Mirrors and Doubling: Paired Women, Queer Rivals, and the Female Gaze

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In Céline Sciamma’s 2019 film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, one character, Marianne, is an artist, commissioned to paint a portrait of another woman. “I would hate to be in your place,” Marianne tells Héloïse, her subject. “We’re in the same place,” Héloïse replies. “Exactly the same place … Look. If you look at me, who do I look at?”

This project echoes Héloïse’s question, examining the trope of mirrored or doubled women across various genres as an avenue to explore the formation of queer desire and the female gaze. It is composed of two distinct sections which are themselves queer doubles of each other: a critical paper in multiple chapters which define and articulate the trope of the female double, and a novella which explores and employs similar thematics of queerness, mirroring, and violence. Just as mirrored women are both reflected and distinct figures, so, too, are both sections of this thesis, which are mutually constitutive and yet deliberately separate bodies of work.

In all of this work, I ask what constitutes a queer female gaze and explore the complicated relationship between identification, antagonism, and desire that doubling seems to produce. In Chapter 1 of my critical paper, I consider the erotic triangle and its queer possibilities as outlined by Eve Sedgwick, while critiquing Sedgwick’s male-centric analysis of rival or doubled queer figures within an erotic triangle. To do so, I use texts including Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Christabel,” and Joseph Sheridan LeFanu’s *Carmilla*. In Chapter 2, I turn towards the figure of the double itself, in particular as it is expressed through the metaphor of mirrors or mirroring. Here, I primarily examine George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and the BBC television series *Killing Eve*. My critical paper concludes with an analysis of a distinctly queer, female gaze through the lens of the 2019 film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. My novella intentionally spans the young adult and Gothic genres and follows two mirrored young women as they move through and eventually fight their way out of a time loop, a fantasy trope in which a single day keeps repeating. In it, I consider themes I also deal with in my critical work: most notably violence, haunting, desire, the female gaze, and queer futurity.