

Brotherly Relations: Self and (M)Other in Conjoined Twin Films

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Prompting fascination and fear since mythological times, twins continue to haunt our imagination. Identical, non-identical, conjoined, mutant, telepathic, homicidal, buddies, soul-mates or jealous rivals, twins feature in scores of films across a range of genres; comedy, drama, thriller, horror, sci-fi, action and auteur cinema. Amidst this apparently infinite variety, however, insistent patterns occur (De Nooy and Statham, 1998). In this paper we focus on a particular sub-set of twin films -- recent horror films featuring male conjoined twins -- to show some surprising regularities of representation. Specifically, these narratives of fraternal attachment and separation represent the twin relation as maternal. Our aim is twofold, to demonstrate this striking pattern (in our analysis of *Dead Ringers*, *Basket Case I and II*, an episode of *The X-Files*, and *The Dark Half*) and to account for it. We argue that existing work on the representation of the body in contemporary horror only partially explains the emergence of this phenomenon, and that the pattern needs to be understood as a highly specific configuration of genre (horror), gender (male) and topos (conjoined twins) that lends itself to the rehearsal of a cultural anxiety regarding gender (male maternity). The discursive power of this configuration is demonstrated in our reading of *Twin Falls Idaho*. This film is not in the horror genre, and it repeatedly uses the metaphor of marriage, rather than motherhood, to describe conjoined twins Francis and Blake's relationship. And yet this text too must negotiate the pattern we have identified, making numerous gestures to displace and deflect maternal references. These remain, nonetheless, an undercurrent in the film, an indication of the force of this discursive phenomenon.

Genre and Gender

As we have argued elsewhere (De Nooy and Statham, 1998: 279), narratives of twins in popular culture are decidedly gender marked. Despite comprising a quarter of twin births, twins of mixed sex are strangely absent from film (an exception being *The Prince of Tides*). Male twins and female twins are more or less equally represented in number, but not in kind.

Among male twin films, scenarios vary enormously, but tend to be consistent within genres. The (frequently mutant) twin wreaks homicidal havoc in horror (*Basket Case*, *The Dark Half*), whilst twins separated at birth team up in action films (*Double Impact*, *Twin Dragons*) and in comedy (*Twins*). Confusion between look-alike twins is a staple of comedy (and a popular device in other genres). Recurrent thriller scenarios involve the struggle between good and evil twins (*Take Two*, *Raising Cain*, *Lies of the Twins*) and the hunt for one's twin's murderer (*Jack's Back*, also the action film *Maximum Risk*). The intense relationship between soul-mate twins provides substance for drama (*On the Black Hill*, *The Krays*, *Dominic and Eugene*) and leads to stagnation and decay in art-house films (*Dead Ringers*, *A Zed and Two*

Noughts; see De Nooy, 2002, on the representation of the narcissistic spiral towards death in twin narratives).

Female twin films, on the other hand, are far more homogeneous -- gender is clearly the key determinant. Without exception, they feature identical twins who (once they are over twelve years of age) are played by the same actor. And apart from a few comedies of confusion like *Big Business* and the recurrent “family entertainment” plot of twin girls matchmaking for their parents (*The Parent Trap* and its remakes), they are all thrillers involving deadly rivalry between good and evil twin sisters. Moreover, these sisters are always split along the same predictable line -- a version of the virgin/whore dichotomy. Unlike good and evil male twins, who tend to be distinguished on the basis of attributes such as lawfulness, altruism and family values versus criminality, worldliness and aggression, twin sisters are invariably distinguished by sexual behaviour. This group of films is thus highly coherent in terms of genre, character and plot. Its central preoccupation is the good girl/bad girl split, and women’s sexuality is associated with the threat of violence and/or castration (De Nooy and Statham, 1998; Fischer, 1989: 172-194; Creed, 1993: 131-138).

Clearly then, the conventions for the filmic use of the twin topos are functions of the interaction of genre and gender, and it is thus unsurprising that conjoined twin films are strongly gendered. Although the birth of female conjoined twins is considerably more common than that of their male counterparts (70% of surviving sets are female), there are very few films featuring female conjoined twins. (Sanders, 2002) A rare example is Brian de Palma’s *Sisters*, in which sweet Danielle and murderous Dominique are separated by Dr Emile. Avi Neshet’s *Doppelgänger* similarly involves bodily joining and disjoining, although the look-alike in this case is an alter ego rather than a twin. Whilst these two films tend towards the horror end of the spectrum, they share concerns that are entirely continuous with those of the female twin thrillers described above. Even the porn film *Joined: The Siamese Twins*, constrained by the video classification system to eschew the violence of the thrillers, manages to dichotomise its conjoined twins as sexually adventurous and sexually reticent.

On the other hand, late twentieth century films exploring the physical attachment (and detachment) of male twins’ bodies seem to share their own set of concerns, not only distinct from those of female twin films but setting them apart from other male twin films. The small corpus available consists of David Cronenberg’s *Dead Ringers*, a pair of classic bad horror films -- Frank Henenlotter’s *Basket Case I and II*, George Romero’s *The Dark Half*, and the Polish brothers’ *Twin Falls Idaho*. We shall juxtapose these with an episode of *The X-Files* that serves to parody and comment on the corpus.

At first glance, the texts in question appear coherent in neither genre nor quality. Even so, *Twin Falls Idaho* stands apart in positioning itself as a love story, as *not-horror*. This generic isolation does not however mean that the film can avoid other, less obvious patterns of representation, and we shall demonstrate that certain key images and issues recur in all these texts, repeatedly intertwining brother and mother stories.

Dead Ringers: “A View from the Womb”

Dead Ringers may seem an odd inclusion in this corpus, for each of the twin gynaecologists, Elliot and Beverly Mantle, ostensibly has his own, intact body. Fantasmatically, however, the

two are joined. Thus in Beverly's nightmare, the twins are connected by a band of flesh resembling a giant umbilical cord passing from one belly to the other, that Claire, the woman who comes between them, severs with her teeth. Additional footage, not included in the final cut, even showed "a quarter size parasitic figure of Bev growing out of his own abdomen." (Humm, 1997: 82) Beverly claims not to possess an individual nervous system, whilst Elliot states: "Whatever goes into his bloodstream goes directly into mine." Playing doctor in the most deadly way at the end of the film, Beverly operates on Elliot with instruments supposedly designed "to separate Siamese twins." Resonating with repeated verbal references to the original Siamese twins, the final shot has the moribund twins in foetal position, joined like Chang and Eng at the chest.

As several critics have pointed out, however, the fusion and division of the brothers in fact involves another fantasmatic figure, absent from the film -- the mother. Linda Badley notes that the film crew dubbed their work "Foetal Attraction" (Badley, 1995: 132). Drawing attention to the twins' blood-red robes, the claustrophobic interiors bathed in filtered amniotic-blue light, and the intra-uterine nature of both their domestic environment and their professional activity, she argues that the film is a "view from the womb" (Badley, 1995: 132). Drugged, the twins regress to an increasingly infantile condition. The rare view of the outside world is terrifying: Beverly's failed attempt, at the end of the film, to exit the narrow confines of the twins' environment finds him in a telephone booth planted in an overwhelmingly open space in front of their building. Speechless and unable to escape to a life with Claire, he returns to death in the twins' apartment.

From the womb, the omnipresent mother is not visible. Her role can even be denied, as occurs in both the twins' fantasised umbilical link to each other and their use of reproductive technology. As gynaecologists, they specialise in female fertility, and their perspective is so restricted to the womb that they do not "do husbands" or childbirth. Gender instability emphasises the possibility of the twins usurping the mother's position -- the feminised names Bev and Elly prepare the way for Beverly to use gynaecological instruments on his twin, thus (lethally) superimposing a female anatomy on Elliot. As Badley writes, "Their professional and personal lives are devoted to the construction of intricate systems that substitute for the mother, separate from her, or both." (Badley, 1995: 133)

There is a wealth of critical work on the film, focusing on the representation of twin separation as separation from the mother and its attendant anxieties (Badley, 1995: 131-136 Creed, 1990; Frank, 1991; Humm, 1997: 58-89). What several of these analyses have in common is that they view the maternal dimension of *Dead Ringers* as an idiosyncrasy of Cronenberg's films (Showalter 1992: 141). Considered alongside *The Fly*, *The Brood*, *Scanners* and *Videodrome*, *Dead Ringers* does indicate something approaching an obsession with reproductive processes. Yet, if we examine *Dead Ringers* together with other films exploring the same topos, we find that Cronenberg's representation is not so idiosyncratic, and that the relation to the maternal body is a recurring theme in films involving male conjoined twins. Significant elements of *Dead Ringers* are anticipated by some less than auteur cinema horror -- *Basket Case*.

Basket Case: Keeping a Lid on It

Duane Bradley carries his twin brother Belial around in a wicker basket. Belial (a Biblical name for evil) is a monstrously deformed “parasitic” twin, a head and arms that was once attached to Duane’s right side. (Gilbert, 1996) In their adolescence, while their motherly aunt was away, their father had them separated in a clandestine attempt to give Duane a normal life he did not seek. With remarkable resilience, Belial survived being put out with the garbage, and became a homicidal mutant of superhuman strength. *Basket Case* starts off as a story of revenge as Belial, aided by Duane, sets about killing those who performed their separation. As the film progresses, however, the focus shifts to Duane’s attempt to escape from the twin dyad by means of his relationship with Sharon. What is interesting, for our purposes, is that this attempt is represented in terms of the separation of mother and infant.

Whereas *Dead Ringers* is marked by symmetry and similarity, Bev and Elly both living in a foetal environment and usurping the maternal role in their work, the obvious asymmetry of the twins in *Basket Case* calls for a division of labour: Belial receives Duane’s maternal ministrations. Belial’s existence is foetal (he prefers the dark, enclosed space of the basket), as is his appearance, dominated by a frequently blood-smeared, disproportionately large, squashed head. Moreover, he is infantilised firstly by his aunt and then later by Duane. Duane turns out to be a something of a maternal mixed bag. At times he is the stereotypical “bad mother,” feeding Belial a diet of junk food, losing him and his basket, and leaving him with a non-functioning television as babysitter while he goes on a date with Sharon. At other times, he is nurturing and rehearses a familiar maternal discourse. Sensitive to the jealousy and fear of abandonment that has prompted Belial’s toddler-style destructive rampage in the hotel room, Duane cuddles him on his lap and reassures him, “I’m not deserting you. I just needed some time to myself. I’d never desert you after all we’ve been through. We’ll always be together.”

Although the maternal role is clearly assigned to Duane, the existence of both twins is marked by womb-like confinement, and here the resonance with *Dead Ringers* is clear. The seedy Hotel Broslin (tracking shots emphasising its long, narrow, tunnel-like passages and staircases) is dark and claustrophobic, as are the bar where Duane recounts his life story, the cinema where he loses Belial and the offices where the murders are committed. The only exceptions to the otherwise enclosed spaces of the film -- Duane and Sharon’s sightseeing tour of New York and a dream sequence in which Duane runs naked down the street to Sharon’s apartment -- both come to represent the possibility of Duane’s independence from his twin. And just as Beverly, at the conclusion of *Dead Ringers*, is unable to function in the open spaces outside the uterine world of the twins’ shared lives, just as he is ultimately unable to commit himself to a relationship with Claire, Duane too is unable to fulfil the promise of these excursions into the open spaces beyond the twin relation. Sharon poses precisely the same threat to the twin relation as Claire does, offering the twins the possibility of separating from each other but ultimately causing them to self-destruct in the same way. When Duane finds Sharon killed by Belial, he launches an enraged attack on his twin. They struggle, eventually falling from the window to their presumed death, their bodies rejoined as before at Duane’s abdomen, nicely anticipating the return to the conjoined position of the bodies in the final scene of *Dead Ringers*.

Unlike the invisible but omnipresent maternity in *Dead Ringers*, the mother role in *Basket Case* is aligned with Duane. His striving for independence is portrayed as a separation not from the mother but from the mother role in relation to his barely formed brother. In pursuing Sharon, Duane seeks release from his confinement -- in both the spatial and obstetric senses of the word. His struggles are however in vain: Duane is unable to be delivered of his foetal

twin, who reattaches himself to Duane's abdomen. What the two films thus share is a preoccupation with the twins' conflictual desire for and fear of separation and, in representing that conflict, both take the relation to the maternal body as paradigmatic. In each case, through portraying the fraternal relation as umbilical, the topos of conjoined twins is used to allude to the spectre of male maternity.

Basket Case II: Coming up for Air

With predictably miraculous hardiness, Duane and Belial survive their fall to feature in an equally low-budget sequel, *Basket Case II*, that reinforces this representation as it recounts another story of failed separation. For a while, independence seems attainable, when Duane and Belial are taken in by a community of "freaks" living in the home of Granny Ruth, a "freak's rights" activist. Here, Belial finds not only a new home outside his basket (the nursery), but a new mother (Granny Ruth) and the possibility of a new and different life, paired up with Eve, a shy, head-and-two-limbs creature as foetal as himself. The diminished importance of the basket marks the attenuation of the umbilical link between the brothers. Duane, relieved from his fr/maternal responsibilities, can finally hit the road, and who better to accompany him than the apparently normal Susan.

Susan however insists that although they are alike, neither she nor Duane belong to the normal world outside, and at the film's conclusion she reveals her own freakishness, explaining, "I'm pregnant. I've been so for the past six years." She lifts her shirt to reveal a long, re-sealable opening in her abdomen from which a squalling amphibian emerges. As the reptilian foetus returns inside her body, she blithely informs Duane that he isn't ready to be born yet but has to "come up for air" sometimes. If Duane reacts with horror, it is not only at the revelation of Susan's freakishness, but at the sudden realisation that he and Susan are indeed alike in their abnormality, that their sameness lies in their monstrous maternity. If her pregnancy involves the repeated birthing of a monster child, a continuous, impossible process of separation, Duane is reminded of his own maternal attachment to his baby-like brother, who pops in and out of the security of the basket. There is, of course, only one way to "make things right:" Duane must (re-)enact his maternity, reincorporate his brother's body into his own, which he does by sewing the reluctant Belial back onto his side. Jolted by Susan's permanent pregnancy, Duane recognises his inability to sever the umbilical link with his brother and reverses their illusory separation. "It's alright," he shouts wildly, "We're back together again."

The X-Files: Staying out Late

The representation of the conjoined twin as a foetus hesitating at birth reaches its culmination in an episode of *The X-Files* entitled "Humbug," in which no attempt is made to deny the dynamics of maternal-infant separation. If, in both *Dead Ringers* and *Basket Case*, the brother story is a cover for a mother story, then "Humbug" blows that cover. In clearly portraying Lenny and his conjoined twin brother Leonard as mother and baby, "Humbug" is marked by a degree of parodic self-reflexivity and explicitness in its representations of the fraternal as maternal that is not present in our earlier examples.

In this episode, Scully and Mulder find themselves in Gibsonton, investigating a series of murders in which the fatal “entry wound” is a deep, gaping puncture in the victim’s abdomen like a slit between two puckered lips. Gibsonton, the traditional off-season home for sideshow performers, is a carnivalesque community, home to such human curiosities as The Alligator Man, contortionist Dr Blockhead and his omnivorous side-kick The Conundrum. It is at the funeral of the murdered Alligator Man that Scully and Mulder first encounter Lenny and Leonard. Lenny has what appears to be an infant, cutely dressed in a tiny suit, clasped against his breast, nuzzling into him. But this is no new-born, rather Lenny turns out to be mothering his parasitic conjoined twin brother, Leonard. A further encounter reinforces the feminised image of Lenny when he knocks at Scully’s door early one morning in his dressing-gown. His body is soft, and the bulge of his brother’s body protrudes from his gown. Scully cannot help staring, whilst Lenny’s eyes are drawn to the cleavage revealed by Scully’s gaping robe. Conscious of the other’s gaze, each hurries to cover the exposed flesh. The two bodies -- the monstrous and the feminine -- are clearly paralleled in the way in which they attract the gaze (see Appendix One).

As to the identity of the killer, tracks suggest that the killer has a tail of sorts, and can squeeze through a dog-flap. The mysterious clue linking all the murders is a trace of blood, curiously always at the opening through which the killer enters rather than exits the scene of the crime. The explanation is revealed when alcoholic Lenny is locked up to dry out. We see him all alone in his cell: where Leonard is usually perched, we find a wound, and there is blood around the window bars. The Sheriff is horrified, “They extracted the twin!” Scully, however, knows better, “No, the twin extracted itself... This wound is identical to the other victims’ wounds, with one exception -- he’s not bleeding.” Indeed the wound has no discernible effect on Lenny’s health. Neither is Leonard a victim, rather the blood on the bars points to the escape route of this half-formed creature. Once more, the conjoined twin is revealed to be a homicidal mutant. Scully’s diagnosis? “I have a feeling that Lenny has an internal anomaly that allows his conjoining twin to disjoin.” Sure enough, when Lenny dies soon after, Scully’s hypothesis is confirmed, for the autopsy reveals “offshoots of the oesophagus and trachea that almost seem umbilical in nature.”

Unlike Belial in *Basket Case*, Leonard is not simply attached to his twin by tissue that can be severed to effect separation. The relation is more like Susan’s ongoing pregnancy -- the little monster who has to “come up for air sometimes” -- with the difference that Leonard is distinctly detachable, able to “crawl outside [Lenny’s] body and then go gallivanting around town.” In fact, Leonard occupies a space reminiscent of Belial’s basket -- a kind of marsupial pouch on his brother’s left side, below the ribs, with a long, vagina-like opening. Like Duane, Lenny is very clearly maternal in his relationship with Leonard, but when the basket is replaced by a pouch, this adds a very distinct and bodily feminisation. The sign of his twin’s detachability is not a scar but an orifice. Furthermore, Leonard’s umbilical “tail” (hence the unidentified tracks) and blood-smearred body (hence the mysterious blood traces) suggest that he is part-foetus and that, despite repeated birthing, he is far from ready to leave the gestational pouch definitively. In fact, his murders are attempts to burrow into imagined pouches in other bodies. As Lenny explains soulfully, “I don’t think he knows he’s harming anyone. He’s merely seeking another brother.” Fearing that his inadequacy as a br/mother is what drives Leonard away, and yet over-protective and possessive, Lenny echoes a classic maternal discourse of reproach and self-reproach, and insists that Leonard always comes back. This time, however, he does not return. We glimpse him escaping from the jail, umbilical cord trailing, and taking refuge in the narrow passages of a hall of mirrors before

venturing outside to be devoured by The Conundrum. His fatal/foetal desire to re-enter a brother's belly is fulfilled.

Conjoined Twins and Horror

The texts of our corpus have so far all been associated to some extent with the horror genre, but the trademark irony of *The X-Files* allows us to view "Humbug" as a commentary on the conventions of the genre. Firstly, there is the very use of conjoined twins, the predictability that they should be the central figures and that one should be the murderer (see Appendix Two), and secondly, in portraying their fraternal relation so clearly as a maternal relation, the "Humbug" episode self-consciously engages with a usually implicit aspect of their representation. This foregrounding of conventions allows us to raise explicit questions about genre and topos: why do conjoined twins tend to feature in horror? Could the maternal aspect of their representation be related to genre (horror) rather than topos (conjoined twins)? What would it mean to shift genre, and tell a non-horror story of conjoined twins?

The link between conjoined twins and the monstrosity typical of horror is a longstanding one. Historical depictions of monsters suggest that a large proportion of these creatures -- notably the two-headed and multilimbed varieties -- were in fact conjoined twins (cf. their abundance in Thompson's 1930 survey *The Mystery and Lore of Monsters*). Conjoined twins were similarly overrepresented in the now defunct carnival freak show. Fiedler identifies the horror film as heir to the freak show, in that it provides a similar opportunity to gaze upon the monstrous with impunity (Fiedler, 1981: 315).

Most recent studies of monstrosity define the monstrous and explain its cultural importance in terms of a violation of boundaries (Fiedler, 1981; Kristeva, 1982; Halberstam, 1995; Cohen, 1996), and a "category crisis" (Garber, 1992: 16). Certainly, conjoined twins disturb the borders between self and other, one and two, whole and part, autonomy and dependence. And yet, in our corpus, their representation confounds another, unexpected borderline: brother/mother. Whilst the notion of boundary challenging explains the link between conjoined twins and horror, it falls short of accounting for the representation of the conjoined twin relationship as maternal.

It is useful to consider Badley's and Halberstam's accounts of the evolution of the horror genre at this point, for while they do not coincide, they both point to a focus on gender in contemporary horror films. Halberstam describes a shift from the violation of racial, species, class and nationality boundaries in nineteenth century gothic monsters towards a crisis of gender and sexual identity in contemporary horror. She puts this largely down to the triumph of psychoanalytical interpretations of "subjectivity as sexual subjectivity and identity as sexual identity and monstrosity as sexual pathology." (Halberstam, 1995: 24)

Badley, on the other hand, explains the shift she identifies in terms of the waning of Freudian psychoanalysis, yet still arrives at gender disturbance as a central concern in contemporary horror. She suggests that early horror is traditionally explained in psychosexual terms, placing the emphasis on its supernatural aspects -- the unconscious, psychological terror, the uncanny. More recent (post-1980) horror, she argues, can be seen in terms of a discourse of the body -- the body is opened up and transformed, displayed in all its monstrosity (Badley, 1995: 5-31). It is worth noting that the topos of conjoined twins lends itself to both these

understandings of horror, offering both the uncanniness of the fabled telepathic relation between twins and the possibility of the gruesome division of their bodies. Badley's characterisation of recent horror, however, sheds even greater light on the filmic representation of conjoined twins when she suggests that male maternity actually typifies post-1980 horror. The late 1970s, she argues, saw a discursive shift from the Freudian psychoanalytical model of the self to an understanding of the self as embodied, and the 1980s horror boom articulated the accompanying crisis of identity through an iconography of the monstrous. The focus on the supernatural was replaced by a graphic physicality, and in particular by grotesque bodily transformations (Badley, 1995: 26). Paradigmatically a feminisation and hystericisation of the male body, this metamorphosis is figured in depictions of the hypermasculinised "hard body" as a permeable, "soft-bodied" focus of invasion, transformed into a maternal body "through which the male subject confronted or 'gave birth to' the soft bodied 'feminine' in himself" (Badley, 1995: 106). Badley suggests that it is this association between the male body and the maternal function that is at the heart of the 1980s transformation films (Badley, 1995: 126).

Although Badley writes of a specific genre and epoch, her argument echoes Julia Kristeva's thesis in *Powers of Horror* that horror in general invokes the maternal body. Kristeva explains that abjection stems from a reaction of disgust at what transgresses the borders of the clean-and-proper body, at what disturbs the boundary between inside and outside, between me and not-me. She argues that these distinctions (self/other, inside/outside, proper/abhorrent) elaborate a more archaic division that must be made between one's own body and the mother's. Thus horror generally (and not just horror genres) harks back to the ambiguities of separation from the maternal body. (Kristeva, 1982)

There is, then, a body of work linking contemporary horror (and its representation of the monstrous body) with the violation of gender boundaries and explaining the phenomenon in terms of contemporary cultural anxieties. Kristeva goes so far as to link horror generally with the maternal, and Badley even identifies male maternity as symptomatic of recent horror. We would not want to dispute these analyses, for our corpus clearly illustrates such connections. Nevertheless, this general position seems less than adequate in accounting for the coherence of these films, which indicates something on the one hand wider than the personal obsession attributed to David Cronenberg, but on the other hand more specific than the characterisation of an entire genre. Rather, it is our hypothesis that the consistent representation of conjoined male twins in horror films in terms of separation from the maternal body is the product of a particular conjunction of topos, gender and genre that has acquired a certain discursive power.

As we indicated earlier, the filmic representation of twins is determined primarily by gender but also by genre. Almost invariably thrillers, female twin films are marked by a strikingly consistent pre-occupation with a split image of womanhood. None of these films, nor the rare horror films featuring conjoined female twins, ever represents the twin relation as a maternal one -- there are no nurturing twin sisters. And whenever male twins appear in genres other than horror, the brother story is not used to tell a mother story. The particular conjunction of topos, gender and genre with which we are concerned here -- male conjoined twins in horror -- imposes exploration of the maternal in a way that these other twin narratives do not. Male maternity may be distinctive of 1980s horror, but conjoined twins provide a particularly clear opportunity for exploiting it.

Certainly the disturbance of bodily limits is a given with conjoined twins. And splitting them means separating two beings together since the womb, like the infant/mother dyad. The topos thus lends itself to the theme of establishing identity through difference, viewed by psychoanalysts as inevitably based on the separation from the mother as other. And yet it is not simply a question of a developmental parallel, but of the force of generic conventions, for the discourse of maternity only determines the representation of *male* conjoined twins, whilst virtually all female filmic twins succumb to the virgin/whore dichotomy. The representation of the fraternal as maternal with conjoined twins brothers in horror may be a less established discursive convention, but is still strong enough to be constraining. So much so, that when there is a shift in genre, as in *Twin Falls Idaho*, the theme of maternity still needs to be negotiated. But before showing this, let us briefly analyse a limit case, *The Dark Half*, in which the most tenuous physical attachment still invokes the maternal.

The Dark Half: In Denial

The Dark Half sits precisely at a point of tension between thrillers and horror, between narratives of good and evil brothers and stories of conjoined twins, between the macho and the maternal. Thad Beaumont and his alter ego George Stark are only physically connected in the most minimal sense, and yet this vestige of corporeal connection together with the proximity to the horror genre seem to make it impossible to avoid representations of their relation in terms of maternal attachment.

The film is not obviously about conjoined twins. As a child, Thad Beaumont suffered from severe headaches and hallucinations. The cause was eventually discovered and a “very rare sort of tumour” was surgically removed from his brain. Consisting of “an eye, part of a nostril, [and] two teeth,” the “tumour” turned out to be the vestiges of an unborn twin, “absorbed into the system,” that somehow “got itself going again” and started to grow (see Appendix Three). Now married with small twin sons, Thad is a college English professor who writes best-selling, violent, sleazy novels under the pseudonym of George Stark. In order to frustrate a blackmail attempt, Thad decides to reveal the true identity of George Stark and retire the pseudonym. Faced with the prospect of his own “death,” Stark comes to life with a vengeance, colonising the foetal remains and becoming Thad’s homicidal double.

Nor is *The Dark Half* obviously a film about maternity. Despite his beginnings as a foetal twin, Stark is certainly not infantilised. On the contrary, the character is hypermasculinised -- drinking, smoking, violent, foul-mouthed and sadistic, he relishes in his gratuitously violent murders. In this case, the “beast inside” -- Thad’s “dark half” -- is certainly not a baby. Although physically identical down to their fingerprints, Thad and George are poles apart -- whilst Thad is conspicuously depicted sharing childcare responsibilities, George is a thorough-going tough guy. The ready availability of this contrast between the caring, respectable Thad and the vulgar, violent George Stark suggests that this film sits comfortably with male twin films in other genres. Moreover, the relationship between Thad and George has none of those nurturing aspects that were so apparent in *Basket Case I* and *The X-Files*. *The Dark Half* thus strains our hypothesis that the appearance of male conjoined twins in horror imposes consideration of the maternal. Yet even in *The Dark Half*’s determinedly masculine, hard-bodied world, Thad’s means of escaping from George Stark involves a repeated (and somewhat unconvincing) denial of his own maternity.

From the very beginning, the scenario of Thad's "tumour" is a very clear example of a feminisation of the male body: Thad's body harbours a growing foetus. The organ that nurtures the foetal twin is not however the womb we might expect. Unlike the brother emerging from the pouch in *The X-Files*, or from below the rib cage in *Basket Case*, or from the belly in *Dead Ringers*, the vestige of Thad's twin is lodged in the brain. The site of gestation has shifted upwards. As Vern Bullough notes, hysteria was once thought to be due to a disturbed uterus wandering through the body. In these terms, the vertical migration of the unabsorbed foetal twin to Thad's brain -- his wandering would-be womb -- is a form of male hysteria.

It is significant that the foetus is a cerebral one. Thad does not share the same sort of obvious bodily connection with Stark that is apparent in the other films of our corpus. Indeed he is at pains to deny such a bond. Thad comes to understand his alter ego twin as an intellectual invention -- "a conjuration, an entity created by the force of [his] will," and the mode of their connection is primarily psychical, mediated through writing as Stark's thoughts are channelled through Thad's hand.

The denial of a visceral bond is however undermined through the competing metaphors of creativity that pervade the film. On the one hand, Thad, when writing as George, uses long, black pencils, phallic weapons viciously sharpened to the point where they can and do maim. At the same time, Thad himself describes his writing as a kind of birth, "It's not coming out of me easy," he comments. More significantly, George Stark's creation is re-interpreted to Thad through gestation and birth metaphors. When Thad visits the doctor who removed his "tumour," he is told that his parents had insisted on its burial in the family graveyard plot, like a stillborn baby. The morning after the first murder, the local gravedigger finds a hole in the grave site with hand prints around the edge "as if someone buried alive dug his way out." The second twin has pushed his way into the world. Later, the local police investigator confronts Thad with the preposterousness of his assertions that the murders were committed by his pseudonym, "Maybe you'd like to tell me where this guy came from, Thad. Did you just sort of give birth to him one night? Did he pop out of a damn sparrow's egg? Exactly how did it go?" George Stark is characterised as Thad's offspring, borne of his body as much as of his pencil.

In *The Dark Half*, then, there are not the obvious indices of maternity that are present in the rest of our corpus. Nonetheless, the traces of conjoinedness in horror mean that that we once again find an insistent maternal dimension to the representation of the relation between the brothers.

Twin Falls Idaho: Deflecting the Maternal

Twin Falls Idaho presents itself as "a different kind of love story," and the poster reiterates the claim, "However many films you may have seen, you probably haven't seen anything like *Twin Falls Idaho*." Certainly the film is not your standard romance, and as a love story, we might expect a sharp contrast with the horror films studied. Separation from this corpus, however, seems to involve revisiting many of its tropes.

From the earliest sequences we see the narrow hotel corridor and the dingy exiguity of the hotel room. One face and then the other peeps through the bathroom door. Blake and Francis

Falls, conjoined laterally at the thorax, do not venture outside except on the night of Halloween, and their indoor existence is emphasised through sepia tones, and green and blue lighting. Only once do they find themselves in the brightly exposed open space of a city park, and the experience is distressing. The film recounts the triangulation of the twinship: Penny enters their life, and whilst Blake falls for her and imagines a life away from his brother, Francis grows jealous and contemplates his abandonment. Meanwhile, their quest for their lost mother, along with half-articulated allusions to an abandoned child and a joking reference to the abject maternal make motherhood an underlying issue throughout the film.

Clearly the film rehearses some of the conventions we have identified for the narrative depiction of conjoined male twins. It does not, however, simply reiterate them. There is an important difference in the portrayal of the twin relation between this and the other films in our corpus -- the fraternal relation is never represented as maternal. In *Twin Falls Idaho*, the undercurrent of allusions to motherhood is clearly associated with mothers, not brothers, while the brothers' relationship is repeatedly characterised as marital.

This does not however mean that the film is simply able to ignore the representational conventions established for the topos. On the contrary, it is continually obliged to deal with them. This is obvious firstly in the generic positioning of the film. *Twin Falls Idaho* is described as a drama and a love story, but this does not simply eliminate the horror genre, rather the film positions itself as patently *not* horror. Anne Freadman (1988) emphasises the importance of "not-statements" in her theorisation of genre, demonstrating that cultural practices define their genre by explicitly distancing themselves from neighbouring genres. The regular use of conjoined twins to represent horror means that *Twin Falls Idaho* must continually reassert its status as other than horror, which it does by repeated references to and deflection of the genre.

Thus the camera lingers voyeuristically on the joined chests as Penny's doctor friend examines them, but Miles is patently *not* wielding a scalpel ("Relax, I'm not a surgeon," he says) and is far from keen to see them separated. Even the emergency surgery late in the film to separate the twins eschews the gruesome in favour of a poetic dream-like sequence. Misshapen bodies are highlighted in the film, but are far from confined to the twins -- from the taxi-driver's steel claw hand from which Penny recoils in the opening sequence to the excircus dwarf who leads Penny to Blake's van at the end, unconventional bodies abound. At a Halloween party, the twins stand out only for the excellence of their "costume" amongst the carnivalesque party-goers, who include a half-man-half-woman and "Siamese" twins in red Chinese outfits tied together with ribbons. Split screens are used to show the variety of disguises (see Appendix Four). The gay host, on learning of the twins' conjoined condition, exclaims "the horror!" imagining that one twin might be gay and the other straight, and insists that he is a freak too. As a culturally sanctioned freak show, the party works as a commentary on the conventions of horror, in contrast to the principal narrative. Finally, the story that might have been the basis for horror -- the story of gestation in a cow's belly -- is clearly a joke.

The second, related way in which the film needs to displace conventions is in the representation of the twin relation. Although Blake takes care of his sick brother, this nurturing is not figured as maternal. On the contrary, there are explicit references to the twinship as a marriage. After examining the brothers early in the film, Miles takes Penny aside, "You see two people depend on each other for survival -- makes you feel kinda queasy, huh? Quite a marriage." And as Blake says goodbye to Penny, he adds with the trace of a wry

smile, “Maybe I’ll call you -- when I’m single.” Later the exploitative Jay wants to offer them tabloid fame by inventing “the most famous divorce case of all time.” And their charismatic marriage celebrant neighbour sees their relation as the ultimate wedlock, “I like what you two represent: two folks living in harmony... Divorce is not even an option in your marriage.”

The conspicuous repetition of the conjugal analogy serves to distance this portrayal of conjoined brothers from the others studied. The analogy is reinforced when Blake and Francis do a magazine romance quiz interpreting relationships, and during the bitter fight when Francis accuses Blake of falling in love, and Blake accuses Francis of jealousy. Furthermore, the twin relation is portrayed as a partnership of equals. It resembles their musical duo, Blake and Francis each using one hand to play a guitar. As Miles remarks when surgery seems imminent,

Two single dollars put together into one bill, worth twice its value -- tear it in half and you don’t get two single bills. The bill loses all its value. The strength is in the bond of two. They need each other to live as one.

The parental does not enter the equation.

Similarly, the possibility of their separation is never seen in terms of birth/emergence, unlike infantilised Beverly propelled outside, Belial peeping from his basket, Leonard protruding from the pouch, and Stark emerging from the hole in the ground in the other films of our corpus. Instead, it is seen as a divorce, and the metaphor is one of bisection. Blake reminisces about their youthful desire to separate,

Every dollar was fifty cents. When we were little, we used to search for train tracks, every city we’d visit, and when we found ’em, we’d lie down, a rail would split between us, and we’d wait for a train. Francis used to say, “Blake, do you hear the train?”

When the operation to separate them finally takes place, we see a hallucinatory fantasy. A grainy, film, fading to white, shows Blake and Francis unattached, cycling on a cliff edge in circles and figures of eight on separate old-fashioned bikes. Having traced these symbols of their relation and separation, Francis cycles away, waves goodbye across a gulf between two cliffs and disappears. Francis has gone over to the other side, and Blake remains. This is parting, not parturition.

Lastly, the use of confined spaces is not linked to a uterine metaphor. There is nothing foetal about the claustrophobic scenes in the hotel. Rather, together with the bars that frame the twins’ faces at the peephole in the hotel door, the grill fence of the city park through which passers-by gawk at them, and various verbal references, they allude to the caging of freaks.

Twin Falls Idaho thus sets itself apart from the other films in our corpus by positioning itself against the horror genre and avoiding any hint of the maternal in its representations of the twin relation. Curiously, however, there is still a focus on maternity in the film. It is as though merely abstaining from representing male maternity is not enough to dispel a now compelling convention. Maternity must be seen to be firmly re-anchored to the feminine.

Early in the film we learn that there is something to discover about Penny. Miles’ remark is unfinished, “If you ever want to find out how he’s doing, or some information...” and his

words echo later to Penny in front of the mirror. Who is “he”? And for what does Penny need to make amends (“I need something to level my karma”) by tending to Blake and Francis? Penny’s secret haunts the film. Her lawyer/pimp Jay sheds some light, when he too takes Penny’s solicitude for atonement, “Just because you had a retard... ok, you couldn’t take care of it, you did the right thing, you got rid of him, but you can’t replace him with those freaks in there.” Penny’s secret is a son that she tries to forget she had. Although Penny’s capacity for childcare is somewhat doubtful (she is at a loss when asked to buy food for the twins), her caring gestures towards the brothers are interpreted by both herself and Jay as substituting for a maternal relationship with her disabled son. If motherhood is a theme of the film, in *Twin Falls Idaho* it is deflected back where it belongs -- onto the mother.

This is not the only instance of feminine refusal of and confrontation with the maternal role. The brothers know that Francis’ health is failing, and they are in town with the express purpose of finding the mother who abandoned them, known to them only through a name on their adoption certificate, Francine Ross. At Halloween, the only night they can roam freely, they go trick-or-treating and call on Francine, who slams the door in shock.

Even before this encounter, however, Francine’s experience is a subject of speculation. Penny’s friend muses, “Could you imagine being their mother?”, and the failed reunion is followed by a scene where a story -- clearly endlessly rehearsed to comic effect -- is told to explain the absence of a mother. Penny’s enquiry is met with “We don’t have a human mother” and the brothers jointly tell of being transferred to a cow for the last one and a half months of pregnancy, the punchline being a moo-like “Maaaa” from Francis.

The unanswered questions about Penny’s child and Francine’s desire to avoid the inevitable confrontation with her sons become important linked issues in the film. It is Penny who begs Francine to visit the twins in hospital as Francis lies dying. Both women are in tears as Francine describes her decision to give up the twins and the anguish that has never left her, and we understand Francine’s story as a commentary on Penny’s, and just as Penny avoids receiving information about her son, Francine feels she cannot go to the hospital. Eventually, however, she yields, and Francis is reunited with his mother before he dies.

If Francine is finally able to accept her maternal role after denying it for so long, we wonder whether Penny will not do likewise, but the question remains open, and the film concludes with the possibility that Blake’s grieving might eventually give way to romance with Penny. Motherhood is thus a crucial theme in the film, but remains firmly linked to mothers.

Conclusion: Negotiating Convention

If twin sister films invariably work through fantasies of unbridled female sexuality and virginal virtue, filmic narratives of male conjoined twins also impose a compulsory figure -- a mother story of sorts. As our analysis shows, however, genre is the crucial factor determining how the maternal will be represented and its attendant anxieties resolved.

Conjoined twins are most frequently associated with the horror genre, in which the fraternal relation inevitably substitutes for the maternal. David Cronenberg’s twin gynaecologists may have attracted the most critical attention in this regard, but they are far from alone in their fraternal/maternal attachment. With bodily limits already blurred by an archaic joining going

back to the womb, the topos of male conjoined twins provides an ideal opportunity to hystericalise the male body, to linger on its instability and permeability. Employed in this way, it speaks to a preoccupation that, Badley suggests, is characteristic of recent horror generally.

However, the striking coherence of our horror corpus -- the insistence and predictability with which the foetal brother appears -- is only partially accounted for by such broad characterisations of horror genres. Atypical of filmic representations of twins generally, and not paralleled in horror films of conjoined twin sisters, the representation of brother as mother is a product of a particular conjunction of topos, gender and genre. Its force is such that the theme of maternity still needs to be addressed when films featuring male conjoined twin brothers appear in genres other than horror. Thus the self-styled love story *Twin Falls Idaho*, unable to simply escape or ignore this convention, must continually deflect it. Its protagonists are obliged to negotiate not only their own fraternity, but also the fact that they form part of a broader filmic fraternity of conjoined twins, occupying a privileged site for exploring the separation of self and (m)other.

Appendices

Appendix One: Badley argues that the very way in which the monstrous becomes the object of the gaze already involves a feminisation, for traditionally the (male) gaze has objectified a feminine other (Badley, 1995: 119-120; Williams, 1984: 87-88).

Appendix Two: There is a resonance here with a Halloween episode of *The Simpsons* ("Treehouse of Horror VII," Season 8, Production code 4F02), in which Dr Hibbert separates conjoined twin Barts, one good and one evil. In this caricature of the horror genre (in a series known for its self-conscious parodying of both social and generic conventions), not only is Halloween seen as quintessential horror, so too are conjoined twins and the possibility of their separation.

Appendix Three: Although this may seem far-fetched, there is a very rare form of conjoined twins, the *fetus in fetu*, that occurs when "an imperfect foetus is contained completely within the body of its sibling" (Gilbert, 1996; Fiedler, 1981: 223-225).

Appendix Four: The use of this technique is a convention of identical twin films (*Dead Ringers* being a prime example) but here it is *not* used for the twins (played by Mark and Michael Polish), but for other "freaks." Once again a convention is cited and transposed.

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