Doubles and Doppelgangers in Film:

Representations of Identity, Psychology, and Relationships in Female-centered Narratives

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Abstract

Cinema has continued to grow and develop as a popular form of both art and entertainment, specifically through its ability to convey an immersive doubling world before an audience's eyes. In this world, stories are told that incite emotion, encourage personal projection, and create an attachment between the viewer and the images on the screen. Cinema's potential as a doubling mechanism has been used in tandem with the tradition of the doppelganger genre, creating compelling narratives in which the concept of doubles and doppelgangers are played out upon a screen-turned-mirror. This genre and its themes have remained relevant throughout time, as the concept of the double has continued to fascinate society, and film form has enabled it to be explored in new ways.

In this paper, I wish to investigate doppelgangers and doubling within cinema, focusing on how it is explored in three female-centered narratives: *Black Swan* (2010), *Coraline* (2009), and *Petite Maman* (2021). Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* adheres most to the genre's traditions, as the appearance of a sabotaging double leads the protagonist down a path of suffering and self-destruction. The film follows Nina, a ballerina in a production of Swan Lake, as she struggles to embody the two contrasting roles she must dance: the white and black swan. In this film, the double is used to highlight Nina's feelings of self-hatred and inadequacy, as she experiences a split in identity. Nina's struggle to embrace a darker side of herself and overcome the conflict her double ignites leads her on a journey that ultimately results in her self-destruction.

Breaking somewhat from the tradition is *Coraline* (2009), which centers on a child's encounter with a doubling world, communicating the danger of desire through its nearly fatal repercussions. After being forced by her parents to move, Coraline finds herself in a boring and

depressing existence, lonely due to her cold and absent mother. Her dreams appear to be fulfilled when she finds a portal that leads her to a more exciting world that mirrors her own, complete with improved versions of her parents. However, this world proves to be carefully constructed by her Other Mother, who manipulates Coraline's desires in order to entrap her. It is not until Corlaine faces losing her real life that she realizes all that she has to be grateful for. Henry Selick translates the dark themes typical of the doppelganger genre visually, as he creates a frightening mise-en-scene in this stop-motion film that is perfect for conveying the danger of desire.

Providing a much different perspective on the doppelganger within cinema is Celine Sciamma's *Petite Maman* (2021), carrying a poignant fable-like tone. Following the death of her grandmother, eight-year-old Nelly confronts her double, Marion, who happens to be a younger version of her mother. Through this experience, Nelly becomes a companion to Marion, allowing for a greater connection with her 'real' mother who has remained distant due to grief. Here, the doppelganger ceases to be a double of a singular self and becomes generationally involved, as mothers and daughters are inevitably linked through their being doubles of one another. It is through this generational connection that empathy is grown and healing from loss can occur.

In each of these films, the doppelganger or double becomes a tool that allows for greater complexity and depth in the protagonist, as the mirroring figures and their effect on the story world provide greater insight into the characters and their reality. Throughout this paper, I will explore how the doppelganger or double are used within these films, and compare their effects. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how *Black Swan*, *Coraline*, and *Petite Maman* all utilize the theme of doubling or the doppelganger to investigate complex emotions, the relationship between mothers and daughters, and the nature of identity.

Introduction

Since its invention in the late 19th century, cinema has continued to grow and develop as a popular form of both art and entertainment. Arguably one of its most captivating aspects is its ability to convey an immersive world before a viewer's eyes. With this comes the phenomenon of an attachment between the viewer and what is seen on the screen. A viewer identifies with and projects upon what is shown before them, turning cinema into a mirror in which the cinematic world doubles that of the viewer. In the "Imaginary Signifier", Christian Metz explores the idea of spectatorship when saying that to a certain extent, "film is like the mirror", and upon the screen "the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception" (Metz, 604-605). Metz describes the way in which cinema is an act of encountering one's own identity or ego through the act of perceiving an alternate reality displaced spatially and temporally by the camera. The concept of identification has been discussed by other film theorists, such as Laura Mulvey, who explores viewer identification in her canonical essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Although known primarily for defining the 'male gaze' of Hollywood cinema, Mulvey significantly calls upon identification when writing that the spectator "imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body", resulting in the projection of an "ideal ego" (Mulvey, 31). In this, spectators take narcissistic pleasure in the identification with familiar forms that are presented to them on screen, which are often reflections of a more complete and ideal version of themselves. Founded about the same time as cinema, psychoanalysis is a tool often used in film theory and analysis, as many works are referential to or interact with Freud, Jung, and later, Lacan. Such discussions revolve around the concepts of identity, ego, desire, and the release of the repressed. Ultimately, this possibility that

cinema carries as a doubling mechanism has translated directly into the content of the films, as doubles or doppelgangers are figures that are widely used within film narratives.

A notable work from Freud that relates to the experience of spectatorship and cinema's preoccupation with doubling is his essay "The Uncanny". In this work, Freud investigates, "all that arouses dread and creeping horror", or those things that leave us with unease as well as fear, which are often prevalent in the arts (Freud 1). The term "uncanny" itself originates from the German term "unheimlich". Its antonym, "heimlich" most commonly translates to "familiar" or "belonging to the home", leading one to believe that "unheimlich" must describe that which is unfamiliar or foreign (2). However, Freud notes that a lesser-used definition of "heimlich" is that which is secret, hidden, and potentially dangerous. In this, the words begin to approach each other in terms of meaning, making the "heimlich" become "unheimlich", or the familiar become dangerous or foreign. It is at this juncture between the two that the true meaning of the uncanny can be understood, as Freud describes it as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1-2). Examples of this include inanimate objects coming alive, representations of death such as ghosts, and encountering a double or twin. A significant example that is used in his line of argumentation is E.T.A Hoffman's short story, "The Sandman" (1816). This story follows Nathanael, who recounts his fear as a child of the Sandman, a being that would terrorize children who didn't go to sleep by stealing their eyes and feeding them to his children. Nathanael deduces that a nightly visitor of his father, a cruel lawyer named Coppelius, is the Sandman, and the cause of his father's subsequent death. After many years, while in school, Nathanael is visited by a barometer who he is convinced is Coppelius, and is distressed by this appearance. The psychological and emotional deterioration that comes from this reappearance results in the destruction of Nathanael, with the story ending in his death. The

tension in this tale between reality and fantasy and the reappearance of this traumatic figure from the past, speak to the themes laid out by Freud in “The Uncanny”, and how doubles, as uncanny subjects, create fear, unease, and disruption in the story world.

Tales of doppelgangers have long fascinated society, with their origin in 18th-century German folklore. In these stories, a double's appearance was typically a bad omen, a symbol of imminent death. These ‘shadow selves’ have often been used to represent an adverse side of an individual or reality, resulting in an uncomfortable confrontation with the self and the existence of a complicated or repressed duality. Doubling is prominent in other foreign literary works, such as in Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novels *The Double* (1846) and *Crime and Punishment* (1866). *The Double* is a more overt form of the doppelganger tale as it follows Goliadkin, an awkward and social-climbing government worker after he encounters his double, a figure that embodies what he aspires to be. Goliadkin’s double begins sabotaging him and taking over his life, heightening his feelings of paranoia and inadequacy, until he is driven to madness. *Crime and Punishment* uses the concept of doubling less literally, as protagonist Raskolnikov commits two murders and must deal with the aftermath of his actions. The name of the protagonist derives from the Russian word “raskolnik”, which means “schismatic” or “split”, thus hinting at the split nature of this character’s identity. This work investigates the idea of contradiction and duality within an individual, as Dostoevsky interestingly explores the ability of a seemingly unremarkable individual to take such actions and have a darkness contained within them. Both of these works, along with other doppelganger narratives, explore the impacts of doubling on the identities of the protagonists and fall into the tradition of the fantastic tale. This genre of literature is characterized by “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov 25). It is a neighboring genre

to the uncanny, but differentiates itself from its ambiguity as to whether or not the phenomenon is truly occurring. This uncertainty points to the fragility of reality, making it a useful genre when describing doppelgangers and their representation of the complexity of identity. It reveals that not everything presented before us as readers or spectators can be trusted, as reality becomes fractured and unreliable.

Film form has been able to both continue and transform the tradition of the doppelganger through its investigation of the implications of doubling within the narrative, while simultaneously presenting a mirror for the audience, confronting them with an alternate reality. It is important to note here the difference between the use of the terms doppelganger and double or doubling. Doppelganger is used in this paper to refer directly to an individual who resembles another greatly or is identical to them. Meanwhile, doubling is a broader term, which includes doppelgangers, but also can be used to describe a paralleling or comparison between individuals whose appearance may not be one-to-one. One of the first doppelganger narratives in film is the German film *The Student of Prague* (Stellan Rye 1913), loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe's doppelganger tale "William Wilson" (1839). In this film, Balduin, a poor student, makes a deal with an ill-doing elderly man that results in his reflection being stolen from him. His double appears and begins to sabotage Balduin's attempts to win over the woman he loves and causes great destruction. In an effort to rid himself of his double, Balduin takes a pistol and shoots him. But, this shot that strikes the double results in Balduin's death, as he succumbs to the gunshot wound, carrying on the theme of the double as a mechanism of self-destruction. This is a thread that has continued to be used throughout films, such as David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), where the image of ideal masculinity, Tyler Durden, is created by the protagonist. This creation of a double ends up resulting in self-harm as the unnatural intrusion of another being into an

individual's life causes chaos. Looking upon the themes of *Crime and Punishment*, the concept of an individual's 'two-sidedness' is similarly prominent in film, whether it be the existence of the black and white swan within Nina in *Black Swan* (2010), violence and destructiveness within Jack in *The Shining* (1980), or the presence of Mrs. Bates within Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960). It demonstrates that as spectators, we identify with and relate to these multi-sided characters we see on screen, representing the inherent existence of conflict and duality within us as well.

This topic initially piqued my interest while taking a Dostoevsky course, as I found myself fascinated by the implications of confronting a double, as well as how this theme can depict a duality within an individual. It was not until the end of the course that I began to realize what drew me to this topic was my background. I am a triplet, having a brother and a sister, with my sister and I being identical. This has been a formative part of my identity and experience in the world, for I have lived my life with a 'double' or 'doppelganger' always close by. While this relationship is ultimately positive and one of great understanding, support, and love, it has simultaneously been an instigator of struggle, many of which I find expressed within doppelganger narratives. In *Identical Twins: The Social Construction and Performance of Identity in Culture and Society*, Mvikeli Ncube investigates twin identities through the lens of social construction. Within this, he describes how twins are viewed as a unit, two halves to a whole, and cultural representations can depict or result in identity confusion, comparison, misunderstanding, jealousy, etc. Much of the challenges described in this research are connected to the struggles of protagonists in doppelganger tales, struggles that as a multiple, I can relate to. In these stories, it is through the confrontation of a double that one's identity is questioned, as anxieties and insecurities are externally manifested in the doppelganger figure, and the

protagonist becomes fearful of being exposed as the lesser image or living in the other's shadow. Growing up with an identical sibling, the strong comparison both externally and internally resulted in ongoing feelings of inadequacy, where being good at something was never enough because I was not *as* good. These shortcomings were a reality that I tried to keep from being discovered, something explored in tales such as *The Double*, where Goliadkin wishes to keep the public from realizing the inadequacies that his double draws attention to. The challenge of viewing myself as an individual while being identical has been pervasive, as it feels that I exist with a foil, serving to highlight differences or deficiencies. As described by Ncube, my sister and I are often viewed as a unit, predominantly by others, but occasionally by ourselves. My identity is often mistaken for my sister's and her actions are occasionally misconstrued for my own, as if we are interchangeable, muddling my view of individual identity. It is through this lens of being a multiple that I found myself identifying with and engaged in the research of doppelganger tales, driving me to pursue the way that representations of doubling reflect a character's internal and external experience with the world.

For my thesis, I wish to focus on the theme of doubling within cinema, investigating its function as a narrative device. In many of the examples described, doppelgangers and doubling are essential elements to the plot, as the story and its progression rely on the appearance of this figure and/or the representation of a splitting within a character. I argue that within film, doppelgangers and doubles are used as a mechanism to open up a character's identity and their narrative possibilities, allowing an understanding of them to a depth that is incapable without a mirroring figure. It is through the double that a character's complexity can be understood, and the unease and uncertainty that result from this figure's appearance directly reflect the precariousness of the world in which we live. This becomes especially interesting when looking

at the way gendered doubles are represented, as the existence and complicated position of a woman can be investigated through doubling. I will explore the way that the doppelganger or double is used specifically through female characters in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010), Henry Selick's *Coraline* (2009), and Celine Sciamma's *Petite Maman* (2020). All three films use the doppelganger or double to explore complex emotions, investigate the relationship between mothers and daughters, and express the challenging nature of one's own identity.

Throughout the various examples described, doubling speaks to a psychological symptom used to convey complex emotions that the characters are experiencing. These emotions can include one's feelings of self-hatred, inadequacy, or complication with identity, as is the case in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*. In this film, and often seen in the doppelganger tradition, these negative emotions become translated into a doubling figure that is self-sabotaging, as the source of harm and suffering comes from one's split self. *Black Swan* depicts the internal conflict that arises as Nina must dance both the black and the white swan in a production of Swan Lake. Her struggle to embrace a darker side of herself, to become the black swan, leads her on a journey of suffering and self-inflicted pain, which ultimately results in the killing of herself, an action that follows her transcendence to 'perfection'. The use of doubling in *Coraline* also speaks to an emotional or psychological symptom through its discussion of boredom, dissatisfaction, and the danger of desire. Selick's film follows a young girl bored with her dreary existence in a new town, who discovers an alternate world through a portal within her house. This "other" world is a double of her own, a colorful and exciting replica constructed to fulfill her desires. However, this enticing and seductive world proves to be less than a utopian existence. Chasing an ideal existence, Coraline places both herself and her family in jeopardy and must battle the world's doubles to save her real existence. Following suit, Sciamma's *Petite Maman* explores the

emotional state of grief, with doubling being a symptom of grief that assists in the child protagonist's understanding of the complex emotions associated with it. The film follows eight-year-old Nellie, who after her grandmother's death, encounters her doppelganger. It is through the relationship built with her doppelganger, a young version of her mother, that she is capable of understanding her mother's absence and the loss of her grandmother. The use of the doppelganger in this film enables Sciamma to show a young girl's understanding of loss and growing empathy for her mother, who shares in this grief.

Also shared across the three films is the discussion of mother-daughter relationships, facilitated through the theme of doubling. In *Black Swan* and *Coraline*, this type of doubling is distinct from the idea of twinning, as it does not depict a direct reflection of the protagonist or a split within them. Rather, the dynamic is demonstrated through Nina's comparison to her mother and Corlaine's experience with both mothers across the mirroring worlds. *Petite Maman* uniquely ties the mother-daughter relationship to twinning, creating a greater closeness in this relationship by having the daughter be the mother's mirror image, and played by identical twins. Important to note here is the context and research behind mother-daughter relationships, an area of study that many researchers argue has been neglected. The article "Adult Mother Daughter Relationships: A Review of the Theoretical and Research Literature" provides a useful summary of the research of mother-daughter relationships over time from Freudian theory to more progressive feminist research, and investigates specific dynamics that continue to be relevant in our society. With the mother often being the primary caregiver, she is "the primary object for identification and a role model for the daughter", and, being of the same gender, the relationship "can be emotionally intense and sometimes highly ambivalent" (Shrier et al, 94). This ambivalence can manifest itself in "elements of fusion or strong feelings of attachment,

connection, mutuality, as well as increasing psychological separation and autonomy" (94). A daughter's identification with her mother has a significant impact on how she feels about herself, her body, her relationship with men, etc. Meanwhile, the mother also identifies with the daughter, having been a girl once, intensifying the emotion in this two-way identification. This complex relationship between mothers and daughters has been explored in art and literature, often negatively, which is discussed by María Dolores Martínez Reventós in "The Obscure Maternal Double: The Mother/Daughter Relationship Represented in and out of Matrophobia". Within works of literature, the mother is often resented by the daughter, who aims to reject the mother and blame her for a lack of love or affection. This fight is emotionally intense as, "The daughter is characteristically identified by the mother as her continuation or double" (Reventós, 286). This rejection of the mother and search for complete independence is typically futile as the daughter realizes her defiance has made her more closely resemble her mother or that this identification is inevitable, for she is fated to become her mother. This complicated process can be held responsible for the issue of "mother-blaming", where the "individual mother is blamed for issues that have nothing to do with mothering, issues that, in fact, condition, constrict and victimize the woman-as-mother" (Reventós, 288). These two sources are significant in considering the depictions of mother-daughter relationships within the *Black Swan*, *Coraline*, and *Petite Maman*, providing useful context on the differences and/or similarities in which these films approach mother-daughter relationships in relation to doubling.

In *Black Swan*, Nina's identity is influenced by her dysfunctional relationship with her mother, a retired ballerina who wishes for her daughter to achieve what she couldn't. Nina's mother, Erica, becomes an image of what Nina could potentially become as she exerts her influence to keep Nina in a dependent and regressed state. In *Coraline*, the titular character

encounters a literal double of her mother, who initially appears to be all that she feels her mother is lacking. Coraline is dissatisfied with her preoccupied and emotionally absent mother, granting the opportunity for the malicious Other Mother to prey on her desires. It is ultimately through Coraline battling and defeating the Other Mother that she gains perspective on what it means to be a daughter and expresses gratitude for her real mother. Finally, *Petite Maman* is primarily focused on the relationship between mothers and daughters, literalizing the idea that daughters are doubles of their mothers. After Nelly's mother leaves without saying goodbye, she encounters a young version of her mother who happens to look just like Nelly. Sciamma uses the casting of identical twins to discuss the complexity of identity by making the young image of the mother identical to the daughter's. The effect of this is an even stronger bond formed between mother and daughter, for Nelly can empathize with her mother's grief by relating to her mother's childhood self, who is a direct reflection of Nelly. The two girls are capable of guiding one another and granting each other companionship, conveying an inspiring symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter. *Petite Maman* demonstrates how mothers and daughters are inextricably linked through their being doubles of one another, and how the death of a mother can be felt deeply by the generations of doubles.

Also interesting to consider in these films is the use of space, as *Petite Maman* and *Coraline* both utilize a doubling of the home environment to different effects. In *Petite Maman*, Nelly journeys to Marion's home, a double of her grandmother's house that she and her father are trying to clear out. Distinct characteristics of the home and Nelly's familiarity with the layout allow the audience to note that it is the same home, yet holds a different position in space and time. NBC News describes Sciammas' set, as "a charming, somewhat disorienting space with no clear end and beginning", and Sciamma shares the implementation of her past into the home,

stating, “The set has been designed as a real synthesis of both my grandmothers’ interiors,” (Patton, “Celine Sciamma’s ‘Petite Maman’). Nelly’s access to this separate space is representative of the connection between generations, the past and the present, and creates a sense of timelessness when it comes to the relationship between mothers and daughters, again adding to the mystical tone of the film. Meanwhile, in *Coraline*, the home is mirrored by a dangerous doubling world full of characters with sinister intent. This world is looming behind a small door, accessed directly from within the home. With this, the home itself becomes both dangerous and endangered, as the dark power of the Other Mother and her minions is only the turn of a key away. Selick uses space to create the sense of an imminent threat, conveying how desire has the capability of destroying a home and a family from within. *Black Swan* also plays with space when it comes to conveying its themes, particularly through mirrors, as nearly all scenes have some form of reflective surface in the mise-en-scene. Much of Nina’s identity is navigated through her reflection, whether it be the trifold mirror that she dances in front of within her home, obsessing over her movements, the vanity within her dressing room, as she dons the makeup of the white or black swan, or other scenes in which her mirror image appears to act independently from herself. The use of mirrors within the space or setting of the film is essential to showing the splitting of Nina’s identity and her descent into madness, as the destruction of Nina is achieved through her reflection.

Despite their similarities, each of the films put their distinct signature upon the doppelganger device. First and foremost is the use of tone, with the greatest contrast being between *Black Swan* and *Petite Maman*. The former taps into the traditional tone associated with the genre, where the doppelganger signals a dark, disrupting, and disorienting intrusion into the character’s world and mental state. In *Black Swan*, the introduction of Nina’s double, Lily,

signals the start of Nina's mental decline and her self-destruction. The film instills the same anxiety and confusion that Nina feels into the audience through a disturbed and unreliable protagonist as well as distressing images. Adding to this chaos, doubling is prolific in this film across female bodies as the audience sees Nina's identity doubled by her doppelganger as well as various women in her life. With this, Aronofsky weaves a complex web that allows Nina's conflicting identity to be explored. Meanwhile, *Petite Maman* drastically changes the tone traditionally associated with the genre to one that is more moving and poignant, granting a different perspective on the doppelganger figure in cinema. The doppelganger is typically a harmful intrusion of the unnatural into the natural world. However, *Petite Maman* shifts this by exploring the great possibilities of this phenomenon, with Nelly's double being an opening into her mother's past and exposure to her emotional state. Unlike *Black Swan*, *Petite Maman* uses the doppelganger or double as a mechanism of healing, for it is the next generation of doubles, the daughter, who allows the mother to overcome loss. Through this film, the doppelganger ceases to be a double of a singular self, but becomes multifaceted and increasingly complicated because an individual is inherently a double of others: their family. We are all alternate realities or versions of our parents, grandparents, and siblings, making the theme of doubling generationally connected. This opens the concept of doubling to being heavy with the subtext of the past, a past we may have not been a part of, which seeps into our world and dictates our reality. *Coraline* also holds a unique tone in the doppelganger tradition through the exploration of dark themes within a children's movie and expressed through the medium of animation. Unlike the other two live-action films, *Coraline* employs a different medium, stop motion animation, which is unsettling to the audience through the merging of the medium with the content. With this animation, the characters appear to move fluidly and autonomously upon the

screen, giving it a realism that allows the audience to deeply relate to the characters and have an emotional or visceral reaction to the events of the film. However, the film is simultaneously unsettling through the knowledge that the movement on the screen requires human intervention and the manipulation of space and material. The use of molded figures gives the image on the screen a texture and tangibility, one that is otherworldly, establishing a tone that is difficult to place or categorize, creating uneasiness in the audience. In an interview with Focus Features, Selick describes the contradictory nature of this medium, stating, "Stop-motion animation brings a charm, a warmth -- it takes a little bit of an edge off the darkest, most troubling parts of the story, I think, and adds a little creepiness to parts that might be too sweet" ("Henry Selick In Conversation"). The use of figurines creates a greater eeriness, relating to Freud's discussion of the uncanny, specifically the example he cites of dolls and the movement of inanimate objects. In *Coraline*, the audience is confronted with dolls that appear to move on their own in a humanlike way, capable of speech and interaction, as Selick humanizes the inhuman through objects that resemble or double reality. It is at this juncture that Selick creates a film with a tone that has perplexed audiences and continues to be engaging and interesting.

Black Swan

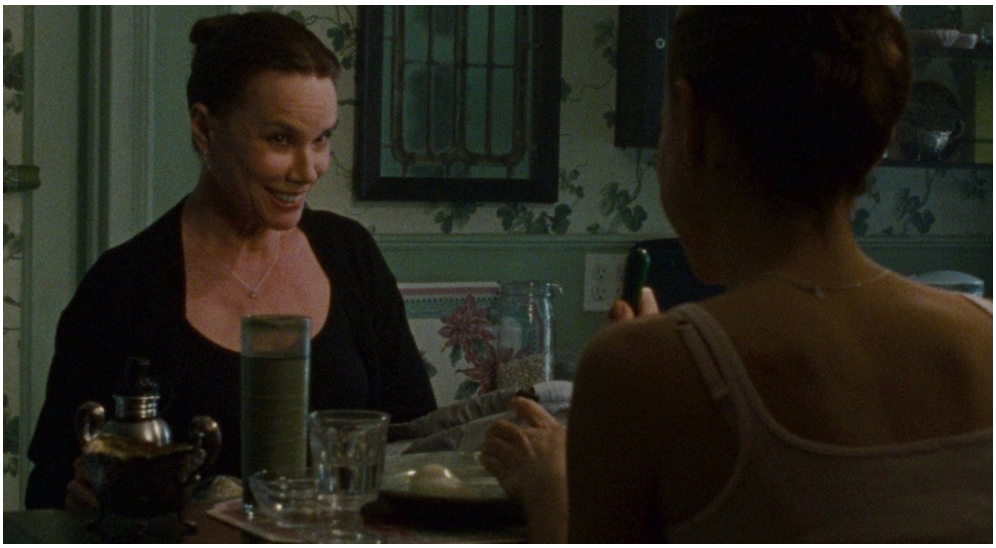
Darren Aronofsky's film, *Black Swan* (2010) takes on the tradition of the doppelganger narrative, investigating the concept of one's doubling, mirroring, and splitting through a psychological exploration of its protagonist, Nina (Natalie Portman). Aronofsky's film tells the tale of a ballerina in a production of Swan Lake, who is confronted by her rival double and undergoes a transformation to embody the two contrasting roles she must dance: the white and black swan. With this, Aronofsky explores the ideas of self-sabotage, self-hatred, madness, and

insecurity that come with encountering one's image. The film conveys a female's hysteria that arises from meeting her doppelganger and being required to embody a split role, complicating the audience's ability to perceive occurrences as reality or a result of madness. The film continues the tradition of the doppelganger tale through these themes, using doubling on multiple accounts to investigate the precariousness of one's identity, as Nina's identity is explored and expanded through her relation to several women, including her mother, Erica (Barbara Hershey), retiring ballerina Beth (Winona Ryder), and dance rival Lily (Mila Kunis). The film uses these doubles to speak on the idea of obsession with perfection and fear of inadequacy that results from within and is heightened by one's comparison to others.

Aronofsky's film is rooted in the doppelganger tradition through its connection to Dostoevsky's *The Double*. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, Aronofsky shared that the conception of the film came from his " thinking of doing something on Dostoevsky's 'The Double'", and upon seeing a production of Swan Lake, he found a connection in the principal dancer embodying two parts or roles (Kaufman, "'Black Swan' Director"). Inspired by this mechanism of doubling Dostoevsky lays out in his novella, Aronofsky describes, "I thought it was a terrifying idea, that you wake up one day, and someone's taking over your life and taking away everything that belongs to you, and everything you believe in, that loss of identity" (Chester, "Director Darren Aronofsky on Creating a Disturbing Masterpiece"). *Black Swan* follows many themes laid out by Dostoevsky that are characteristic of the doppelganger tale, while simultaneously elaborating on them. This includes leaning into elements of the fantastic, in which the audience is left with great uncertainty, especially from the lack of closure in the film's ending. Like Dostoevsky's Goliadkin, Aronofsky foregrounds Nina as an individual with troubled mental health, as she is highly anxious and obsessive, causing the viewer to question the

events before them. The ambiguity and confusion that Aronofsky implores through Nina's paranoia enables connections to be made between Nina and other females in this film, confusing the understanding of her true identity, as her old identity becomes distant and is intruded upon by these varying influences. Following *The Double* and the doppelganger tradition, the film similarly details the path of self-destruction that follows one's encounter with a double and uses this as a mechanism for exploring the protagonist's identity.

Erica:



As in *Coraline*, a destructive mother-daughter relationship is explored in *Black Swan*. Nina's mother, Erica, is overbearing and treats her like a child, overseeing her every move, restricting her freedom, and confining her to a limited life. Despite being an adult, Nina lives in her childhood bedroom full of stuffed animals, pink decor, and a Swan Lake-themed music box. It appears that the space Nina lives in has been preserved since childhood, untouched by the effects of time. The preservation of this environment by Nina's mother has confined her to the innocence and dependency of youth, preventing growth and maturity. Erica is arguably the first instance of doubling in the film, as at the beginning of the film, Nina is paralleled with Erica at

breakfast. This scene begins with a close-up of Nina's breakfast, half a grapefruit, demonstrating the way that Nina's mother helps fuel her disordered eating. A close-up of Nina shows her against a dark wall, her pink cami contrasting, as she comments, "Look how pink. So pretty", in a childlike voice. It can be determined that what is pretty about pink is its purity and femininity, something that Nina and her mother both believe to be true. The film cuts to a medium shot over Nina's shoulder, showing Erica, as they say in unison, "So pretty". Both through the dialogue and framing Erica and Nina are mirrored, as they face each other across the barrier of the counter, as if they are reflected. Nina and Erica both have their hair pulled in taut ballerina buns, further paralleling them, but Erica's mature age is highlighted by this in comparison to Nina's youth. Erica is dressed in all black, contrasting the pink cami that Nina can be seen wearing in the foreground to the right of the frame. Nina's wardrobe emphasizes her youth and innocence, while her mother is draped in black clothing, giving her a sinister presence. This starts Aronofsky's expert use of color in this film, as the mother embodies a darkness and harshness characteristic of the black swan and the film's generally gloomy mise-en-scene, which is contrasted by Nina's light feminine clothing that represents the white swan. Like in many scenes, Aronofsky also plays with mirrors and reflections within his shots. A long shot shows Nina's profile as she sits at the counter, but the orientation of it is confusing through the use of multiple mirrors. It seems as if this shot is a reflection of Nina, where her image is further fragmented by the multiple mirrors that refract it. This demonstrates a confusion of identity, specifically within the context of her mother's influence. Noticing self-inflicted scratches on Nina's back, an over-the-shoulder close-up shows Nina's image reflected in a mirror before her, as her mother can be seen analyzing them, despite physically being out of the frame. Nina turns to inspect her scratches in this mirror, as her mother continues to be reflected, her stern expression shown. By

conveying their interaction through a mirror, Aronofsky invites the audience to consider the mother and daughter as reflected images, or doubles of each other. As a mirror to her mother, it appears that Nina is looking into the future at her older self. In the essay on matrophobia, Reventós states that "in spite of the daughter's fierce rejection of the" mother as double, she "cannot discard the mother's shadowy influence", for the mother has long been the daughter's reflection (Reventós, 287). Looking at the relationship between Nina and Erica, the threat lies that Nina may be destined to become her mother, an obsessive and resentful aged-out ballerina, demonstrating how daughters are inherently doubles of their mothers.

Through Nina's mother, what may typically be a sweet or sentimental idea is turned cynical as it is revealed that daughters will grow into bitter and unfulfilled mothers who will become jealous of and obsessed with their daughters. In this vicious cycle, the mother becomes envious of the youth their daughter has, which grants them the ability to accomplish what they could not. Having been a ballerina who never reached success and was left a single mother, Erica lives vicariously through Nina and is obsessed with her image. Erica continually inspects Nina's body for self-inflicted scratches and encourages her to wear sweaters to hide them, preserving the image of perfection characteristic of the white swan. Nina's body "is a matrophobic battlefield", as Reventos describes, because, "as long as femininity is culturally constructed

around the female body (its beauty), the daughter will use it as an instrument of protest or resistance, as a site of struggle against the issue of feminine identity" (Reventos, 287). In *Black Swan*, Nina's physical self and image become a point of obsession and conflict between mother and daughter. Erica uses and exploits the image of Nina in a manner that is similar to the dance company leader, Thomas (Vincent Cassel), as she physically exposes and humiliates her. After returning from a gala presenting her as the new principal dancer, a medium shot shows Nina in her room, as she stands in the center of the frame, back to the camera, with her face reflected by a mirror in front of her. Her mother enters the frame, pausing behind Nina as she strokes her hair, an excuse to inspect her. As the scene progresses, a close-up over Nina's shoulder shows Erica standing almost face-to-face with Nina, refusing to let her undress on her own. Nina's reaction to her mother can all be seen in the mirror's reflection, as Erica moves around her, fussing with the dress. As the top of the dress comes off, large red scratches can be seen on Nina's back, which Erica notices and becomes very upset. Nina tries to spin around to hide it, but the mirror reflects Nina's back and the scratches upon it, demonstrating her constant lack of privacy from her mother. A long shot of the room shows Erica pulling Nina's dress off, as she is exposed, only wearing pink underwear. Erica takes Nina by the hand as the film cuts to a tracking shot of Nina being dragged down the hallway and into the bathroom, her bare back and its scratches in the center of the frame, a physical manifestation of her inner turmoil, some of which is induced by Erica. In the bathroom, extreme close-up shots show Erica clipping Nina's nails with scissors, seemingly a metaphor for clipping her wings, limiting her ability to grow into her own. Erica is possessive of Nina and holds ownership over her image and identity, for it is in Nina's body, her beauty and talent as a dancer, that Erica sees value. Nina's physical self has become a representation of Erica's identity and success as a mother.

Erica's preoccupation with Nina's image is demonstrated again through her art room which contains solely painted portraits of Nina. Nina's mother's obsession manifests itself in the need to multiply Nina's image, reflecting Nina's neuroticism and focus on her appearance. On multiple occasions, Nina passes by her mother's art room, in which there are numerous photographs of Nina and attempts at painting these images. Like Nina, her mother is focused on image and attaining a level of perfection in the image she curates of her daughter. However, her tyrannical side comes out through this desire to preserve the image of Nina, capturing her in a stage of life and refusing to let her change. In one scene, as Nina begins to descend into madness, these portraits come to life. A long shot shows the portraits on the wall moving and speaking nonsensically, as dramatic Swan Lake orchestral music plays in the background. This auditory overload demonstrates how overwhelmed Nina feels with both the internal and external pressures she faces and the terror of descending into madness. The film cuts to close-ups of several paintings beside their reference photos of Nina. All these paintings have become distorted, with evil-looking versions of Nina, and the reference photos have become similarly deformed. Nina's identity has become complicated and warped, expressed by these disfigured images of herself. A long shot shows Nina standing in the doorway, frightened, as the camera rapidly tracks in toward her, giving the impression that these images are advancing and overwhelming her. Nina places her hands over her ears to shut out the noise, screaming, "Stop!". An over-the-shoulder shot shows Nina rushing to the wall of photos and tearing them down, the camera following behind her, as she attempts to destroy the cause of her anguish. The noise ends once a medium shot shows Erica entering the room, questioning Nina's actions. This is an experience of the uncanny as the familiar image of Nina, an inanimate painting, is distorted and comes to life, being given the human characteristics of movement and speech. Erica's doubling of Nina is proven to be

overwhelming and terrifying, for the images that are produced become pestering voices that complicate Nina's understanding of her identity, and Erica has difficulty realizing that Nina's behavior is a monster of her own making. This cultivation of one's image through the daughter, or double, fates Nina to pain and suffering, for she struggles to become the possessor of her identity and her life. Through this, the film has the capability of exploring one's position to previous generations through the appearance of a double, displaying how self-hatred can stem from the hatred of a controlling past and traits inherited from parents that cannot be rejected, showing the complications of life as a double.

Beth:

Another notable double within Aronofsky's film is retired ballerina Beth, who performs a similar role to Nina's mother through her presentation of what Nina could potentially become. Beth is the company's principal ballerina and has been forced into retirement by Thomas, who wishes to have a fresh young face for the new production. Similar to Nina's mother, Beth serves as a cautionary tale for what Nina could become: washed up, bitter, and used and discarded by men. Like Nina, Beth had been the ingénue whom Thomas had groomed and taken advantage of, a role that proved to be entirely replaceable in the end. Nina becomes Beth's double as she takes on her role in the dance company as the principal dancer, eventually assuming the same nickname from Thomas ("little princess"). Through this, the past seems to continue to repeat itself as it would seem that the trajectory of Nina's story isn't unlike that of her predecessor, Beth, which is defined by misery and self-destruction.

Despite Beth's position as an antagonistic character, Nina aspires to acquire Beth's image and role. After Beth vacates her dressing room, a close-up shows Nina sneaking into the room as

the camera pans around her. The room is full of pink and white decor, paralleling Beth and Nina through these characteristic colors, as Nina also wears pink in this scene. The camera tracks behind Nina as she sits down at Beth's vanity, her face reflected by the mirror before her, and she takes in her image, pleased. The camera then pans down as Nina grabs a lipstick sitting on the table, and pans back up to show Nina's reflection in the mirror as she inspects it, entranced by its beauty. Once more, the camera pans down as Nina places the lipstick in her pocket, stealing an item of Beth's that Nina sees as being a part of Beth's identity and success. It is revealed that she steals other items as well, including diamond earrings, perfume, and a sharp metal nail file. By acquiring these items and working to attain Beth's physical image, Nina hopes to become worthy of being the principal dancer in the company. When Nina goes to ask Thomas for the role of Swan Queen, an over-the-shoulder shot in the subway shows Nina's reflection in the window as she puts on Beth's lipstick, altering her previously makeup-free image to one that is more seductive, one that looks more like Beth. Being made the new principal ballerina, Nina takes ownership of Beth's former dressing room, physically occupying her space, which seems to be haunted by the memory of Beth. She inspects her image in the mirror which Beth used to analyze her own as she prepares for her performances, trying to construct the image of perfection that she believes Beth attained. But, trying to appropriate Beth's image and perfection contributes to Nina's self-destruction at the end of the film.

Further paralleling Nina, Beth is also self-harming, as she is in an accident in which it is presumed that she purposely walked in front of a bus. As Thomas tells Nina, Beth was interesting to watch as a dancer because she had dark impulses, but this also makes her self-destructive, hinting at Nina's growing self-destruction. After the accident, Nina visits Beth in the hospital. A close-up of Nina from behind shows her wearing a pink coat and navigating the gloomy hospital hallway until she stops in the doorway of Beth's room. Reflected in the glass of the open door is Beth, her body lying upon pink hospital sheets and surrounded by pink and white flowers, which is followed by a close-up of Nina hesitantly entering the room. An over-the-shoulder shot of Nina shows Beth in the background, looking just as she did in the image reflected in the door, lying upon the bed, but even more pink and white decor and flowers surround the room, giving it a sickly sweet feeling. Being colors used to signify purity and innocence throughout the film, it is only through this great act of self-destruction that Beth can be surrounded once again by purity, foreshadowing what is to become of Nina. But this purity is artificial and constructed, curated by the decor that has been brought into the somber hospital room, which can just as easily be removed. Nina approaches Beth and the camera pans down to the pink sheets, as Nina lifts them, revealing a gory gash along Beth's leg, an extreme version of the scratches that Nina inflicts upon herself. The film cuts to a medium shot of Nina as she jolts

away, gasping, and exits the room. The two characters are mirrored through this shot through the use of color, demonstrating the deterioration of Nina's innocence and purity, and how it is to become a mere facade. The use of mirrored surfaces in this scene, such as Nina looking in the door's window, also gives the effect that Nina is looking at a disfigured version of herself, foreshadowing her self-inflicted pain. This scene is mirrored later in the film, when Nina again visits Beth's hospital room, understanding Beth's feeling of desperation now that Thomas has made Lily her alternate. Stepping into the room, a long shot shows Beth slumped in a wheelchair, stripped of identity and humanity. The feminine decor is gone, the innocent facade has been removed, and all that is left is the bare and gloomy hospital room, proving Nina's hope to return to her previous self impossible. Nina returns Beth's items to her, as a close-up shows her placing them on the table as if discarding them can ward off the darkness that is overtaking her. But, Nina has gone too far in occupying Beth's role and is fated to live out the destruction that is to come. Beth suddenly grasps Nina's hand, startling her. The film cuts between close-ups of Nina and Beth, as Nina tries to apologize, saying, "I know how it feels. She's trying to replace me. What do I do?". Beth's close-up shows her disheveled and sickly as she looks shocked at the belongings that Nina stole. Referring to the stealing Nina pleads, "I was just trying to be perfect, like you". Beth scoffs, and a close-up shows her hand grabbing a hold of the sharp nail file. The camera returns to a close-up of Beth as she analyzes the object, looking away from the camera, stating, "I'm not perfect. I'm nothing". Here, Beth takes the object and begins stabbing her face, repeating "Nothing", as dramatic orchestral music begins. Nina goes to grab Beth's arm, but Beth fights back, and looking up towards Nina, Beth's face has been replaced by Nina's, demonstrating the tie between these two characters. A close-up shows Nina stumbling back, and the film cuts back to Beth-turned-Nina, who continues to stab herself, yelling, "Nothing". Nina's

self-hatred is literalized in this as she watches her double self-destruct, listening to the figure insist that Nina is “nothing” and will not amount to anything, let alone perfection. Fleeing the room, a medium shot shows Nina running through the hospital hallway, getting to the elevator, but here Nina realizes her hands are bloody and she holds the sharp object. This solidifies that it is Nina who is the source of self-harm and emotional suffering, as the external influences or doubles, such as Beth, merely magnify the battle she has with herself. By trying to appropriate Beth’s position in her chase for perfection, Nina’s identity becomes increasingly complicated, and her fight against the influence of her doubles is futile, for she is fated to self-destruct.

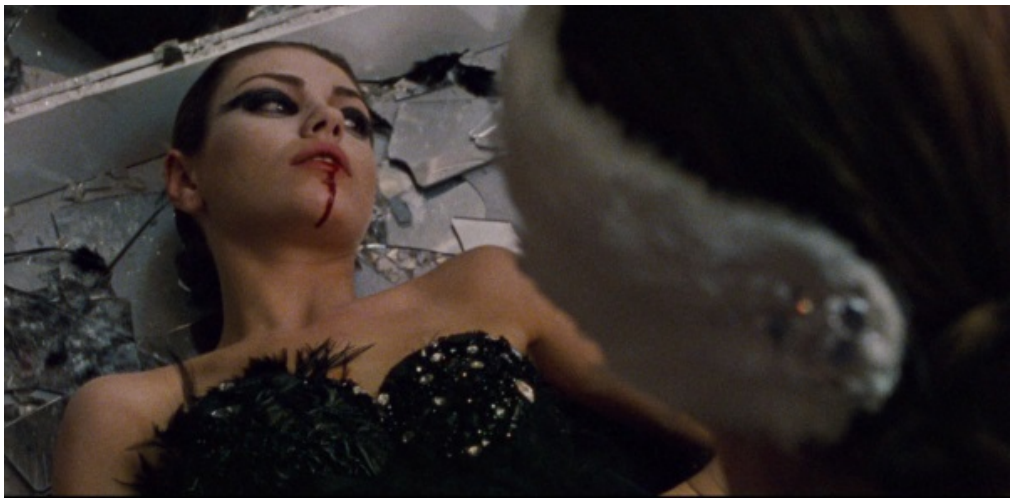
Lily:

The primary instance of doubling occurs through Nina’s doppelganger Lily, who is inextricably linked to the split in Nina’s personality as she works to embrace the role of the black swan. Lily is the character that has the greatest ability to open up Nina’s character and show her the possibilities of her own identity. The first indications of Nina’s psychological break coincide with the arrival of Lily, who is officially introduced during Nina’s audition for Swan Lake. Arriving late, Lily disrupts Nina’s audition and knocks her off balance. The entrance of Lily into Nina’s world is destabilizing and threatening, as Lily makes her feel more vulnerable and becomes sabotaging through the anxiety that she instills within Nina. *Black Swan* uses the appearance of a doppelganger to speak to the anxiety of inadequacy that Nina holds, as she feels that her incompetence is highlighted by Lily. This relates to twin research and studies, such as Mvikeli Ncube’s book *Identical Twins*, as he summarizes, “the constant comparisons between twins can also create problems”, such as promoting unhealthy competition and causing identity confusion (Ncube 20). This occurrence is further described by Jeanna Magagna when she writes

about a psychotherapy patient, Hanna, who happens to be an identical twin. Magnagna describes the natural tendency for a twin to feel fearful of being in the shadow of the other, and states that "Hanna felt herself to be the reverse side of her sister Sarah…Sarah was bright, Hanna was stupid; Sarah was good, Hanna was evil…In this way rivalry between the 'healthy twin' Sarah and 'the weakened twin' Hanna was intensified (Magagna 53). Nina is concerned about her inadequacy as a dancer and her inability to embody both roles, which is heightened by her fear that Lily will take her place. Lily embodies the characteristics of the black swan and represents Nina's repressed desires and impulses, particularly those related to sexuality, freedom, and artistic expression. She embodies everything that Nina wishes she could be, but feels incapable of becoming. Lily is confident, uninhibited, and comfortable with her body, while Nina is constrained by her perfectionism and self-doubt. It is in Nina's comparison to Lily that Nina's insecurity is heightened and her identity becomes fractured.

Lily represents an influence that encourages Nina to part with her innocent identity and embrace a darker side of herself. After taking Nina for a night out fueled with alcohol, drugs, and men, Nina brings Lily back to her apartment and drags her back into her bedroom, escaping Erica. As she yells at her mother not to come in, a close-up of Nina shows Lily lingering behind her, their faces are side by side, giving the impression that they are two sides of the same person. As Nina ensures the door is closed, a medium shot of Lily shows her looking seductively at Nina, standing in her all-black ensemble against the pink butterfly wallpaper of Nina's room. Nina's pink frilly bedroom is tainted by the intrusion of this darker and uninhibited aspect of Nina's identity, represented by Lily. As the two come together, kissing, close-ups show them undressing, Lily wearing black lingerie and Nina wearing pink girly underwear, again representing two distinct sides of Nina's personality and her exploration of her repressed

sexuality. Moving onto the bed, various close-ups show Lily on top of Nina, a demonstration of this darker side of Nina overpowering her or asserting itself. In this scene, Nina takes pleasure in the company of this dark side of herself, literally and figuratively. At the close of the scene, after the two have had sex, a medium close-up shows Lily sitting up on the bed, again in front of the youthful wallpaper, as she says, “Sweet girl”. The film cuts to a close-up of Nina, confused by this statement, which is followed by the return to the shot of Lily. However, replacing Lily is Nina, wearing Lily’s dark clothing, as she takes a pillow and places it over Nina’s face, or the camera, and the shot goes black. The reality of Lily’s presence in this scene becomes questioned, as it appears that Nina has instead had an interaction with an alternate self. With this scene, the line between self and double becomes more complicated through Nina’s attraction to Lily, who serves as both an opposing image as well as a reflection of a suppressed self. By creating a character who is both a projection of Nina's desires and a threat to her sanity, Aronofsky challenges the viewer to question the nature of reality as well as how our own complicated identities shape our perception of the world. It is through Lily that Nina has gained entrance into a different world, one that is less inhibited but more dangerous, as she further breaks with her innocent identity.



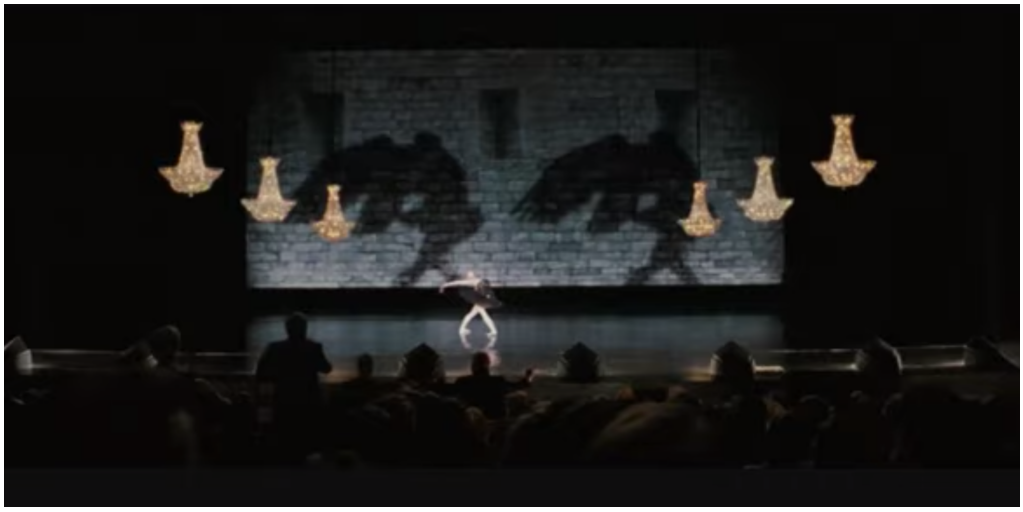
Aronofsky's film grapples with the idea of self-sabotage as a result of self-hatred, embodied in the figure of the doppelganger. At the end of the film, believing that her double is out to steal her role, Nina has a physical altercation in which she appears to kill Lily. A close-up of Nina shows her entering her dressing room, dejected after a poor performance. Over Nina's shoulder, a long shot shows Lily sitting at Nina's vanity, as she states that the performance, "Must have been pretty humiliating". The film cuts to a close-up of Lily reflected in the mirror as she spins in the chair to face Nina. The camera pans to the source of the reflection, which has changed to become Nina in the costume of the black swan. She states, "How about I dance the black swan for you", the voice morphing from Lily's to Nina's as the transformation occurs. With this, it is demonstrated that Lily represents an extension of Nina or the split in her personality, which is cruel and sabotaging. Nina lunges towards the black swan, and a high-angle long shot shows Nina shove her back into a mirror, breaking it. Here, Nina is forced to confront and battle the two sides of her identity emblematized by the black and the white swan. A close-up shows Nina's face as the black swan, lying unconscious atop the shards of glass, as suddenly, the black swan jolts awake and begins to strangle Nina. Reverse shots show close-ups of the black swan, demanding that it is her turn to dance, and Nina struggling to breathe. The film cuts to a close-up of Nina's hand which grabs for a shard of glass and then a close-up of the glass plunging into the black costuming of the black swan. Nina uses a mirror, a tool for reflection and identity formation, against her doppelganger as a weapon. A close-up of Nina reveals her eyes turned red, as she insists, "It's my turn", proving that she will not let her doppelganger steal her chance to reach perfection through her performance, going to any lengths to achieve this. But, as the film cuts to a close-up of the black swan, the figure has once again become Lily, blood trickling from her mouth. Panicked and horrified by her actions, Nina drags

Lily across the glass shards and into her bathroom to hide the body. A final close-up shows Nina hyperventilating, and as she starts to get her breath under control, her eyes become red once again, solidifying her transformation into the black swan. It is through this violence against her doppelganger that Nina is capable of embodying the black swan, perfecting the role. Embracing the darker side of herself has allowed Nina to conquer the anxieties and insecurities she held, but has also destroyed her former identity. Nina soon discovers that this murder never took place and that what initially appears to be a murder of her double, proves to be an act of self-harm. Nina has instead stabbed herself with the shard of the mirror and is bleeding out onto her pristine white costume. Similar to *The Student of Prague*, the destruction of a doppelganger ultimately leads to the destruction of oneself, reflecting the way that a double or doppelganger is directly tied to the physical identity of an individual. It is the fragmentation of Nina's identity into these two opposing sides, one of which is embodied by Lily, that results in her downfall. This scene demonstrates that the true battle is that which Nina is having with herself. The double becomes the object of the protagonist's hatred, turning one's image into the enemy, which becomes a catalyst for self-destruction.

Nina:

Following her mother's example, Nina is similarly preoccupied with her image. Achieving perfection is Nina's focus, which causes her to place a lot of pressure on herself, furthering her neuroticism. Nina's obsession and ambition manifest themselves in adverse behaviors, as Nina is shown as being self-harming through her scratching compulsion, creating wounds on her skin, and her eating disorder. This is an external manifestation of the tension and inner conflict that Nina holds, stemming from the disorientation she feels in her identity and the

pressure she places upon herself. In this time of difficulty, Nina's mental health deteriorates gradually and her double appears, becoming the ultimate trigger for her self-destruction. The film focuses on a split in Nina's personality and identity, coinciding with the two roles of the black and the white swan, as Aronofsky uses the structure of the ballet Swan Lake to investigate the two sides of this character. In the film, Thomas states that he is searching for someone who can "embody both swans…the white and the black", with the black swan being the "lustful twin" that "tricks and seduces" the prince. Desiring this role, Nina begins her journey to embody the black swan, releasing a repressed side of herself that proves to be destructive. After being cast, Thomas tells Nina that she needs to "lose herself" to dance the role of the black swan, indicating the necessity for Nina to free herself of inhibition and innocence, and immerse herself in the dark and confusing aspects of her identity. The narrative of the ballet parallels or is a double to Nina's experiences as she feels that her "lustful twin", Lily, aims to trick and seduce Thomas in order to gain the role. However, the true evil twin that appears is within Nina, as the split in her identity results in a release of the repressed, which becomes impossible to control.



Aronofsky employs visual cues to indicate the splitting of Nina's identity as her dark side begins to overtake her. A primary way in which this is achieved is through costuming, as Nina

begins the film dressed in light soft colors such as gray, white, and pink. These colors speak to Nina's purity and innocence, which begin to be disrupted by her casting as the black swan, the introduction of Lily, and the splitting of her identity. As the film progresses and Nina's dark side begins to become more prominent and her sanity is threatened, darker colors become introduced into her wardrobe, such as black leotards and dark gray shrugs, and she wears more makeup, darkening her features. This break in identity is also shown visually through the use of mirrors. In one scene, a close-up of Nina in the bathroom mirror shows her wrapped in a pink towel, with fresh scratches on her back. She inspects these wounds with her back to the mirror, and the camera pans to her profile as she looks at her nails. The camera then pans up to the medicine cabinet, showing Nina grabbing a pair of nail scissors, and back to her reflection in the mirror as she begins to cut her nails. Nina's face, initially distraught, is shown looking up sinisterly as her reflection takes the scissors and cuts her finger. She suddenly realizes what she has done and looks down at her bleeding finger in pain. Nina's mirror image, her evil twin, possesses the ability to take actions that harm Nina, following the tradition of the double being used to show or instigate one's self-destruction. This previous example is one of many that speaks to Aronofsky's use of the fantastic tale and psychologically induced visions to play with the audience's perception of Nina's contradictory identity. The idea of splitting is introduced again near the end of the film when Nina dances the part of the Black Swan and undergoes a physical transformation. A close-up shows Nina, eyes red, enjoying the power she feels as the black swan, as the camera pans along her arms, her skin prickling and beginning to grow feathers. A long shot shows her entering the black stage, pirouetting towards the camera as she sprouts more feathers with each turn. The camera tracks behind her as she takes her final stance, spreading her large black wings above her head, having completed her transformation into the black swan and

fully embodying that side of herself. The film cuts to a long shot of the stage from the audience's perspective, and her body can be seen without any wings, showing it is an internal transformation that is imagined by Nina. However, this certainty is complicated by the fact that the spotlight causes her to cast a shadow on the backdrop of the stage, and her shadow has wings. This confuses the line between madness and reality, as the shadow she casts (another form of doubling) keeps the viewer from explicitly stating certain occurrences as completely false. It is through these visual cues that the audience gains a greater understanding of a distinct split in Nina's identity and contemplates her deteriorating sanity.

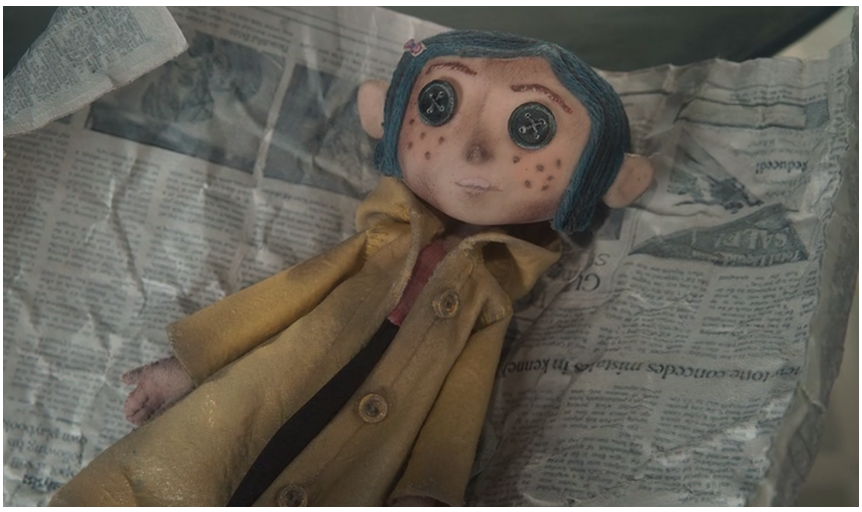
Although the ending lacks closure, it proves that the doubling occurring throughout the film results in or is a representation of a complication of Nina's identity that is ultimately self-destructive. As in other traditional doppelganger tales, such as *The Double*, it is one's mirror image, another aspect of oneself, that is self-sabotaging. As the protagonist works to navigate this phenomenon and reconcile their identity, they descend into madness. In *Black Swan*, this is manifested both mentally, through Nina's disorienting visions, as well as physically, through the destruction of her body. This is affirmed by Nina's imagined fight with Lily that culminates in the stabbing of herself, as the battle becomes between the conflicting sides of her identity. After realizing her wound, Nina proceeds to dance the final part of the white swan, returning to her former purity as, like Beth, she has completed the cycle of self-destruction. In this final act of the ballet, the white swan kills herself out of despair, paralleling the way Nina's tale ends, for the audience assumes she dies as well. It is here, in the moment before her death, that she finally feels perfection, having given her best performance and completely broken with her identity as well as her sanity. The doubling of Nina through the various women in the film leads to the ultimate conclusion that the greatest tension in the film is Nina's battle with herself. The theme

of the doppelganger and doubling serves as a mechanism to show the complexity of identity and how one can lose control over oneself, causing destruction.

Coraline:

Henry Selick's *Coraline* follows Coraline, a girl who encounters an alternate world that initially appears to be full of excitement, but is truly destructive and dangerous. The film begins with Coraline's family moving into the Pink Palace Apartments, having left Michigan to pursue a job opportunity. Coraline is upset by this move, for she had to leave behind her friends and a more exciting life, and is bored by the dull new existence forced upon her. Coraline is surrounded by strange neighbors including two aged-out actresses, a mouse circus conductor, Mr. Bobinsky, as well as a quirky boy, Wybee. After being given an eerie look-alike doll that Wybee finds, Coraline is led to the small door within her house that is the entrance to a doubling world, one in which everything seems more interesting and perfect. Here, she is greeted by button-eyed doubles of her parents and neighbors, all of whom appear to be improved versions of the originals. Initially intrigued by this world which fulfills all of her desires, Coraline soon realizes it was constructed to lure her in and trap her. Coraline's Other Mother aims to keep her there and sew buttons into her eyes, as she has done to former children. Henry Selick uses his trademark gothic style in this stop-motion film to convey dark and complex themes that transcend those of a typical children's movie and give another life to Neil Gaiman's novel. *Coraline* explores a doubling world and its doppelgangers to comment on the danger of desire and ungratefulness as well as the precarious relationship between mothers and daughters. In the end, the doppelganger narrative device becomes a catalyst for growth and maturity in Coraline, changing her

perspective on her world and its occupants, and allowing her to become grateful for what she has.



A significant plot device and symbol within *Coraline* is that of the doppelganger doll. *Coraline* opens with a scene that shows the construction of Coraline's look-alike doll, one that is cyclical or mirroring in its shot layout. The first shot of the film is a long shot showing a doll floating through a window in the center of the frame. The window has cobwebs around it and the surrounding room is unlit and tinged with green, causing the doll's pink clothing to be incongruous. From the foreground, metal hands reach out and grab the doll, demonstrating that this scene is shot from the perspective of this unknown inhuman being, which in conjunction with the non-diegetic children's chorus music, creates a chilling tone. A tracking shot follows the doll as it is placed on a table beside a collection of scissors and other sharp objects. Subsequent shots reveal the doll being taken apart, such as a close-up that shows the seam of the mouth being opened, letting the stuffing out. The doll is then shown in the center of the frame upside down as the metal hands remove the remaining stuffing and it is pulled inside out. The doll no longer resembles a human, but rather an identity-less lump of fabric. It has become a fresh slate for this inhuman figure to craft the image of a new doll, a new girl to prey upon. The film cuts to

a bucket of sand, as the camera tracks its pour, following it to the mouth of the doll as it is filled and given a form again. A mirroring shot follows the doll being placed back on the table as the metal figure gets to work making a new doll. A close-up shot reveals a drawer being opened that contains a variety of buttons, as the metal hands move to select the perfect pair to be used for the doll's eyes. This introduces the concept of eyes being a precious commodity that can be used to possess one's soul, relating to the Sandman, who steals the eyes of children to feed them to his children. Similarly, the film's villain, a monstrous mother, steals the eyes of children and "consumes" their lives, replacing them with buttons. The later shots of the new doll's construction mirror those of the former's deconstruction, such as a close-up of the mouth seam being sewn shut, eyes being sewn on, and hair being placed upon the head. An extreme close-up of the sewing machine shows the clothing being made, as the film displays the dingy and dusty sewing machine with contrasting bright yellow thread, a color that does not seem to belong in this dark and frightening world. The final shot in this sequence again mirrors the first shot, as the metal hands hold up the doll, releasing it to float out the window and into the abyss of the night, the window serving as a sort of portal between worlds. The scene's focus on the metal hands performing the construction of the doll demonstrates the ability for Coraline's image to be manipulated by others, even the less-than-human, turning her identity into a weapon. The button-eyed doll presents the audience with the image of Coraline that the Other Mother desires, foreshadowing what is to come. Selick makes an interesting choice presenting the audience with the doll, Coraline's double, before introducing the character herself. With this, the film opens with the idea of identity formation through a constructed and artificial image. It becomes revealed that these dolls are constructed by the Other Mother to spy on the children whom she marks as her prey. It is through the child's image that the villain is capable of intruding into their

lives, as she uses the button eyes of the doll to watch. With this, the line between the animate and the inanimate is blurred. This figure is an example of the uncanny described by Freud, for it is a familiar object that incites fear through its unexplained ability to move, see, and direct Coraline to the “other” world, demonstrating the film's engagement with the doppelganger genre’s traditions. The theme of dolls also demonstrates how a human can be dehumanized, as is the case with the other mother’s viewing of Coraline. In one scene, the Other Mother and Father present Coraline with a box that contains buttons and needles, encouraging her to let them sew buttons into her eyes. The scene begins with a shot from Coraline’s perspective, showing the mother and father seated on either side of the table, both looking at her expectantly. Not knowing their intentions, the audience understands that Coraline views this as the family she wishes to have, one in which her parents dote upon her. In this shot, the Other Mother passes down a box as she states, “For you. Our little doll”, demonstrating how she sees Coraline as an object she can manipulate and play with for personal pleasure. In this scene, Coraline is even wearing the clothing that her Other Mother gave her, dressing Coraline up like her own doll. A medium shot shows Coraline at the center of the frame eagerly lifting the lid on the box, as she tries to process what is before her. The film cuts to a close-up of the box on the table from Coraline’s perspective, revealing that the box contains two buttons, a needle, and a spool of thread, arranged in a way that resembles a face. A reverse shot shows Caroline’s horrified expression and the film cuts again to the cheery Other Mother, the camera zooming in as she describes the various colors of buttons Coraline could choose from, the final shot of this being an extreme close-up in which the Other Mother taps her button eye. In this world, eyes are a form of accessory, and Coraline is being asked to accessorize herself with the inhuman button eyes as if she is a doll. This is followed by a close-up of Coraline’s human eyes, demonstrating what is to be lost in this

exchange. Taking Coraline's eyes, a mechanism of stealing one's soul and freedom, becomes a way to strip Coraline of her identity. In this, the only thing differentiating Coraline from the soulless doll is her eyes, which haven't yet been replaced by buttons.

Directed to the doubling world by the doll, Coraline becomes lured into and entranced by a world that is everything she ever desired. This world has been constructed specifically for Coraline to ensure that "everything is right", fixing that which she dislikes in reality. Like the doll, this world is a mirror image constructed by the Other Mother, and true to the doppelganger tradition, it highlights the inadequacies of the figures it mirrors. Her parent's doubles are everything that she feels her real parents, who are uninteresting and absent, lack. In this constructed world, the parents enjoy playing with Coraline and gardening out in the mud, which is something that her real mother prevents her from doing because she doesn't like messes. During her first night in the other world, Coraline sits down to a table of delicious food, in which she can eat whatever she wants and is doted upon by her parents. A high-angle long shot shows Coraline sitting at a long table in the center of the frame, with her parents on either side. Before her is a feast of food with vibrant colors, and the scene is lit with warm lighting, giving this new alternative world a more homey and comforting ambiance. The audience cannot help but enjoy this world more than her real world, as it is more entertaining and pleasurable. This directly contrasts the family dinner shown a few scenes before, where a long shot similarly shows her family sitting at dinner, but in the real world they sit at a small round table upon collapsable chairs, and before them is slimy unappetizing food. In this previous scene, the room is dingy and tinted green as Coraline is slumped upon the table, her mom preaching to her, "Your dad cooks, I clean, and you stay out of the way". Selick speaks on the set of the real world, describing that "Coraline's life is less dimensional, so there is a muted color palette. The sets are built with less

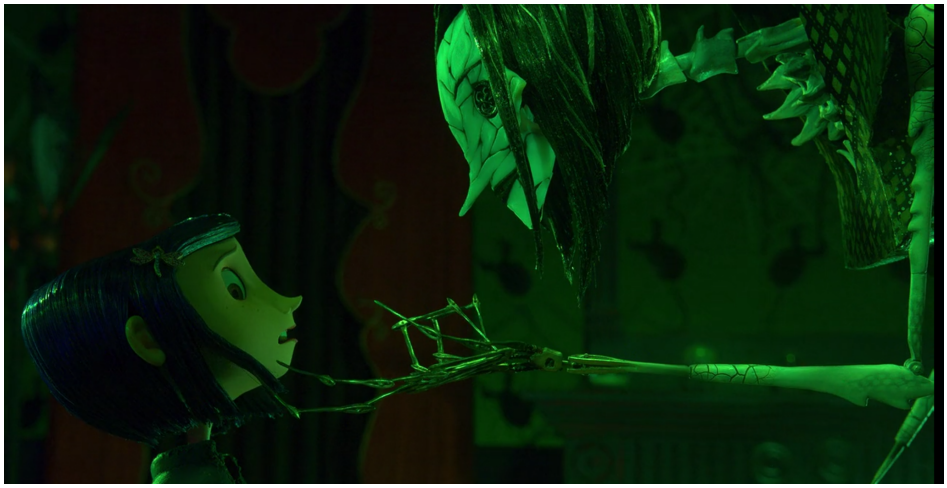
depth because the story is about her dissatisfaction and loneliness at home" ("Henry Selick in Conversation"). This new vibrant dinner scene allows the audience to become just as enticed as Coraline by this world, which is seemingly perfect. The meal is fun for Coraline, as any of her demands are met, including a tracking shot of a miniature "gravy train" winding around the table and serving Coraline. At the end of the meal, a medium shot of Coraline shows the Other Mother entering the left of the frame and placing an undecorated cake before her. The film cuts to a shot of the cake from Coraline's perspective as decorations magically emerge, with the writing, "Welcome home!". After Coraline asks what they mean by home, an over-the-shoulder shot shows the Other Mother and Father holding hands, united, stating, "We've been waiting for you Coraline". In this other world, the parents have physical proximity, showing their love for each other, something absent in Coraline's real world. They also look upon her as if serving her and making her feel content and loved is their life's purpose. Here, they present the possibility for this doubling world to become Coraline's true home, as she could leave behind the previous world for one that fulfills all of her desires. However, the camera zooms into the Other Mother's tapping sharp fingers on the table, foreshadowing the underlying tension and violence of this doubling world, leading the audience to recognize that there is more to this world than the image presented. Further taking on the doppelganger tradition, the mirror image is not what it appears to be, as something more sinister and dangerous lingers behind it. The Other Mother understands that the fulfillment of Coraline's desires through this world is a temptation that she cannot resist. Coraline initially disregards the strangeness of the button eyes and the existence of this world of doppelgangers, showing both the tendency of children to accept what is presented to them, but also a desperation to have her desires fulfilled. She is given the opportunity to live in a world in which "everything is right": her parents are loving, everyone pronounces her name correctly,

Bobinsky is a real mouse conductor, the two actresses are impressive and entertaining, Wybee cannot talk and can no longer annoy her. It is through this world's appeal that Coraline overlooks the hints of danger, allowing Selick to communicate the danger of desire. This world preys upon a void or absence in Coraline's life through its presentation of a mirror, an alternative. But, as in other doppelganger tales, the double proves to be a bad omen that is inadequate in solving the problems Coraline faces in the real world.

Speaking of the absence felt by Coraline, the film discusses greatly the relationship between mothers and daughters through the use of the doubling worlds. In an interview with Coming Soon, Selick comments that "As a kid you wish for different parents. So everyone imagin[ing] a better life is a universal theme", a theme that is carried out in this film with dangerous consequences ("Exclusive: Henry Selick on Making Coraline"). In both worlds, the mothers hold authority over Coraline and her father. In the real world, Coraline's mother and father work together, with her mother being the editor, a representation of how she controls her father's words, and therefore, identity. Speaking to Focus Features, Selick describes the familial dynamic saying, "They are writers, and Mom is the head. The tension that is in the family, I wanted it to feel real. Families aren't in love with each other all the time. The father-knows-best family, that's the fairy tale" ("Henry Selick in Conversation"). The structure of power created in this family makes Coraline resent her mother for she feels her freedom, self-expression, and ultimately her identity, are controlled by her mother. This leads to the ideal conditions for the film's villain, for it prompts Coraline's dissatisfaction and desire for a better life and a better mother. The dynamic described by Selick is exemplified in a scene near the start of the film when Coraline enters her father's study following a frustrating interaction with her mother. The scene begins with a long shot from Coraline's perspective as she opens the study door, revealing

the father surrounded by stacked moving boxes as he types at an outdated computer. This contrasts with the previous shot of the mother typing peacefully on a laptop in the kitchen, demonstrating the inequity in the relationship. A long shot of Coraline standing in the doorway in the background shows her father looking haggard as he hunches over the keyboard, ignoring her presence. After Coraline asks if she can play outside, the father responds, “What’d the boss say?”, never looking up from his computer. In the background, Coraline goes into an impersonation of her mother, going as far as bringing her doppelganger doll up to her face and yelling, “Don’t even think about it, Coraline Jones!”. Wanting her father to be more sympathetic and give her a break, her father refuses to go against the mother’s word and similarly gives her limited attention. This scene demonstrates that in this family, the mother is the ultimate authority, and Coraline must begrudgingly follow her rules. This causes Coraline to resent her mother, who is not only restrictive but also absent in how much she works and how little she engages with Coraline. Coraline is bored and lonely as an only child who feels neglected due to an unavailable and unsympathetic mother. She has been dragged against her will into a boring existence that her mother seems to make minimal attempts to fix. This is further communicated in a scene where her mother takes her uniform shopping. In a medium shot, Coraline’s mother stands with her back to the camera, sifting through a rack of identical gray clothes. The window in the background displays a dull gray day as rain trickles down the glass. Coraline rides across the screen atop a rolling stool, aiming to get her mother’s attention so that her mother will buy her the colorful gloves she has put on. As Coraline stops to the right of her mother in the center of the frame, her mother states, “Put them back”, not even looking up from the clothing rack to address Coraline’s presence. The film cuts to a close-up of Coraline from her mother’s perspective as the mother holds up a gray shirt for size. Coraline tries to dodge it and convince

her mother to get the gloves, pleading, “The whole school’s going to have boring gray clothes. No one will have these”. Coraline’s mother is cold, as this mother-daughter interaction is about efficiency and productivity, for Coraline’s presence is barely addressed. Coraline desires to express herself through her appearance, and feels that her mother is hindering her ability to form her true identity. Coraline sharply replies, “My Other Mother would get them”, to which her mother retorts, “Maybe she should buy all your clothes”, showing the tension in their relationship. The desire that Coraline holds for her mother to act differently, or perhaps for an entirely different mother altogether, is what makes her vulnerable to the predatory Other Mother. It is not until Coraline realizes the danger of the Other Mother and faces the permanent absence of her real mother, that she can recognize all that she has to lose. Speaking on one of his favorite aspects of Gaiman’s novel that he implemented into the film, Selick states, “Mom is cold…but she loves her daughter; that is an understood thing, and it doesn’t need to be always demonstrated” (Focus Features). This challenges the conventions of the mother-daughter relationship through the idea that love can be shown in unique ways and is an emotional connection that goes beyond physical affection. With *Coraline*, Selick demonstrates that a cold mother can still be a good and loving mother, as Coraline’s true appreciation for her mother is gained through her traumatic encounter with doppelgangers.



Coraline's dissatisfaction with her mother propels her to escape her real life, leading her to a more monstrous and destructive version of her mother. The power structure that she experiences with her real mother is heightened in the other world, a dynamic that is referenced in Reventós' work when she speaks of a detrimental power imbalance, where there is the "master" mother and "slave daughter" (Reventós, 289). In the other world, Coraline's Other Mother is an even more powerful and wicked "master" who wishes to forever have a "slave daughter", gaining ownership through the possession of the daughter's eyes. The Other Mother is the one who has constructed the world to be the way that it is, holding power not only over the father, but the other figures in the world, as she becomes a physical threat to both Coraline and her real parents. As Coraline realizes the Other Mother's evil and tyrannical side, she learns that this world is entirely directed by her, causing the surrounding characters to be at her mercy, and violence is inflicted upon Coraline through the Other Mother's puppets. As Coraline begins to realize the danger of the world, she is dragged into a seclusion room by the Other Mother through a portal within a mirror. A close-up low-angle shot from Coraline's perspective shows the Other Mother looming over her, punitively shaking her finger and saying, "You may come out when you've learned to be a loving daughter". In this relationship, the Other Mother has

strict expectations of what a daughter's behavior is, which is to show love for the mother, and the daughter's compliance or obedience is essential. Looking around the room, an angled long shot from Coraline's perspective shows a dim room, lit only by three figures sitting upon a metal bed in the background under a sheet. This space is cold, damp, and lifeless, and as Coraline approaches the bed, the camera follows, showing her hand pulling back the sheet to reveal three ghost children. As they speak to Coraline, a medium shot of the children shows them floating around Coraline and telling their story, enlightening Coraline on the dysfunctional relationship the Other Mother has with children. It is revealed by the ghost children that the Other Mother recognized that they were unhappy and preyed on this, acknowledging their own challenging or dysfunctional relationships with their real parents. The ghost children state that "She only made what she knew would impress you", for, "She wants something to love, I think. Something that isn't her. Or maybe, she just wants something to eat". This shot shows one of the ghost children passing through Coraline, leaving ghost-button eyes upon Coraline's face, hinting at what a life without a soul is like. Coraline realizes that the nature of the mother is to obsess over something outside herself, something that perhaps fills some void. But, this resulting consumption of children and their lives leaves the Other Mother empty and without love, requiring her to find a new child to prey on. This is similar to *Black Swan* in how the nature of mothers is to obsess over their daughters. This highlights the dysfunctional relationship between mothers and daughters, for a mother believes their daughter's role is to love and idolize them. For a mother, love from a daughter gives self-worth, proving the relationship to be directed by a mother's narcissism and need for affirmation. Near the end of the film, the Other Mother transforms into a spider-like being, turning the other world into a web that she hopes to catch Coraline in. The mother here becomes a predatory figure who wishes to destroy and consume her prey.

Navigating this relationship with her daughter brings out the ugliest side of herself, which is her true nature. The need to consume children hints that the Other Mother's survival is essential to having a child, and without this, she will presumably die. Again, this mirrors *Black Swan* with the theme that mothers live through their daughters; without their daughters being images they can possess, their existence and survival are threatened.

Coraline engages with the temporal nature of doubling through the theme of the past repeating itself and influencing the present. This primarily is shown through Coraline's discovery of the ghost children, previous victims that this world has trapped. These children are from various points in time, showing their shared experiences and how events have repeated themselves, leading to Coraline's similar encounter with this doubling world. Coraline's ability to interact with these ghosts of the past also proves that the trauma this doppelganger world inflicted has left a mark that can be seen in the present, in the form of ghosts. It is revealed by Wybee that his grandmother had a twin sister (another kind of double) who disappeared, or "was stolen". Because of this, Wybee's grandmother has refused to let children live in the apartments until Coraline, seemingly fearful that this pattern of the past would repeat itself. Coraline's experience proves this fear to be true as she becomes yet another victim of the Other Mother who preys on children's unhappiness. This pattern can only be stopped by Coraline's refusal to let her Other Mother sew buttons into her eyes, as she is unwilling to hand over her life to this world that seems to fulfill her desires, something that the previous children gave into. But, the children of the past are offered a chance at redemption, as they are essential to Coraline's defeat of the Other Mother. Trying to get her parents back and free these children, Coraline plays a game with the Other Mother in which she must find the ghost children's eyes, hidden in the "wonders" that were made for Coraline, for the Other Mother used these souls to power and create this vibrant

world. As Coraline searches for these eyes, each one that she finds and possesses causes the world to further deteriorate. Upon the capture of an eye, the area loses color as it freezes up or hardens. This is followed by close-up shots of the children's eyes from Coraline's perspective, revealing the glowing sphere with a child's voice thanking her, which is proceeded by the sphere itself also "dying" or becoming an inanimate object. Upon the capture of the final eye, the whole world begins to lose color as a web of gray and white expands, crackling across the screen. Shots show pieces of the world deteriorating into flakes that float in the air and objects unraveling. A bird's-eye view long shot shows the land in which Coraline stands breaking apart, as the boundary of the world closes in on her. Escaping into the house, this whole setting has changed as it is dimly lit, and wallpaper peels from the wall. Entering the lair of the Other Mother, a medium shot shows Coraline in the left of the frame lit by green lighting, as a hunched figure can just be made out in the background. As the mother speaks, she becomes lit with the same green lighting, and the camera zooms in to reveal her gaunt white face that has cracks throughout it. It is the souls of the past that have given the world its power and glamor, and by repossessing this past, Coraline weakens the world to a point in which she is able to conquer it, ending the cycle of trauma. Coraline is unable to defeat this world without the help of the past, which she harnesses to give her greater strength. The film proves that the doubling nature of the past is what enables those of the present to recognize how to end a dysfunctional cycle and create a new ending to an often repeated story.

Ultimately, Coraline plays into many of the traditions of the doppelganger tale in order to communicate its themes. It is not until Coraline encounters the doubling world and its objects that she can understand the danger of her desire and become grateful for what she has in the real world. She gains maturity in recognizing the need to question what is presented to her, as she

learns that there is always more to a superficial image. Also through the doppelganger world, the film discusses the complex relationship between mothers and daughters, linking this relationship to doubling through the character of the Other Mother. This doppelganger mother sinisterly aims to trap Coraline through the manipulation of her desire, making Coraline believe that she can fill the void her real mother has left by giving her the love and attention she wants. Through this process, the past is also discussed in how it continues to repeat itself, as it becomes an essential tool for Coraine to break the pattern and ultimately conquer the doppelganger world.

Petite Maman:

Celine Sciamma's *Petite Maman* follows Nelly (Josephine Sanz), an eight-year-old whose maternal grandmother has just died. She accompanies her parents to her grandmother's home, where her mother grew up, to empty it. Saddened by this loss and process, Nelly's mother (Nina Meurisse) leaves one night without saying goodbye. As an only child, Nelly feels alone in this space and decides to occupy herself by exploring the woods. Here, Nelly meets a girl named Marion (Gabrielle Sanz), the same name as Nelly's mother, who happens to be her mirror image. The two girls begin to play with one another and Marion soon welcomes Nelly into her home, the same home as Nelly's grandmother. It becomes understood that this doppelganger is Nelly's

mother at eight years old, who similarly yearns for comfort and friendship as she prepares for a surgical operation. In *Petite Maman*, the doppelganger is both a reflection of Nelly, played by the actress's identical twin sister, as well as an alternate version of her, with it being a young image of her mother. Sciamma uses the doppelganger tradition to explore the themes of grief, loss, childhood, and identity when it comes to the inherent connection that we have to our parents. With this, there is a doubling of not just people, but spaces, through time, demonstrating the interconnection between past and present and how they coexist. Through this, Sciamma transforms the traditional associations of death and doom with the doppelganger tale into one that is poignant and moving.

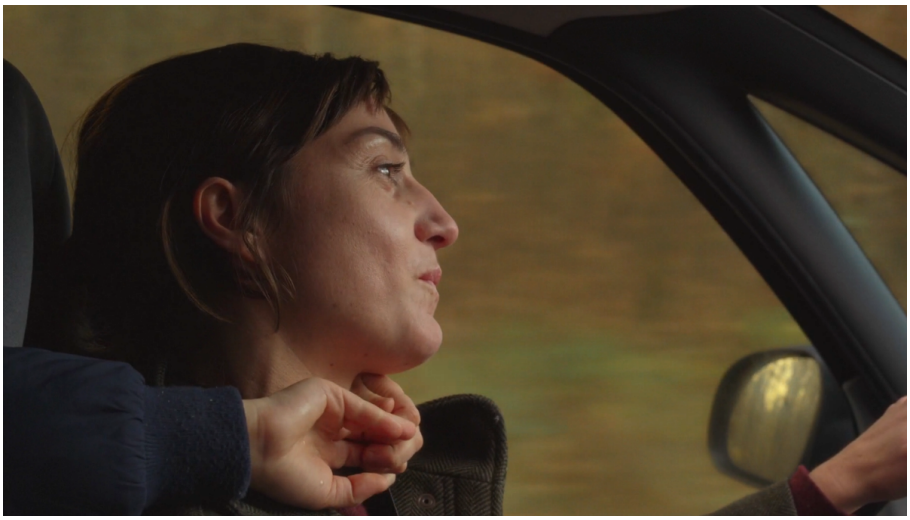
Similar to *Black Swan*, *Petite Maman* plays on the custom of the fantastic tale, as it creates a world that cannot be defined as imagined or real. The film never confirms nor denies whether the appearance of Nelly's doppelganger and her entrance into her mother's childhood is an actual occurrence. It is in this uncertainty that the themes of the film can play out, for it becomes unimportant whether the occurrences are real or not, for there is a distinguishable effect that they have on Nelly regardless of their authenticity. In an interview with Entertainment Weekly, Sciamma shares this sentiment, stating, "The whole film is like a daydream. The big what-if in the film is whether this happens or not for real, but the impact is the same, whether it has happened or not…The film is breaking the hierarchy of family, making a mother and a daughter equal. What can we learn from that mythological situation?" (Coggan, "How *Petite Maman* Director"). It is in this ambiguity that the film gains its fable-like quality, for the development of Nelly's relationship with her mother is understood through the phenomenon of encountering a double, a mythological experience that propels Nelly on a journey of personal growth. The audience's instinct to explain it as a child's daydreaming becomes complicated,

particularly in scenes such as the film's ending, which adds to the ambiguity. Interestingly, the departure of Marion coincides with the arrival of young Marion, and the departure of young Marion as she goes to have her procedure signals the final scene, the return of adult Marion. In this sense they are established as the same being, their comings and goings dependent on one another. The final scene begins with a long shot down a hallway to another room, centered in the frame. Nelly enters from the left of the frame and stands in the center of the room, pausing, appearing to see something. Her surroundings in this frame are empty and blank, allowing the focus to be on her reaction and indicating the erasure of the past from the home, as it has been cleared out. This erasure is concurrent with the removal of young Marion from Nelly's world. The film cuts to a long shot of adult Marion, from a slightly high angle as she sits slightly off-center to the right of the frame. Nothing is said as Nelly approaches her mother, going from the foreground to the middle ground and sitting to the left of Marion. They both sit side by side with their legs crossed, mirroring one another, as Marion says "Sorry…For leaving you". This leads to a close-up shot of Nelly in which she states "Don't apologize. It was nice", which cuts to a similarly framed close-up of Marion as she looks away, glancing around the house. It is difficult to discern whether Nelly means this as an insult or as a comment that it was nice to be accompanied by young Marion, a different version of her mother. Through a series of reverse shots, the two exchange commentary about the strangeness of the house being empty. Lingering on the close-up of Nelly, she looks at her mother and says, "Marion". This is followed by a close-up of Marion as she looks sadly at Nelly and affectionately says "Nelly", and the two embrace. It would seem that this is the first time Nelly has called her mother by her first name, possibly hinting to her mother that she understands that the young girl whom she had befriended still lies within her adult mother. Her mother's sad response may be a recognition or

remembrance of this formative time with Nelly as a child. However, nothing is explicitly stated or explained, as the character's motivation is ambiguous, leaving the audience unsure as to the true meaning of this exchange. Through this open ending, Sciamma allows the audience to formulate their own interpretation of the truth, understanding that regardless of what truly occurred, the relationship between mother and daughter has changed fundamentally.

Sciamma uses her child protagonist to change the traditional associations with the doppelganger tale. The appearance of the protagonist's doppelganger is not a bad omen or a manifestation of mental instability, but rather the result of either a phenomenon or a child's imagination. *Petite Maman* uses a doppelganger to explore the power of a child's mind when it comes to understanding complex topics, such as grief and a mother's absence. Marion's appearance comes shortly after the death of Nelly's grandmother and her mother's leaving, allowing the doppelganger to fill a void that has been created by these two absences. This is especially important for Nelly, with her being an only child. With this, *Petite Maman* is similar to *Coraline* in the way that the doppelganger appears in the life of a lonely young girl with an absent mother and a well-meaning father who can't fill the void left by the mother. However, in *Petite Maman*, the doppelganger is not a dangerous figure, but instead one that provides friendship and comfort. In the scene in which Nelly encounters Marion, Nelly goes to play outside and is given the game of paddle ball, a solitary game, to which she comments, "A game you play alone. It's perfect", implying her desire for a playmate or friend. But, the ball detaches from the string and flies into the woods, leaving Nelly to enter the woods to find it. A long shot shows Nelly searching for her ball through the leaf-lined ground of the woods, and Nelly pauses, seeing something. An extreme long shot shows what Nelly has seen: a girl in a red sweater dragging a large branch toward a fort. As Nelly continues to watch, the girl sees Nelly from afar

and stops to wave at Nelly, asking for her help. This initial friendliness speaks to the eagerness young Marion also has for a friend and her complete comfortability with Nelly from the start. Nelly journeys down toward the girl and helps her carry her branch, and a series of shots show close-ups of Nelly analyzing Marion, as Marion is shown with her back to the camera. Marion's face has not been shown enough yet to surely determine her identical appearance to Nelly, but Nelly watches carefully, knowing the likeness this girl has to her. As she helps the young girl with the fort, Nelly asks her what her name is, as if she already knows that the girl's response will be "Marion". This coincidence, that of the ball breaking away and leading Nelly to Marion, plays into the fantasy-like quality of the film, as the doppelganger becomes a fulfillment of Nelly's innocent desire for company. This encounter shows the beauty of a child's unquestioning and innocent nature, as Nelly steps in to help Marion with the fort without any commentary on Marion's uncanny similarity to herself. It is comforting to watch Nelly meet her doppelganger and gain true companionship, as Nelly benefits as much from encountering her doppelganger as young Marion does. This mutually beneficial relationship changes the typical message associated with the doppelganger tale, as the doppelganger here is not aiming to exert power, but is similarly lonely.



By focusing on a mother-daughter relationship, this film discusses a generational connection to the theme of doppelgangers and doubles, as each person is a product of their parents and a past that they cannot control. It is through recognizing these parallels and embracing them that healing can come and relationships can be strengthened. Nelly is paralleled with her mother from the beginning of the film, as she sits in the back of the car, directly behind Marion, when they leave the nursing home. Shots from Nelly's perspective show the windshield and the landscape behind it, as well as the rearview mirror in which she can see Marion's reflection. It is through this mirror that she can watch and interact with her mother, as their initial relationship is facilitated through a fragmented reflection of Marion, indicating that Marion is closed off. As Nelly opens a snack, a close-up shows her eating. The film cuts to a close-up of Marion's profile as she drives, and Nelly's arm appears from the left of the screen reaching around to feed her mother the same snack. Her hand disappears and then reappears again, this time with a juice box, giving her mother something to drink, as if she could anticipate what Marion wanted. With this, a connection is made between mother and daughter where they understand one another and their desires as if they are mirrors of each other. Nelly's hand leaves and reenters the shot once more, as she wraps both of her arms around Marion's neck in a loving embrace. Marion smiles and leans her head into the embrace lovingly. This moment of sharing ties these two together in a way that hints at Nelly's mother being a reflection of a future self. Nelly and her mother are one and the same emotionally and physically, for it appears as if Nelly's arms in this scene are an extension of her mother's body. However, in the process of grief, Nelly's connection to her mother is distanced, as their faces do not occupy the frame together in this scene. Marion's absence is followed by Nelly's encounter with young Marion, which becomes impactful in creating a greater understanding between mother and daughter. As

Nelly spends more time with young Marion, she begins to understand and empathize with her mother, as she processes the complex emotions tied to grief. This process speaks to the mother-daughter dynamic discussed by “Adult Mother-Daughter Relationships: A Review of the Theoretical and Research Literature, which states, “From early on mothers and daughters are engaged in mutual identification and a mutual reciprocal process of high and evolving levels of responsibility for one another and empathy to one another’s feelings" (Shrier et al, 104). This early scene demonstrates the mutual identification between mother and daughter, which makes it especially impactful to Nelly when her mother leaves. Through the encounter with a doppelganger, Sciamma elaborates on the inherent connection between mother and daughter, and their feelings of responsibility for one another. In an interview with NBC News, Sciamma shares, “Nelly speculates that maybe she’s the source of her mother’s frequent sadness — as children often do” and references a discussion between the two girls in which “young Marion responds, ‘You didn’t invent my sadness’” (Patton, “Celine Sciamma’s ‘Petite Maman’”). This coincides with the dynamic discussed in “Adult Mother-Daughter Relationships”, for it demonstrates a daughter taking responsibility for her mother’s emotions and empathizing due to mutual identification, which is conveyed through the use of doubling in *Petite Maman*. Sciamma beautifully uses the theme of doubling to free the daughter from responsibility, while allowing her to be an instrument of healing for the mother.

This generational connection is strengthened throughout the film and goes beyond mother-daughter relationships, with the various parallels that are formed from the past to the present, and the related women (Nelly, her mother, and her grandmother). After they play in the woods together, Nelly frequents Marions’ home, getting to see and interact with her grandmother, who had passed away. By escaping into the past, Nelly is capable of forming a

closer and more meaningful relationship with her grandmother through their brief interactions. In one scene, a long shot shows Nelly's grandmother sitting on a couch in the center of the frame, occupied by a crossword. Nelly enters from the foreground and approaches her grandmother, asking for help tying her tie. Nelly sits on the couch next to her grandmother and the film cuts to a closer shot of them, as the grandmother fixes Nelly's tie. Once she is done with this, she returns to the crossword, Nelly scooting closer and watching. Nelly chimes in and helps with the puzzle, spotting a few words, and impressing her grandmother. After asking Nelly to pass a glass of water, the grandmother says, "Thank you, Nelly". She pauses and comments that she "hasn't said that name in ages", recalling the fact that Nelly is named after her great-grandmother, which serves as a reminder of this relative who has passed. This creates a greater bond between Nelly and her grandmother and a potential point of healing from this loss. Not only is Nelly a double of Marion, but she becomes a double of her great-grandmother, linking generations of women together. Names are a means of likeness and identity, and those we share them with, especially familially, form bonds and connections. This speaks to the power of future generations in recalling the past and helping with the healing of loss. As time repeats itself, people continue to be doubles of the past, providing comforting reminders of loved ones. Further speaking to the generational connection is the manner in which children inherit the past, and are faced with problems because of this. A significant plot point in the film is that Marion is preparing for an operation. It can be seen that Marion's mother has a physical problem that affects her ability to walk. Marion states, "If they don't do the operation, I'll have the same problem as my mom". As a double of her mother, Marion is set to inherit her mother's same physical problem without intervention. The looming operation is something that Nelly is able to provide support and comfort for Marion, giving her a friend and a means of distraction from it. Through this support,

both Marion and Nelly can provide companionship to one another and help each other become less lonely.

Identity is also navigated in *Petite Maman*, through the theme that one's identity cannot be separated from their ancestors. In a scene where Nelly and Marion lie together in bed, a close-up of the girls shows Marion's face lit by moonlight as she looks at Nelly contemplatively, who lies in the foreground. This bed has the same floral sheets as the bed Nelly slept in when adult Marion was present, connecting the spaces temporally. This scene occurs across one shot, demonstrating the way that Sciamma expertly uses simplicity to let other aspects of the film, such as dialogue, be emphasized. Concerned, Marion asks Nelly why her mother left, to which Nelly responds she doesn't know, and that she feels as if everyone has been "asking themselves questions" in this time of grief. Nelly shares with Marion, "You were young when you had me", acknowledging the fact that she knows that young Marion is her mother. Marion questions the meaning of this to which Nelly replies, "I don't know. It's what you say. So I'm listening". This shares the way that children absorb the dialogue and emotions around them, even if they are difficult to understand. Marion asks Nelly, "Did I want you?", to which Nelly replies, "Yes". Marion then shares, "I'm not surprised. I'm thinking about you already". Here, Marion reaches out and tenderly touches Nelly's face, in a maternal gesture. Again, young Marion's identity is formed by the fact that she is fated to become Nelly's mother, something that she feels fondly about even from a young age. Because of this, the sadness of the loss of her mother or any unfulfilled dream can become healed by the promise of this beautiful relationship with her daughter. Ultimately, Nelly is drawn to Marion because she represents a version of her mother that is different from the one she knows in real life. It is through this alternate representation of her mother that Nelly is able to gain a greater understanding of her mother in the present day.

This doppelganger allows Nelly to explore her identity and confront the loss and grief that she is experiencing in a way that is both imaginative and therapeutic. The doppelganger serves as a mirror image of the protagonist, highlighting the way that our childhood experiences and memories shape the people we become. Sciamma explores identity through casting in this film as well, by choosing two identical twins to play the roles of Nelly and Marion. Speaking to Entertainment Weekly Sciamma shared a question she held that influenced her casting, stating, "If I met my mother as a kid, would she feel like my sister? That's why I picked sisters" (Coggan, "How *Petite Maman* Director"). This is interesting to consider when looking upon twin studies and research, and the way in which it influences identity and experience in the world. In "Transformation: from Twin to Individual", Jeanne Magagna describes her experience treating an identical twin, Hanna, in an inpatient program. She expresses that Hanna's being a twin was of great consideration when it came to treating Hanna, for she describes how "Twinning research suggests that the most important relationship for almost all twins is that between the twin and her co-twin where support and reciprocity are foremost" (Magagna 59). With this being the primary relationship in Hanna's life, her twin was a significant influence on her identity and perspective, and "Hanna felt that only her twin understood her and only she understood her twin" (60). This demonstrates how twinning results in a deepened connection and understanding between the individuals, forming a unique relationship of mutual compassion and dependence. By casting identical twins and establishing a type of twin relationship on screen, Sciamma taps into this special connection, demonstrating that it is possible to occur between mother and daughter, connecting this relationship to a form of twinning or doubling. This brings about the potential for a strong shared identity between mother and daughter, between past and present, and demonstrates how one's identity cannot exist independently or without influence.

Petite Maman demonstrates the way that childhood experiences are influential in the understanding of the world and one's position in it. After meeting her mother at the same age, Nelly gains companionship and connects with her mother, allowing her to navigate the challenges of her present and understand the past that she is a product of. The doppelganger serves as a device that allows Sciamma to explore themes of grief, memory, and intergenerational connection. By creating young Marion, a character who is both a representation of the mother's past and a link to the protagonist's present, Sciamma challenges the viewer to a different perspective on how our identities are shaped and the power of ancestral influence. The doppelganger in *Petite Maman* symbolizes the connection between mother and daughter, past and present, life and death, and changes the traditional associations with the doppelganger narrative to show the challenging but beautiful nature of living life as a double.

Conclusion:

Through its ability to present an alternate world before a viewer's eyes, cinema serves as an ideal medium through which to communicate the idea of doubling. The medium itself allows the opportunity for the audience to consider their own identity in relation to others through the mirror that film holds up. With film being a mechanism for doubling, it has allowed for the doppelganger tradition to continue, as the same themes of identity analysis are performed within these narratives. These narratives continue to be influenced by the conventions of the genre, such as the exploration of one's psychology, the concept of the uncanny, uncertainty and confusion, the exploration of identity, and dark themes and imagery. Looking upon the use of doubling and doppelgangers within art, literature, and cinema, a common theme can be seen that the doppelganger or double serves as a narrative device that is essential to the plot as well as to the journey of the protagonist, prompting individual change. The doppelganger or double is used to

gain a greater understanding of the protagonist, such as their fears, ambitions, desires, etc. Without this mirroring figure, the same depth or complexity of the protagonist cannot be achieved. These stories are relatable to an audience for they mirror our own experiences in the world, our innermost emotions, and the precariousness of identity. Digging deeper into this topic, I chose to investigate how the doppelganger device functions in three female-centered films, *Black Swan*, *Coraline*, and *Petite Maman*. I chose these films for both the wide breadth they provide in terms of content and tone, but also for their interesting commonalities. Despite their differences, all three films use the double or doppelganger to investigate challenging emotions, the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters, and the difficulty in understanding personal identity through the interfering influence of doppelgangers or doubles.

Black Swan is the film that adheres most to the conventions of the doppelganger genre, arguably due to its being influenced by Dostoevsky's *The Double*, as it follows many of the themes laid out within the novella. *Black Swan* comments upon identity through the introduction of a double into Nina's world, highlighting her feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, and hinting at a split in Nina. As in *The Double* and many other doppelganger tales, the arrival of the double is a destabilizing trigger that leads the protagonist down a path of self-destruction and madness through their attempt to eradicate the doppelganger and protect their inadequacies from being seen. This film also follows the confusion and disorientation that the doppelganger genre is known for, utilizing dark imagery and themes that lead the audience to question the reality of what they are seeing. However, *Black Swan* interestingly plays with the narrative device of doubling by having Nina doubled by several surrounding female characters, further muddling her understanding of identity as she is bombarded with influences. One of these influences is her mother, Erica, who not only provides a reflection of Nina but works to preserve Nina's innocent

image by treating her like a child. A battle begins as Nina tries to reject the image that her mother has placed upon her, leading to greater destruction. Ultimately, *Black Swan* conveys the issue of identity and security in one's identity as it communicates the complex emotions surrounding Nina's desire for perfection and the resulting self-destruction.

Henry Selick's *Coraline*, like *Black Swan*, contains a dark tone and imagery as a disturbing doppelganger world is explored. Being a children's movie though, much of the confusion and lack of closure of *Black Swan* is replaced by resolution, for in the end, the villain is conquered and order is restored to Coraline's world. Selick uses the idea of a villainous mother and a threatening doubling world to comment on the dangerous nature of desire, which is prompted by Coraline's unhappiness and her wish for a more ideal existence. This film instructs that wishing for more jeopardizes what one has, for it is not until Coraline faces losing everything that she becomes grateful. It is through the encounter with and battle against the doppelganger world, and most notably, the evil Other Mother, that Coraline learns the danger of her desire and the superficiality of the perfect image that had been presented to her. Like *Black Swan*, the mother-daughter relationship in this film is dysfunctional and destructive, as the Other Mother manipulates Coraline to trap her within the doubling world, similar to Erica's desire to entrap Nina in a childlike state. The Other Mother is born out of Coraline's desire for a more affectionate and loving mother, but their relationship proves transactional; the wicked motherly figure has much to gain from Coraline's devotion. In the end, Coraline is capable of triumphing over the Other Mother with the help of ghosts from the past, and she learns that she is loved, despite having an imperfect family and her mother not adhering to conventional demonstrations of maternal love.

Differing the greatest from the tradition of the doppelganger genre and the other two films is *Petite Maman*. With this film, Sciamma challenges the viewer to change associations they have with the uncanny experience of encountering a double, turning it into a moving experience of healing and understanding. The film explores the complicated emotions of grief being experienced by eight-year-old Nelly as she gains understanding and empathy for her mother's own experience with grief. The film uses the doppelganger to form a stronger connection between mother and daughter, with Nelly's double being a child version of her mother. Being able to relate to her child doppelganger, Nelly learns more about her mother, as they become companions and a form of comfort to each other. The generational aspect of doubling is explored, as grandmothers, mothers, and daughters all become connected in this film. The mother-daughter relationship explored is one of strong mutual identification, which prompts growth in maturity and empathy. However, similar to *Black Swan* and following the doppelganger generic traditions, *Petite Maman* utilizes the ambiguity of the fantastic tale. The appearance of the doppelganger and the time-traveling nature of the plot remain unexplained, creating a fairy-tale or fable-like quality to the film. With this, the explanation of the phenomenon becomes unimportant, focusing the attention on the effect that the encounter has on the characters. The use of doubling in *Petite Maman* demonstrates how mothers and daughters are inevitably linked to one another, and enables Sciamma to convey a child's growing understanding of loss.

Despite their differences, all three films stand on the shoulders of the doppelganger tradition, being inspired by the generic conventions and the genre's literary associations. Each film implements elements as well as explores new interpretations of the conventions in order to convey a compelling narrative that centers on a female's experience in the world. *Black Swan*,

Coraline, and *Petite Maman* all play with the theme of the doppelganger and doubling to comment upon the nature of female identity, psychology, and the unique relationship between mothers and daughters. The double or doppelganger becomes a point of comparison for the protagonists within the films and serves to uproot the lives they have been accustomed to, causing them to question everything. It serves as an ideal method of deepening a character and enabling the audience to understand them at a more complex level. In the end, the use of the double or doppelganger in these films encourages the audience to reflect on their own identity, relationships, and complicated experiences in the world.

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