



*Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory*

# LITERARY TWINSHIP FROM SHAKESPEARE TO THE AGE OF CLONING

Wieland Schwanebeck



“A lively, consistently instructive guided tour of some of the most intriguing ways writers have presented twins and twinship over the past four centuries. Wieland Schwanebeck comes up with a remarkable range of different ways to think about twins—as the same yet different, as shadow selves, as clones, as our missing halves, as challenges to our personal identity—and an equally remarkable number of areas—Shakespearean comedy, Victorian detective fiction, literary adaptation, popular fictional genres, pornography, behaviorism, genetics, criminology, eugenics, ethnography, biopolitics, literary production and interpretation—that are illuminated by their handling of twins. Readers are certain to agree with him that ‘once you have grasped twinship, you can never not see it again’”.

*Prof. Thomas Leitch, University of Delaware*



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# Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning

Unlike previous efforts that only address literary twinship as a footnote to the *doppelgänger*, this book shows how twins have been instrumental to the formation of farce, detective novels, and dystopian science fiction. The individual case studies demonstrate how the twin was repeatedly (re-)invented as a pathological and cultural type when other discursive fields constituted themselves, and how its literary treatment served as the battleground for ideological disputes: by setting the stage for debates regarding kinship and reproduction, or by partaking in discussions of criminality, eugenic greatness, and ‘monstrous births’. The book addresses nearly 100 primary texts, including works of Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Priest, William Shakespeare, and Zadie Smith.

**Wieland Schwanebeck** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and American Studies at TU Dresden (Germany). His research focuses on British literary history, impostors and con men, cinema, and adaptation. He has co-edited the *Metzler Handbook of Masculinity Studies* (2016) and, most recently, *Patricia Highsmith on Screen* (2018).

# Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory

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## **Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning**

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# Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning

Wieland Schwanebeck

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# 1 Introducing Twins

## The Omnipresent Twin

Ask anyone to think of two people who share a near-absolute physiognomic similarity, and chances are they will picture a pair of twins. Yet behold a pair of identical twins in more detail and, once your initial ‘shock of likeness’ has passed, you will end up scanning them for differences rather than similarities. *Identical* (2012), a volume of twin portraits taken by Martin Schoeller, reveals this paradox on every page. Popular culture all too frequently emphasises that the essence of twinship is to signify *sameness* – in French, identical twins are known as *vrai jumeaux*, that is: ‘true’ twins. Yet Schoeller’s photographs, particularly the ones that show the wrinkled faces of aged twins, tell a different story. Life has left traces in the physiognomies of these people, and these traces quite literally make a *difference*: some of the twins look more tired and worn-out than their siblings; some make a point of wearing their hair differently; and some bear the evidence of sub-cultural affiliations, accidents, and biographic circumstance: tattoos, hair-styles, tooth spaces, scars, and wrinkles.

The effect displayed in Schoeller’s photographs is truly uncanny if we resort to Freud’s original definition of the uncanny as “what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud 1919/2003, 124) and thus always bears traces of the *homely*. It is worth noting, however, that Freud does *not* include twins in his list of examples of the uncanny, but related phenomena like doubles, automata, and waxwork figures. When nature presents us with visible differences, we are bound to look for similarities; yet if two portraits seem to match at first sight, we will scrutinise them until they reveal to us what distinguishes them, much like the popular riddles of the ‘spot the difference’ variety. Our minds will not rest until they have safely established that, in fact, nothing in the world looks *less* similar than identical twins, maybe because we are intrigued by the intellectual challenge. It is the paradoxical dialectics of similarity and difference that seals the fate of the murderous protagonist in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Despair* (1965). Nabokov’s narrator fails in his attempt to commit the perfect murder, killing his doppelganger

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to make the world believe *he* has died, because he does not understand what the painter Ardalion tells him: “what the artist perceives is, primarily, the *difference* between things. It is the vulgar who note their resemblance” (51).

Evidently, the field of twinship is brimming with paradoxes: similarity triggers a search for *difference*, and we attribute to twins a singular status on the basis of their being *not* singular, for they are each other’s spitting image. Inevitably, then, it would be impossible to reconcile all the diverse semantisations twins have undergone in our culture. They have been conceptualised as harbingers of doom, adultery, the apocalypse, and the hereafter; as personified narcissism, as eroticised objects of desire; as devouring cannibals; as projection screens for collective fantasies about reproduction and fertility; as the founding fathers of civilisation; or as benign deities in charge of various departments, ranging from success in battle to meteorological phenomena (see Frey 2006, 71–76). In some mythologies,

they could throw spells, transform themselves into supernatural beasts, and make epidemics and other ills that befall livestock and gardens go away; they could cure certain illnesses; they were immune to bites of venomous animals; and they could give success in hunting, fishing, and so on.

(Lévi-Strauss 1995, 119)

It goes without saying that this pre-Christian legacy lives on, though in somewhat sublimated forms. Twins are media darlings who regularly provide stories of the rather curious kind: here we have the 38-year-old man from Illinois, claiming responsibility for the murder that his twin brother has been convicted for (see Chan 2016), the All-American family who welcomed three pairs of twins in three consecutive years, not to mention the man who “‘accidentally’ had sex with his wife’s identical twin sister” (Waugh 2015) or the former Pop Idol star who blamed his porn addiction on “watching his twin brother being given special medical help 10 minutes after he was born” (Hope/Saunders 2017). These stories are equal parts human interest and freak show: cue tearful embraces exchanged between adult twins who got separated at birth, and exploitative reporting on surgical attempts to separate conjoined twins. There is no shortage of juicy reading material; just consider the long list of media stories produced in the aftermath of the famous Minnesota twin study (see Segal 2012). The first widely reported case went down in history as that of the ‘two Jims’ from Ohio,<sup>1</sup> and was re-enacted several times across the media. The story is always about twins who grew up without being aware of each other’s existence and who, on meeting again after decades, discover they have quite a lot in common: that they happened to get married on the same day, that they injured themselves

under similar circumstances, or that they gave the same names to their children. Where there is difference, we will prefer to see similarities, and vice versa; the differences just do not make the headlines even though, “scientifically, they are equally important” (Watson 1982, 96).

Not a week goes by without a media report to remind us that *everyone* can be brought down by an uncanny twin (in some cases their own), or that twinship indicates the presence of sinister forces. In recent years, there has been a wave of reports (and feature films) about *fetus-in-fetu* cases: people who learn that they have been living with twins absorbed inside them. Typical tabloid stories focus on well-adjusted young adults who undergo routine surgery in hospitals, only to have the doctors discover remnants of their late siblings. Trust medical detectives like Dr. Gregory House (*House M.D.*, 2004–2012) to clear up the matter and to correctly infer that the young boy who is suffering from severe hallucinations is, in fact, not one person but *two*. As House explains to the astonished parents in episode *Cane & Able*:

It’s called chimerism. Unfortunately, [your son’s] brother’s like a bad double’s partner. The guy just takes up space, gets in the way. Clancy’s body thinks that he’s gonna put away the easy winners. His brother just keeps swatting balls into the net. We gotta get him off the court.

Tellingly, House adjusts his semantics to prepare the boy’s parents for the risky surgical procedure. Instead of marking out the embryo of Clancy himself as a greedy bunch of cells monstrously devouring the weaker one, it is the absorbed brother who is conceptualised as an unwanted intruder and free-loader. By removing the parasite in a suspenseful surgery sequence, the doctors also rid Clancy of his ghostly visions of aliens, the ultimate Other in popular culture.

As popular culture has caught on to the phenomenon, suppressed memories of vanished twins have become a staple in literature. In trans-cultural fiction, they serve as reminders of severed ties with the abandoned home culture, while Margaret Lea, the narrator of Diane Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), realises that it is a vanished twin “that had stained me,” and she recounts several uncanny experiences that suddenly make sense in the light of her biographical discovery, her “pale shadow” (20–21). Both Setterfield’s neo-Gothic tale and *House*’s medical detective work are examples of how outrageous ‘vanishing twin’ narratives are absorbed into the media, leading Hillel Schwartz to suggest that “we have begun to establish a cult around the vanished twin” (1996, 23). Contemporary twin narratives magnify and update what classical mythological tales have always ‘known’ about twinship and what other, infinitely more subtle iterations of the twin motif suggest: that the origins of twins are, at best, dubious and, at worst, immensely scary and

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frightening. While no-one will deny that horror stories of this kind have almost universal appeal, the reasons remain subject to debate – this book seeks to explore them in their historical contexts. It does so by engaging with medical literature of the particular time, which assigned a particular place to twins without actually saying much *about* them. More frequently, research engages with twinship only to illuminate other objects of inquiry; the list includes “intelligence, criminality, sociability, sedation thresholds, temperaments, obesity, homosexuality, depression, suicide, emotionality, cynicism, compulsiveness, submissiveness, pessimism, sexual inhibition, narcissism, passivity, [and] self-expressiveness” (Schwartz 1996, 36). My subsequent summary of twin scholarship and the nature/nurture debate in Chapter 2 will bear testimony to this, as will the individual chapters that engage with the relationship between medical discourse and literary approaches to the twin motif.

All of this points to an almost traumatic obsession: a wound that we keep returning to without treating it properly. It may have its origins at the dawn of Enlightenment in the Renaissance, though most twin myths are older than this, of course. The age of humanism has sung the praises of the *in-dividual*, that is: that which cannot be divided. Does the appearance of twins not tell us that this may just be one gigantic misunderstanding, or even an outright lie? Philosophers and mathematicians alike have reflected on the number two as “the true number,” the existence of which not only introduces multiplicity and, in a theological sense, the idea of creation (Farmer 1996, 332), but also the sense-making operations inherent in structuralism and modern semantics. If the experience of duality amounts to “the foundation stone of human consciousness,” in that it teaches us to distinguish “between the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’” (Herdman 1990, 1), then twin stories are highly instructive tales that provide lessons about the binary structure of thought and the clear-cut boundaries of Western semantics.

Moreover, does the existence of twins not compromise our struggle for singularity? There have been various attempts to dispel such concerns. The most popular strategy has been to overemphasise the otherness of twins and to relegate them to the realm of the monstrous, thus exploiting the twin’s uncanny potential for eerie effect. Modern reiterations continue to insist that nurture can only do so much and that, once brought into the world, evil twins will reign supreme and multiply, for they escape parental control and the bounds of order and domestication. In *Die zwei Brüder* (*The Two Brothers*, 1812), a fairy tale anthologised by the Brothers Grimm, it only takes a mean-spirited relative’s suggestion that the twins are in league with the devil for their own father to abandon them in the forest.

Rationalisation looks easy, yet biology alone is not going to cut it: one or several sperms fertilise one or several ova, subsequent developments depending on the division(s) of the zygote. Go beyond the biological facts

and you will discover that twins always constitute a social event “which may begin even before conception” (Stewart 2003, 3). Statistical data invariably comes with distinct models of explanation attached to them; take the fact that twin births have been steadily increasing in the recent past, particularly in the developed world – in the United States, England, France, and Germany, the rate almost doubled between 1975 and 2014. Two factors are credited for this development: the rising average age of mothers and the increase of IVF treatments and ovarian stimulation, all of which make twin pregnancies more likely (see Miller 2015; Beck 2016). Yet science is at a loss to account for other aspects of the global divide indicated by the numbers: that spontaneous twinning is in decline, even though the beneficial factors, such as maternal body weight, height, and age, are on the rise, or that twin births are much more likely to occur in Scandinavia and West Africa than in Japan, China, or India (see Campbell 1998, 129–132).

The statistical increase has not yet led to a reconceptualisation of twinship as anything other than a highly unlikely anomaly; an aura of the unusual and of deviance surrounds the phenomenon right from the beginning. This begs the question whether twins are ‘meant to be’ at all. It is tempting to give in to the view that the monstrous status of twinship is proven by the way nature deals with it in most cases: by ‘natural abortion,’ a disappearance of at least one twin without the carrying mother even suspecting that she was expecting twins to begin with. A twin pregnancy where both children survive is the exception rather than the rule, and the woman expecting a singleton has been safely established “as the norm, *the* reference point, both individual and social” (Stewart 2003, 169–170). Not only do twins represent an anomaly in this regard, they have been read as the embodiment of everything that is “unnatural and monstrous, and therefore as portending evil” (Hartland 1921, 491). After all, if we know one thing about monsters, it is that they always escape (Cohen 1995, 4), and there inevitably comes the moment when the maternal body literally cannot *contain* the twins anymore.

But turn the argument around – and in discussions of twinship, so much is down to a matter of perspective, the possibility of inversion inscribed into the twinned body right from the beginning – and you can make a quite different case. According to recent scientific estimates, far more of us were originally conceived as twins without being aware of it,<sup>2</sup> and in a more abstract sense, we are all twins, born from the division of cells: “All life is replication. Of twinning are we born” (Lash 1993, 27). Viewed in this fashion, twinship is *not* nature’s anomaly, quite the contrary. The idea that we are all in search of our vanished twin resonates well with the Platonic view, put forward in the *Symposium* (c. 385–370 B.C.), that human beings used to have four hands, four feet, and two faces, before they were cut in half as punishment for being disrespectful to the gods. According to Plato’s account, the fundamental

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trauma of having been split in the middle condemned human beings to ceaseless wandering in search of their missing half: “Whenever one of the two died and the other was left alone, the survivor would look for another mate to embrace, either the half of an original woman, as we now call it, or the half of a man” (2008, 191b).

Plato’s account is a neat summary of many of the themes associated with twinship, including the alleged state of bliss and harmony which can only be experienced within the geminate cell, the idea that other forms of relationships outside this cell are but pale imitations of the idealised bond, as well as the implicit claim that twins never really adapt into larger social structures, deriving comfort from each other’s company exclusively. A version of Joseph Campbell’s ‘monomyth’ is at the heart of such narratives: the blissful state of equilibrium in the womb gives way to enforced separation (*departure*), the twins face trials and tribulations in order to recapture their prenatal union (*initiation*), and they eventually produce a kind of transcendental version of it, which may involve death (*return*). Frequently, the narratives quite literally start *ab ovo*, that is: in the amniotic sac, where blissful Platonic unity reigns supreme. Stasha, one of the twin narrators in Affinity Konar’s novel *Mischling* (2016), recalls how she and her sister “were afloat in amniotic snowfall, two rosy mittens resting on the lining of our mother” (3), while Georgia and Bessi, the protagonists in Diana Evans’ *26a* (2005), emerge from a spiritual world of joint wandering. Both of these episodes culminate in a violent disruption when doctors tear the babies into the harsh light of the delivery room. The first chapter of *26a* highlights the brutality of the event: “There were screams and a feeling of being strangled. Then a violent push and they landed freezing cold in surgical electric white, hysterical, blubbling, trying to shake the shock from their hearts” (Evans 2005, 4).

As these accounts imply, the delivery must necessarily produce traumatised individuals who spend their lives hankering for the absolute intimacy of their prenatal existence; a defining void that spawns their individual quests as if to illustrate an argument frequently made by psychoanalytic literary scholars that literature “presents a detailed account of mankind’s chronic incompleteness” (Hallam 1981, 4). The split becomes manifest in diverse ways in twin narratives, for instance, by the twins taking turns narrating, *Mischling* alternates between Stasha’s and Pearl’s perspective; Evans’ *26a* briefly drops its heterodiegesis in favour of a first-person account once Bessi’s twin sister Georgia has committed suicide; and the ‘Jean-Paul’ brothers in Michel Tournier’s *Les météores* (*Gemini*, 1975) adapt the roles of individual narrators as soon as they have lost their symbiosis, having transformed into “[t]he twinless man in search of himself” who “finds only shreds of his personality, rags of his self, shapeless fragments of that enigmatic being, the dark, impenetrable center of the world” (204). While there is a modicum of hope for twins to fill the void, there is next to none for sole survivors suffering

from ‘vanished twin’ syndrome. Meanwhile, the rest of us are not even made privy to a tiny glimpse into the sacred realm of twinship. The housekeeper in Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale* has an epiphany to that effect when she ponders that all singletons are mere “amputees” from the perspective of a twin (2006, 83). The implication is that we *all* suffer from a version of the traumatic split, with the Platonic ideal feeding into the psychoanalytic belief that identity is per se deficient. Thus, Lacanians will insist on the *moi/je* divide and poststructuralists argue that only frantic activity will compensate for this eternal lack of stable, monolithic self-hood: Judith Butler has taught us that gender must be produced through iterable gestures, while Gilles Deleuze insists that only repetition can provide “the key to understanding difference” (de Nooy 2005, xvii).

If it is true that we all seek the long-lost twin sibling who may only exist as a phantasmagoric shape, this also makes murder suspects of most of us. Right from the beginning, we engage in a struggle for nutrients, space, and power, which only one party can survive. By implication, a singleton commits fratricide before s/he has even seen the light of day. Tournier’s *Gemini*, the most comprehensive and layered twin novel of the twentieth century, takes its cue from this argumentative inversion and its near-transcendental romanticisation of the geminate cell:

Every pregnant woman carries *two* children in her womb. But the stronger will not tolerate the presence of a brother with whom he will have to share everything. He strangles him in his mother’s belly and, having strangled him, he eats him, then comes into the world alone, stained with that original crime, doomed to solitariness and betrayed by the stigma of his monstrous size. [...] We [twins] alone, you understand, are innocent. We alone came into this world hand in hand, a smile of brotherhood on our lips.

(Tournier 1975/1998, 142)

No wonder, then, that twin encounters make for uncanny experiences, for they serve as reminders of our own repressed, guilty past; I will revisit this idea again in the chapter on Victorian literature. The shock of encountering your twin is similar to the one of “hear[ing] yourself on a recording” for the first time, when “the subtle non-you things” stand out to the speaker but to no-one else (Wright 1997, 158).

Yet there is more to it than the devouring and massacring of your own flesh and blood. For every ghostly Grady girl in a Stephen King adaptation (*The Shining*, 1980)<sup>3</sup> and for every clairvoyant, epileptic sister in a Daphne du Maurier story (*Don’t Look Now*, 1971), there is a Shakespeare play, a light-hearted young-adult story, or even an Arnold Schwarzenegger comedy (*Twins*, 1988) to remind us that there is something fundamentally funny about twinship. Even before these comic

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narratives conclude with reconciliatory embraces as well as brotherly or sisterly affirmations of mutual love and completeness, we have laughed – not in spite, but *because* of the presence of twins. Henri Bergson, in his seminal essay on *Laughter* (1900), remembers an observation Pascal includes in his *Pensées* (1670): that two faces that are alike “make us laugh together, on account of their likeness”. Bergson argues that the reason we find this funny is that we suspect some secret mechanism at work here, for “really living life should never repeat itself” (1900/1994, 82). The underlying repetitive and serialised structure of many jokes (“A rabbi, a minister, and a priest walk into a bar ...”) supports his point. One might wonder why German Romanticism, then, with its abundance of uncanny doppelgangers and lifeless automata, finds so little to laugh about in twins and limits itself to playing the sombre notes of this theme, and why it has largely been the Anglo-American literary tradition that has exploited the twin’s comic potential.

It is similarly hard to reconcile a lot of popular culture with the general sense that twin narratives ‘owe’ us a happy ending. No doubt improvements in prenatal medicine helped to redefine the twin pregnancy as a happy occasion throughout the twentieth century, and recent polls and surveys show a predominantly positive attitude towards twins. At the same time, parents are more likely to be asked about how they will cope with the inevitable problems and stress of raising twins than about their happy anticipation (see Stewart 2003, 124–130). This usually entails questions about the mundane realities of raising twins, but it goes deeper than this. How will you deal with being excluded from the geminate universe shared by your offspring? What about the gnawing suspicion that the twins, who are likely to develop their own secret language, are constantly plotting against you? And just how will you stop them from being at each other’s throats all the time?

Popular culture has enormous fun tapping into these fears and mixing contradictory registers; psychological horror fiction, to name but one example, milks the theme for all its uncanny potential. Sarah, the narrator in S.K. Tremayne’s *The Ice Twins* (2015), is frightened of her daughters to begin with, but when one of them dies and the other twin gradually loses her sense of identity, the mother’s mental health is severely affected, too. It is impossible to keep track of all the ghostly manifestations of twins who scare the living daylight out of their parents and friends, not to mention the countless comedies that habitually stigmatise their token weirdo characters as prenatal twin-killers. Dwight Schrute in NBC’s long-running sitcom *The Office* (2005–2013) is a case in point. He takes pride in having “resorbed the other fetus. Do I regret this? No, I believe his tissue has made me stronger. I now have the strength of a grown man and a little baby”.

Of course, this says little about the nature of twinship and much more about typical strategies of denoting otherness, often with racist

subtexts, so that twinship becomes a signifier that routinely denotes people who all ‘look the same’ anyway. Minor characters who admit to having eaten their twins *in utero* are frequently ethnic outsiders to begin with, like Lilly Onakamura in the *Pitch Perfect* franchise (2012–2017), or ‘Señor’ Ben Chang in the critically acclaimed sitcom *Community* (2009–2015), who, having absorbed his unborn twin, celebrates his birthday “to remember that I’m a winner.” Their prenatal ‘cannibalism’ merely re-emphasises what is clear from the beginning: that the Other cannot be trusted.

These darkly comic moments in family-friendly entertainment formats feed into a hypothesis that will resonate throughout the subsequent chapters of this book: the comic twin and the scary twin cannot be separated, for they are really only two sides of the same coin. The Shakespearean screwball character who struggles to catch up with the farcical developments around him always suspects demonic interference, and even the cloned harbingers of doom that populate horror fiction frequently provoke a gut reaction that borders on laughter. Daphne du Maurier’s protagonist in *Don’t Look Now*, who brings about his own doom when he ridicules the clairvoyant old twin and fails to read her prophecy correctly, is not the only one to appreciate the irony inherent in the punch-line structure of his own morbid death scene: “What a bloody silly way to die”, he reasons in the novella’s last words (51).

I will, for the moment, ignore the generic split between ‘comic’ and ‘serious’ modes of twin literature and explore some of the cultural coordinates that the twin phenomenon is embedded in as a “cultural hotspot” (de Nooy 2005, xvii). What it *always* indicates, no matter if one looks at comedies of mistaken identity, young-adult novels, detective fiction or neo-Gothic horror tales, is the conviction that there is aesthetic potential to be exploited. Here we find “sameness and symmetry [embodied] in the human form as literally and precisely as nature permits” (Schoeller 2012, n.p.), and the discovery of symmetry has been integral to the formation of art and in the evolution of aesthetics (see Hahn 1998, 3–8). How exactly this aesthetic potential is exploited is up to the individual text, of course, and this book will by no means deliver an exhaustive account of all the diverse semantisations that the twin motif has undergone throughout cultural history. As signifiers of difference and of broken symbiosis, twins lend themselves to narratives of family reconciliation, the most well-known of which is Erich Kästner’s frequently adapted young-adult novel, *Das doppelte Lottchen* (*Lottie and Lisa*, 1949). They also emblematised nation-building and are frequently included in foundational myths, no matter how unsound they may be. The 2014 Eurovision Song Contest featured an appearance of the Tolmachevy twins, two Russian sisters who performed a song (“Shine”) that bore a none-too-subtle message (sample lyric: “maybe there’s a day you’ll be mine”) in the direction of Ukraine, just two months after the annexation of Crimea,

the alleged inseparability of the two nations finding its visual emblem in the corporeal presence of the twin performers.<sup>4</sup>

### Aims and Structure

This book is not about the complete and unabridged history of literary twinship, for two major reasons: such a history would inevitably be one marked by long gaps, and there cannot be a concise and straightforward historiographic account of literary twinship as there is no singular notion of the twin that permeates *all* of the term's manifestations. What the Renaissance calls a twin differs from what the nineteenth century calls a twin. Sometimes the twin is a biological conundrum that threatens to expose the arbitrary laws of dynastic kinship, sometimes an epistemological problem that challenges the Victorian age's attempts to impose clear-cut definitions, and in another context (that of poststructuralist philosophy) the twin serves both as the ultimate dystopian signifier *and* as a subversive brother-in-arms, as when it joins forces with the clone to parody "the original, as its ironic, grotesque version, the way Napoleon III was, in Marx's view, the grotesque double of Napoleon I" (Baudrillard 1997/2002, 201).

If this book occasionally resembles literary historiography it is because, admittedly, the individual case studies are arranged in more or less chronological order and trace the development of the category of twinship over time, and it would be inaccurate to deny that some historical insight is to be gained in the process. Slavoj Žižek is one of many to observe that the double, one of the twin's close affiliates, mostly comes in comic manifestations until the eighteenth century and the Kantian revolution, when the idea of perceiving oneself "*as object*" turns into a horrific thought: "encountering one's double or being followed and persecuted by him is the ultimate experience of terror, something which shatters the very core of the subject's identity" (Žižek 2000, 315). At the same time, I am not convinced that Žižek or Baudrillard do justice to the topic when they simply historicise twins as the comical prologue to the uncanny horrors of the double, for the very reasons previously outlined. There is always, to paraphrase a mathematical pun from T.W. Robertson's play *Ours* (1866), something "odd" about twins, for the very reason that they are not odd but "even" (73).

Throughout this book, I will show how the twin was repeatedly (re-)invented as a cultural and pathological type while other discursive areas like criminology and eugenics constituted themselves or served as the battleground for ideological disputes, and it is amid these discursive processes that I locate *literary* twinship. My goal is thus not to demonstrate that literature 'mirrors' scientific debates of the day, quite on the contrary. Not only is it evident that literature frequently *prefigured* many of the discussions raging in modern twin scholarship, it has also been

instrumental in *facilitating* these debates and in contributing to the negotiation of power shifts, for instance, by setting the stage for debates regarding kinship systems in the Shakespearean age, by engaging in the Victorian reformulation of the field of crime and the early discourse on genetics and hereditary traits, or by contributing to the dystopian shape of cloning discourse in the twentieth century.

At the same time, there is something to be said for the significance of twinship in literature that goes beyond the sheer reiteration of the motif itself. Twinning leads us down the spiral double helix of (literary) creation to the roots of the most diverse phenomena, some of which emerge as traditional genres (the stage farce, the detective novel), while others (adaptation) are located *beyond* genre. But they all hark back to figures of twinship which are present at their inception, far from the desexualised, narcissistic form of “schizogenesis” that “go[es] from the same to the same” and which Baudrillard bleakly characterises as the epitome of standstill and dehumanisation (1990, 168). As though to confirm their status as divine and incestuous ‘givers of life,’ twins were crucial in the formation of all of them, performing a kind of literary midwife service. Evidently, twinship signifies so much more than sameness and conformity; where there is twinship, there is (cell) division and thus a way *forward*. Deleuze’s rephrasing of Nietzsche is fruitful here: we are not talking about an actual ‘eternal return of the same,’ but a “return of the Similar” (Deleuze 1990, 264).

Poststructuralist philosophy, which is going to feature prominently in my chapter on the cloning debate, is curiously reluctant to follow, however, and tries to have its cake *and* eat it: subverting the questionable binary on which our understanding of original creation rests but being, at the same time, quick to rediscover its love of the auratic original when it sees the latter come under threat by cloning. Dubious as the origins of twinship are often rendered both in medical literature and in fiction, the idea of the ‘monstrous’ birth permeates not just the history of twinship but also that of literary history as such. Exactly how these paradigm shifts unfolded in several different eras of literary and cultural history will be investigated by way of a discursive analysis that plots my individual case studies against scientific discourses. The twin motif clearly did not unfold in a vacuum, outside the jurisdiction of other twin scholarship, and I will explore the various intersections between literature and science in ways that existing literary scholarship has so far neglected to investigate.

At the same time, exploring twin literature will produce some insights into the ‘labour pains’ of literature and of literary analysis, and this means that the study also goes beyond a discussion of twinship itself. Where existing literary scholarship placed the emphasis on reading twin tales as distinct manifestations of authorial preoccupations or of the writer’s ‘vanished twin’ syndrome and survivor guilt, I am more intrigued by

what this kind of interpretative work reveals about our understanding of literature and the act of reading. Clearly, we intuitively seek out differences and opposites in order to structure our sense-making operations; in a way, all our reading is *twinned* reading. It is easy to marry this observation to (post-)structuralist accounts of the textual sign system, not just with regard to the split nature of the linguistic sign which, by necessity, must exceed the individual author's grasp. Meaning comes about *ex negativo*, by *not* meaning something else, just as the twin is perceived as the one who is *not* the other twin. This supplementary logic structures twin literature, as is borne out by the first few items of character exposition in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), the most well-known twin novel of the nineteenth century. Right from the beginning, Angelica is forced into a supplementary relationship with her twin Diavolo; even though the two of them do not amount to the antagonistic pairing which their two names would suggest, any aspect of difference serves to underline their status as complimentary signifiers, with Angelica being introduced as "the elder, taller, stronger, and wickeder of the two" (Grand 1893/1992, 7). It is my conviction that we must not limit this observation to twin literature alone, but that twin tales present us with problems pertaining to wider philosophical and methodological issues that will be discussed throughout this book. They include the search for individualism and identity, the attribution of guilt and responsibility in the face of genetic determinism, and serialised repetition and the alleged loss of aura.

Beyond these major talking points, my analyses will also address the microstructure of rhetoric and stylistic devices, quite a few of which show a clear affinity towards twinship: puns, orthographic peculiarities, and grammatical discordance. In Robertson's *Ours*, one character announces that "[t]he twins has got the twinsey" (82), which combines a word mix-up (quinsy/'twinsey') with a clash between plural noun and verb singular. Frequently, there is an abundance of stylistic twinned devices to be found in these texts; the madness of duality can neither be contained at the structural nor at the lexematic level, and few authors resist the temptation to throw in a joke or two along these lines. When the twin sisters in Evans' *26a* have a go at shoplifting, they steal Twix bars; dim-witted quadruplet Billy in the Cooney/Hilton farce *One for the Pot* (1963) constantly fails at putting two and two together; and in *Little Miss Twins* (1984), a volume in Roger Hargreaves' popular *Little Miss* series for children, the reader is introduced to the country of "Twoland," where everything exists in pairs, to the extent that even verbal utterances come with their own, inbuilt echoes ("Good morning morning", "She's my twin twin", n.p.). Ultimately, twin literature bears testimony to the twinned condition of language itself, in that it highlights the latter's fundamentally flawed nature, the signifier always on a futile chase to catch up with and unambiguously connote the signified. As though to flash a