sephardi and Ashkenazi blood in her—to the mythic level of homeland and soil and gives both psychological validity and metaphorical meaning to Naomi's split-personality syndrome.

Like the other female protagonists that we have examined, Naomi welcomes the cleaving of the self as a liberating act. She knows that her double is the cause of her kleptomaniacal bouts, her hysterical fits, and her attempt to knife Yehuda, and at the same time she craves a visit from "her" and associates it with pleasure. The double becomes a messenger from heavenly regions, and is welcomed with the same eagerness that the ancient biblical poet awaited a sign from God; "And I lifted my eyes to the mountains and saw in the soft light of the setting sun a dot. . . . It was she" (271). In her dual-personality existence, Naomi exposes the hypocrisy of her family members, all of whom hide another, darker self under a veneer, however thin, of normalcy. Naomi is the only person candid enough to admit the mental split in family and culture alike. Though she is one of nine protagonists, Naomi is not only the pivotal character, but the one whose madness sheds light on all other characters and uncovers their mental instability. In fact, each of the protagonists in this novel has at least one double. Naomi's daughter-in-law Dina has concocted for herself several alter egos. She assumes the identity of a very talented, highly sensitive writer, on the one hand, and that of a woman who kidnaps a baby (a protagonist in one of the stories that she is writing), on the other. Dina has another double, of whom she may be only dimly aware, but who is undoubtedly present in the collective subconscious of author, readers and protagonist alike: the biblical Dina. The modern Dina's fear of sex, and her conception of intercourse as a cruel violation, may be due to the experiences of her ancient namesake whose first attempt at independence ended in her rape.

Naomi finally brings her controlled husband, Yehuda, to admit his own duality when, at the end of the novel, he dons Naomi's clothes and assumes a female identity. Naomi sees in Yehuda her oppressor, but not because he is the male "other." According to Naomi, it was Yehuda's calm, self-assured manner and his refusal to acknowledge the

primitive, non-intellectual side of life, and the inherent duality of Israeli life in particular, that estranged Naomi from him: ". . . never again will I hear him speak to me in that overbearing manner that punched my life full of holes" (267). Naomi claims that when she went after Yehuda with her knife, she did not mean to kill him but to "open" him up: "To cut you loose from your constipated fear, from your self-involved, self-diddling intellect . . ." (292). In other words, Naomi wished to cut Yehuda into two selves, and to liberate his wild, imaginative, and untamed element from his cerebral self. She wished to force Yehuda, the "degenerate intellectual" to recognize his own duality.

Ultimately, Naomi names her double *Elohimah* ("Godina"), thus endowing her with divine qualities and replacing the male God of tradition with a female God representing the feminine heightened consciousness. Naomi's spiteful, sacreligious conversion of the deity into a female, while not necessarily a "feminist" cry for equality, is nevertheless the woman's protest against forms of oppression, all male or traditionally associated with the male domain: husband, religion, and intellect. In the creation of a female God Naomi also goes a step further in highlighting the various forms of confusion that have set in among her family and the society at large, such as the blurring of distinctions between male and female (exemplified in Naomi's homosexual son, and in her husband's final exit from the novel impersonating a woman), and the lack of certainty about time and especially about the day on which the Seder is being celebrated, to name a few. Thus, Naomi not only defeats the medical attempts to heal her fragmented psyche, but reasserts the supremacy of the split personality, and succeeds in infecting her own husband and children with the same symptoms.

In the works of the early moderns, Berdichewsky and Agnon, the feminine double is seen as female strategy, the woman's weapon against the oppression of the male-dominant pious community, which backfires and results in self-destruction. In the works of Oz and Yehoshua the mad double is often the creation of a woman more lucid than her sane contemporaries. The woman protagonist is endowed by both male writers with an acute sensitivity, a larger-than-life vision, and near-demonic mental powers. These female qualities inevitably result in the creation of doubles that estrange the woman from her environment but make her the truthful mirror of our existential fears and social maladies.

Program in Judaic Studies and Middle Eastern Affairs
University of Connecticut, Stamford

NOTES

1. See Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of an Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J., 1970).
2. On the paradoxical nature of the Shekinah see Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York, 1967), pp. 186–206, and Yishayahu Tishbi, *Mishnat hazohar*, 1 (Jerusalem, 1949).
3. See Wolfgang Lederer, *The Fear of Women* (New York, 1968).
4. On the female as the “dark double” in Judaic sources, see Nehama Aschkenasy, *Eve’s Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 39–76.
5. The creation of a double-faced original human is suggested in TB, Eruvin 18a: *Du partsuf panim hayah lo le’adam harishon*. Rashi (in his commentary on Gen. 1:27) and the Zohar repeat this ancient legend.
6. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, 1979).
7. Otto Rank, *The Double*, trans. Harry Tucker (Chapel Hill, 1971). Otto Rank’s first study of the subject appeared in 1919. See also C. F. Keffler, *The Literature of the Second Self* (Tuscon, 1972).
8. See, for instance, Rank’s discussion of Chamisso in *The Double*, p. 40.
9. For a discussion of doubles in the works of women writers such as Dvora Baron, Leah Goldberg, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and Rachel Eytan, see *Eve’s Journey*, pp. 204–8, 225–331.
10. In *The Collected Works*, in Hebrew (Tel Aviv, 1951), pp. 197–205.
11. On the difference between the madness of female and male protagonists in the works of Berdichewsky and Agnon, see *Eve’s Journey*, pp. 191–93, 201–2.
12. Trans. Gabriel Levin in *Eight Great Hebrew Short Novels*, ed. Alan Lelchuk and Gershon Shaked (New York, 1983), pp. 167–216. Page references are to this edition. The Hebrew text consulted is the Schocken edition of 1971.
13. Leah Goldberg, who knew Agnon personally, tells us that he was very fond of Adelbert von Chamisso’s story “Peter Schlemihls Wundersame Geschichte.” See “Shay Agnon: The Writer and His Hero” [Hebrew], in *Le Agnon Shay* (Jerusalem, 1959), pp. 52, 53. The story revolves around a shadow which has an independent mobility, and is sold by its original owner.
14. Baruch Kurzweil studied the significance of the dog as a primal sexual symbol in a number of Agnon’s works, most significantly in the novel *Temol Shilshom*; see *Massot ‘al sippurey Agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1963), pp. 104–15 et passim.
15. Trans. Nicholas de Lange in collaboration with the author (New York, 1972). All page references are to this edition. The Hebrew version consulted is the Am Oved edition, 1976; first published in 1968.
16. *Time in Literature* (Berkeley, 1960), p. 104.
17. *Gal hadash basipporet ha’ivrit* (Tel Aviv, 1971), pp. 195–96.
18. See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, p. 518 et passim.
19. On the identification between Hannah and Jerusalem see Shaked, pp. 189–90.
20. See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston, 1955).
21. Amos Oz, “A Hollow Stone,” trans. Nicholas de Lange, in *Where the Jackals Howl and Other Stories* (New York, 1981), pp. 137–167. All page references are to this edition. The Hebrew version consulted is the Am Oved edition, 1977.
22. In *Where the Jackals Howl*, pp. 21–38.
23. Trans. Hillel Halkin (New York, 1985). The Hebrew text consulted is the Hakibbutz Hame’uchad edition, 1982.