The Twin in the Transference
The Twin in the Transference
SECOND EDITION

Vivienne Lewin
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I am grateful to all the patients who have generously given their permission for me to publish aspects of my work with them. I have made all accounts of my work unrecognizable to all except possibly the patient concerned in order to protect the confidentiality of their material.

I have drawn on the work of many published authors both for my general understanding and in referring to accounts of their analytic work. While I may raise critical questions about some of the work, it is always in the spirit of wishing to understand better this complex and fascinating subject. I have as far as possible quoted the sources from which I draw, but I am sure there are some which have become an integral part of my thinking and understanding, which I may have neglected to attribute. To those, I apologize for the omission, and offer my thanks to them for creating a framework for thinking.
About the Author

Vivienne Lewin is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. She trained at the London Centre for Psychotherapy (now the British Psychotherapy Foundation) and was a training therapist and supervisor for the London Centre for Psychotherapy. She is a Fellow of the British Psychotherapy Foundation and other organisations. She has retired from clinical practice, but continues to supervise, teach, and write.
There are two possible reasons to buy this book. The first is the obvious one, that it is a profound resource for anyone whose clinical work has ever included work with a patient who is a twin or else with a parent or sibling of twins. The second reason is, I believe, the more important one. It is that Vivienne Lewin has demonstrated the relevance that experience and phantasies about twinship provide. In exploring twin phantasies, we are invited to explore and understand some of the depths of unconscious interaction in the clinical science and art that Freud heralded, in moving from the experience of being a body to the experience of becoming a person with a mind. Those who wish to delve into the complex psychosomatic and unconscious communications that underpin the daily clinical and social experience of split-off parts of the personality and projective identification as both violent riddance and attempt at communication will find this book a rich resource.

*The Twin in the Transference* demonstrates research in depth. The author has left no stone unturned in her search for narratives: clinical, theoretical, and mythological, in pursuit of producing what I believe is already the defining text on psychoanalytic work with twins. With her perceptive and critical appreciation of other writers’ material and with her development of an original theoretical approach, positioned amongst the works of others, I believe that this book’s academic standard is beyond clinical doctorate level.

She provides additional fascinating discussion of the ethics of intervening in a twin system in the way the analysis will affect the other twin; the neuroscience of attachment shaped by the insecurities of the twinship experience; the reproduction of the effects of twinship sexuality in real and phantasised incest and later choice of partner. Finally, she addresses the shaping and inhibiting of agonised and releasing grief in the experience of the death of one twin.

In her introduction, she declares her considerable indebtedness to the Kleinian and post-Kleinian traditions in its developments and, although not all of us carry the same orientation, she does illustrate the riches of working within that particular orientation. Particularly acute are the details of her own
clinical work with twins. For the way patients’ destructive narcissistic wounds are revealed in the subtleties of annihilating phantasies; revealed in her way of reading their material and in her own countertransference. She also deepens Kleinian theory by investigations into the universality of twinship phantasies within the longing for the retreat into fusion and control of the breast in the shape of the ever-present, never-to-be-relinquished twin transference and restricted identity.

Clinically, my view is that the book is well-worth buying for Chapter Six alone, with her description of work with a very entrenched, wounded twin expressing his addictive and destructive enmeshment through the impacts of besieging twin projective identifications fielded, considered, and interpreted by the analyst.

In addition to this piece of clinical practice and research, Vivienne Lewin has made an enormous contribution to professional psychoanalytic psychotherapy. In the years since we began our training together in 1978, within the London Centre for Psychotherapy, she has held key roles there over the years. She has been Chair and Vice-chair of Council, Chair of Training, as well as numerous other committees, including the challenging work of ethical hearings.

More importantly, she has been one of the significant number of LCP members whose early training left them hungry for a deeper analysis and getting to grips more thoroughly with the need for containment through the use of countertransference, as well as more profound understanding of the traumatised, psychotic, destructive, narcissistic, and perverse violations to person-making that besiege the analyst at work.

Through years of psychoanalytic formation, she has not only put herself in a position to produce this groundbreaking book. Along with others, she has also provided a vision for the positioning of the LCP within the psychoanalytic community, where it carries a reputation as a training institution that produces humane, well-analysed, well-supervised members, competent to search for the holding environment of perceptively timed interpretation that will woo the patient out of destructive, addictive, and omnipotent narcissism into real relating. In consequence, the LCP has been able to pull itself up by its boot straps, from being a course that twenty-six years ago was probably on a par with current less-intensive training courses for psychodynamic counsellors, into the course in intensive psychoanalytic practice it is today. It has been through the leadership of colleagues like Vivienne Lewin that the LCP has been one of the key movers in the recent merger of the British Association of Psychotherapists, The Lincoln Clinic and Centre for Psychotherapy, and the LCP into the British Psychotherapy Federation, with its shared training, standards, and vision of intensive psychoanalytic work in psychotherapy.

At a personal level, it is a great honour to write this foreword to the second edition that belongs so well in the Karnac list. For many years, Vivienne Lewin and I exchanged peer clinical supervision in a way that gave me personal and professional support and insight in dealing with the challenges that come from
the deepening well of doing responsive psychoanalytic work. This experience also gave me insight into the ideas in this book as they were emerging. Those who read it will find, I have no doubt, a deepening of their own capacity to endure uncertainty and wait while the pattern of communication coheres into an experience that can be articulated for the sake of both analyst and patient.

Richard Morgan-Jones
Eastbourne
Preface to the second edition

I decided it was time to bring this book out as an e-book as well as having it in print, hence this new edition of *The Twin in the Transference*. Karnac have been most helpful in arranging this and I wish to express my appreciation of the warm reception I have received from Oliver Rathbone of Karnac.

The substance of the book has not been changed. People have continued to tell me about its usefulness and relevance to their work and thinking, and that it has contributed to their understanding of twin relationships. Although I have continued to research and work with the subject of twins and twin relationships, psychoanalytically I think that the book, as it stands, offers the essence of my understanding about twin relationships, and have decided not to amend it to include new developments or understandings. However, I do wish to mention, briefly, a few of these new ideas in the following pages.

This book explores both the unconscious phantasy of twin intimacy and an analysis of what is revealed in the transference/countertransference experience in clinical work. It addresses the actual experience of working with twin patients psychoanalytically and the complex task of trying to disentangle sensori-motor wired-in dynamics from psychic ones. We see something of this complexity in my brief mention of opposite-sex twins below.

Over the years since I started writing about twins and twin relationships, I have been asked a number of questions about twins—their relationships, their special place in our imagination, and their specific difficulties—issues that are mentioned in the book but which could perhaps do with a little further clarification. In some areas significant new research has thrown more light on the factors that affect twin development and relationships. This is especially so with new research in genetics and epigenetics. I will briefly address some of

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1 *Genetics* is the study of heredity and the variation of inherited characteristics, based on our understanding of the sequence of different genes and their impact on development.

2 *Epigenetics* is the study of changes in the way genes are expressed, as a result of factors (chemical, hormonal, or environmental) rather than changes in the underlying DNA.
these issues below. I will also restate the central theme of this book, linking the nature of the internal twin relationship and our phantasies about twins.

The special qualities of twinship: why are twins so special?

I have been asked why I have focused on the difficulties twins encounter in their development towards maturity and in their relationships with their twin and with others, as they grow older, marry, and have children of their own. It is the developmental difficulties that have concerned me because that is what I have encountered in my work with twins. The nature of these relationships will come alive powerfully in the transference/countertransference relationship between the twin patient and the analyst, and it is here that they can be unravelled and understood, so that new development can take place.

There are specific positive aspects about being a twin, in addition to the particular qualities we project onto twins because of what twins represent to us psychically. Twins may experience an unparalleled closeness and understanding, though it is not necessarily so. Alternatively, they may be intimately connected in rivalry and hatred in an equally binding way. The extraordinary intimacy and closeness between twins represent the “special” factors in twin relationships that are highly prized by the twins, and the parents of twins, and envied by singletons, even though being a twin may create developmental difficulties for twins. We see the special ways twins are perceived in mythology (see Chapter Two) and cultural practices throughout the world, where twins may be regarded as god-like or, alternatively, evil.

The central theme of this book, and of my understanding about twins, focuses on the special, psychic factors that become a central developmental theme in twin relationships. The baby at the breast will have gloried in mother’s unconscious attunement to, and understanding of, the physical and emotional needs of her baby. The infant experiences this as having an ideal twin of his- or herself (see Chapter One). This experience is intermittent and, in the gaps, a sense of having lost the ideal breast will ensue, generating a feeling of essential loneliness. The universal sense of longing for a twin is based on an experience that originates from this feeling of essential loneliness. Thus, the infant creates a phantasy twin from his or her good experience at the breast, hoping to alleviate the longing for perfect understanding that is a continuing factor in life—the longing for a twin self.

Our idealisation of the twin relationship is grounded in these concepts:

- each infant creates an unconscious phantasy of an identical twin self, a twin soul who will satisfy the universal longing to be truly known and understood, in an apparent resolution of ubiquitous essential loneliness;
- in twins, the twin self is perceived as being embodied in, or represented by, the other twin (Chapter Three);
- we idealise twins because we perceive them as having the depth of intimacy that we long for.
Phantasies of an ideal twin self are projected between twins, and into twins by others. This prompts our fascination with twins, as we project our own twin phantasies into them. But it may also interfere with the twins’ needs to establish separate and individual identities rather than being seen only as twin selves. Many are the times I have heard a twin say, “we were always called ‘the twins’ rather than called by our names”; “we always received joint birthday cards, never individual ones”, etc. Thus, as a result of the processes of internal twinning, parental and other projections, and confusions between and about the twins, twins have additional developmental obstacles to negotiate in their move towards maturity.

The unconscious nature of the twin relationship has deep roots in our earliest sensate and primitive experiences. The enduring nature of the internal twinning is created partly by primal biological and sensate resonances between the twins, both before and after birth. Research on brain development in early life indicates that the fact of being a twin will influence the nature of individual development in each infant according to both bio-rhythms between the twins and between mother and each twin, and affect-regulation by mother and the twin (Chapter Ten); as well as the relationship with mother and mother’s relationship with each twin, and the relationship between the twins themselves (Chapter Two).

Clinical work with twins highlights the intensity of the internal twin relationship as it is lived out in the consulting room (Chapters Six and Seven). It elucidates processes that operate not only in twins, but also in all psychic development, processes linked with the centrality of projective identification as a form of communication from which unconscious phantasy can be explored and played with. The transference twin is a central concept in work with patients who are twins, one that is as important as the maternal or paternal transferences, and it is also a primary relationship. In order to understand a twin patient at depth, the quality and nature of the projected phantasied twin will need to be experienced, understood, and addressed by the analyst and the patient.

The aim of this projective identification may be, as with other projective identifications, to communicate something that cannot be otherwise easily expressed. Given the primitive nature of the deepest unconscious aspects of twin relationships, this is sometimes the only means by which the patient can express phantasies and experiences that are pre-verbal, protomental, sensate. It may also be an attempt by the patient to be rid of a troublesome unmanageable phantasy twin. And it may change from moment to moment. These primitive, preverbal, proto-mental phantasies and the experiences upon which they are based, will affect ordinary relationships throughout the lives of twins.

The concept of a phantasy twin is central to our fascination with, and idealisation of, twins, and to the excitement about twins, and the many magical qualities attributed to twins in mythology, and as seen in cultural practices in other countries. A close examination of the transference/countertransference relationships between patients and analysts may reveal not only the
unconscious phantasies of twins in both their twinship and individual relationships. We also find out more about how the development of a sense of self, inter- and intra- the twinship, has been affected, at times transformed, by the expectations and the projections of others. The projected phantasies about twins and their relationships can be pervasive.

I wrote this book because I discovered a lacuna in my own understanding of patients with whom I was working, and I needed to explore and develop my understanding of twin relationships. In psychoanalytic practice, it is in the fearless exploration of previously untrodden territory, the search for what we repeatedly feel we have missed, that we find the “aha” moments, the revelations of newer and deeper kernels of personal truth that transform our understanding of the nature of who we are and how we become who we are. If we can risk facing our own uncertainties and gaps, new windows of understanding can open up.

Opposite-sex twins: won’t it be different for opposite sex twins?

I have often been asked about the dynamics in relationships of opposite-sex twins, usually with the rider that it must be different from those of same-sex twins. It has been suggested that the twinship would be less entangled because the different sexes of the twins would offer less opportunity for primitive identification and more for individual development; that the dimension of developing sexuality of each twin will be different; or as has been suggested, that the opposite-sex twins will be no more alike than ordinary siblings.

In my experience the central dynamic of the relationship of opposite-sex twins is very similar to that of same-sex twins, either MZ3 or DZ4. The early proto-mental relationship between the twins is just as powerful and indelible for opposite-sex twins as it is for any other twins, and the processes of individual development and separateness will likewise depend on many factors including psychic development, constitutional, parental, and other attitudes to the twin babies, and a deep understanding that each baby is an individual in its own right, as well as being a twin.

There may be some differences in the development of sexuality of the individual opposite-sex twin children, based on primitive and later identifications with the other twin and with the parents in the oedipal configuration. Glenn (1966) presents material from his own work and that of other analysts to support this view. I have not addressed these issues in this book.

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3 MZ stands for monozygotic twins, i.e., twins from one fertilised egg, so having near identical genetic make-up.

4 DZ stands for dizygotic twins, i.e., twins from two fertilised eggs, so having genes as different as other siblings.
Genetics and environment: the old nature–nurture debate

A great deal of research has been carried out based on the assumption that MZ twins are genetically identical. Genes are the blueprint from which our development takes instruction, but they are rarely the singular factor determining which way it goes, nor are they immutable. There have been many new developments in this field and our understanding of how genes work has increased enormously.

Jay Joseph (2004) addresses this in depth in his book *The Gene Illusion*, where he examines, amongst other things, the much-reported research on cases of MZ twins separated at birth and brought up in different environments. The research findings that he questions state that these twins, extraordinarily and uncannily, make the same life choices, have the same taste and lifestyle, even marry someone with the same name, simply because of their genetic similarity. Joseph examines these studies and concludes from his extensive research that genes *per se* cannot determine how “identical” twins develop, whether reared apart or together. He asserts that many factors were not taken properly into account in the “twins separated at birth” research, thus skewing the findings.

Tim Spector (2012), as he describes in his book *Identically Different*, has explored the factors that operate in the development of all foetuses, both twins and others, according to the activation and de-activation of their given genes. MZ twins have long been regarded as a unique test of genes in action because they come from a single fertilised egg, and start off with identical genomes (the complete set of genes or genetic material present in a cell or organism). MZ twins are literally clones.

Our development depends on the expression of our genes. Research has shown that identical genes can diverge in their expression during foetal development and in the course of a lifetime, as a result of “epigenetic” factors. Epigenetics is the new focus for how we become who we are. It offers an understanding of how our genes will be activated or de-activated, and altered from conception and through life by various chemical, hormonal, and environmental factors, and will affect how we develop and who we become. Most genes act as multiples working together, and there are different versions of genes that become activated or de-activated.

Epigenetic factors will create differences between twins with consequent changes in their developmental patterns. “Epigenomes” are basically chemical switches that activate or de-activate the genes, which then lay the template for the formation of proteins—the building blocks for development of all kinds. Factors, including hormones, chemicals, or the quality of nutrition, will activate or de-activate genes, creating differences even in monozygotic twins.

For twins, the intrauterine environmental differences for each twin will depend on many factors, including the type of placental implantation—a shared placenta or individual placentas; this may affect levels of nourishment, which in turn has consequences for the level of growth affected in each twin and may
lead to selective intra-uterine growth restriction where nourishment to one twin is restricted.

As a result of the action of epigenetic factors, the categorisation of twins as “identical” and “fraternal” falls apart, creating a much greater ambiguity in our classification of types of twins, and what we might understand about their genetic similarities and differences, and their development.

Thus, factors like health, personality, taste, and appearance, all depend on both nature and nurture, with epigenetics as the link between the two. Nutrition, space, exposure to hormones, small alterations in epigenetic profile, and minute differences in genome—all these factors create subtle but important differences in each twin. Genes alone do not create physical or mental attributes, or personality traits.

So, I return again to the psychic factors in twin development, both intra- and inter-psychic. If we can understand more about each individual twin person, we will enhance our understanding of early and later developmental processes in all of us, and enable each individual twin to move towards a more healthy sense of individual identity, and to value the twin relationship which is so central a part of their sense of self.

References


The Summer Garden*

...‘And the swan, as before, floats across centuries,
   Admiring the beauty of its twin.

And sleeping there, like the dead, are hundreds of thousands of
   footsteps
   Of friends and enemies, enemies and friends.

   And the procession of shades is endless,
   From the granite vases to the door of the palace.

   My white nights whisper there
   About some grand and mysterious love.

   And everything glows like jasper and mother-of-pearl,
   But the source of the light is mysteriously veiled.’

Introduction
Why study twins?

Twins both fascinate and disturb us, and we tend to attribute special qualities to their relationship. In this book, I will explore what lies behind this special interest.

Our fascination with twins is linked with the universal urge towards twinning. The phantasy of having a twin is ubiquitous and is based on developmental factors linked with essential loneliness, a longing to be known, and the creation of a sense of self within a primary object relationship. The specialness with which we regard twins stems in part from our narcissistic wish to be totally understood and merged with an object, as well as from a sense of the uncanniness of the double. I believe that an examination of both the general nature of twinning and of twinning processes as experienced by and exacerbated in actual twins may lead to a greater understanding of developmental processes in both singletons and twins.

Twins excite all sorts of feelings and responses in others and are a source of considerable interest both scientifically and in everyday life. There are many books about twins. There are those written by a twin either to celebrate twinning, or to commemorate or compensate for the loss of a twin, either pre- or postnatally, at any and all ages. Parents of twins write about their experience of bringing up twins, both the pleasures and difficulties that they encounter. Scientists of all descriptions have studied twins for decades in the hope of learning the secrets of inheritability and the progress of both individual development and diseases. Children’s books explore the many facets and functions of a phantasy twin through the twinships of the children in the story.

In one sense, I am writing this book as an outsider - I am not a twin, nor am I immediately related to one. However, in my analytic experience as a transference twin, I am an insider with an outsider’s perspective. As a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, I have worked individually with a number of adult patients who have a twin, and through this route I have discovered the impact of the twin relationship on the analytic transference relationship. As a
result, I have become particularly interested in twinning processes in both twins and singletons. The analysis of the transference twin seems to have been largely neglected in the psychoanalytic literature. This book is about the creation of the twin in the transference and its implications for psychoanalytic work.

While the parents provide a developmental framework for each infant, relationships with siblings offer an opportunity to negotiate and manage peer social relationships. In fact, the existence of siblings propels us into having to confront issues that are not encountered in the parent–child relationship (Mitchell, 2000). The tensions in sibling relationships and between children and their parents are more intense in twins because of the absence of an age gap between the twins. While the twinship lacks the developmental advantages offered by the age difference between non-twin siblings, the twin relationship does provide an opportunity for unparalleled companionship and for an understanding without words reminiscent of the earliest relationship with mother.

The existence of a twin may even ameliorate developmental difficulties in situations of maternal unavailability or neglect. However, a sound ‘friendship’ is not necessarily a feature of the twin relationship. Many factors will affect how the twin relationship develops, and the extent to which each twin within the relationship develops a companionable rather than a narcissistic relationship with the other twin. Siblings and others may envy the closeness of twins, and the twins may use the twinship to create a barrier between themselves and the parents. I will trace some of these factors through this book.

The book is based on the premise that no two people are identical, not even monozygotic twins. To believe that they are identical is a defence against difference and separateness, whatever the genetic make-up of the twins. There are, to a greater or lesser extent, genetic, psychological and behavioural differences between twins, as well as similarities. However, each twin has to struggle with his/her own processes of development to carve out a personal sense of identity. For each twin, this individuality will overlap to varying degrees with that of the other twin, and this may lead to aspects of a shared identity.

There are two central hypotheses that I plan to explore in this book:

1. Twins are fundamentally affected in their emotional development by the fact of being a twin.

I am taking as a base the Kleinian view that the phantasies of the breast and of the parental couple are innate and are central to the development of each individual. Where then do the other twin and siblings fit in? I believe that the indelible twin relationship is linked with the infant’s earliest experiences with both mother and twin, including during the prenatal period. The central internal structure that gives us a sense of identity would be developed through the infant’s relationships primarily with its mother and, later, its
father, and its acceptance of an oedipal parental couple of a different generation. For twins, this internal structure would be more complicated.

The presence of the other twin leads to a situation in which mother and twins create a triad (prior to the oedipal triad), rather than the dyadic relationship that exists for singletons. As a result, for twins there would be three pair relationships: mother-twin 1, mother-twin 2, and twin 1-twin 2. The initial developmental process, say for twin 1, would be shaped both by the relationship with mother and by the relationship with twin 2. The relationship with twin 2 could theoretically be on a continuum between sibling rivalry and merging, and would include twin 1’s perception of the twin 2-mother relationship. It is through this complex structure that each twin will develop a sense of identity.

If the twin bond is strong, it will interfere with each infant’s relationship with mother. In addition, mother would be less available to each twin than she would be to a single baby. Whenever she relates to one twin, the other would be at least partially excluded. Placing father in the picture would create six pairs, and four triads, thus complicating the picture further. When mother and father are engaged as a pair, the twins would be excluded, and if awake, they would probably be an interacting pair. If the twins are together, even asleep, it is likely that they would still be aware of each other. Awake or asleep, each twin is contributing to the formative experience of the other twin. Thus each twin has to engage with the processes of, and tensions between, separateness and relatedness to both the other twin and to mother, and later to father.

Separation from the other twin would be more problematic than separation from mother as the twinship offers a narcissistic refuge. At times when frustration may feel difficult to tolerate, twins would, to varying degrees, seek gratification from each other, thus filling the gap and avoiding the space that is necessary for the development of symbolic thought. The rather concrete nature of aspects of twin relationships may be linked with this area of lack of symbolization. There may be a confusion of ego-boundaries between twins and a relative and variable lack of a separate sense of identity. For twins the twinning is not only an external phenomenon. The other twin would be a potent and active internal object, and would be a source of transference manifestations. The emergence of a transference twin in psychoanalytic work would lead to an intense and tenacious relationship between analyst and patient, echoing the internal twinship. This internal twinship is inescapable and lasts for the lifetime of each twin, even after the death of one twin.

The intense sense of closeness between twins is felt by twins to be a special and unique aspect of being a twin. The twin relationship may profoundly affect the resolution of both the early and later oedipal conflicts, thus having a lasting impact on the structure of the inner world of the individual twin. With the acceptance of mother and father as a couple that are not of the generational sameness as the twin couple, development