

Cultural Representations and Narratives of Identical Twins

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Introduction

This paper is part of a broader project which looks at the experiences of identical twins in Western society and the way in which they account for their identity. The project includes interviews with identical twins. I look at identical twins because among other things, the notion of twins appears to be of psychological interest to many people in Western society. Identical twins played significant role in academic debates, for example, twin studies have prompted psychologists to explain the role and the value of inherited and environmental factors on individual personality traits and behaviours. Numerous and substantial findings have been generated from identical twin studies and these have had an impact not only in the discipline of psychology but other disciplines like medicine and genetics. The study and the understanding of such traits as intelligence, aggression, alcoholism, criminality and schizophrenia have been strongly transformed by 'evidence' gathered from identical twin studies. In this paper I particularly focus on films and novels because they appear to be a rich source of twin representations in Western culture. From the interview material I have gathered in the broader project, I realised that I needed to explore and account for cultural resources that the identical twins were drawing on to make sense of their identity. This paper is meant among other things to provide a socio-cultural analysis context for those interested in doing research on twin's identity or the accounts of their lives. The aims of this paper are: To show how identical twins are

represented in western popular culture and to critically discuss the implications and significance of such representations of identical twins and of Western society at large.

The paper seeks to lay out themes that emerge from a broad range of cultural texts sampled from plays, films and novels. I draw on the account of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). I want to provide a rich thematic description of twin representations so that the reader can get a clear sense of predominant twin themes in Western popular culture.

Analysis in this paper will not go beyond what is written in the texts. It will focus on how identical twins are represented in films, plays and novels. I will then critically discuss the significance, implications and meanings of those representations of identical twins and Western society at large in the light of other studies.

Culture according to Griffin (2000, p. 17) is to be looked at, 'as traditional and communicated meanings and practices, and focuses on how these meanings and practices are lived individually, how they affect identities and subjectivities.' The paper will briefly outline the concept of representation, and some theory of visual and written fiction and cultural representation. I briefly explore both cultural and social representations because these overlap and affect each other, including through their social effects. I will then focus on the representations of identical twins in three different kinds of text (Western films, plays and novels)

before drawing conclusions about possible implications of these representations on our understanding of identical twins and within Western society. In this paper my analysis focuses on novels, plays and films, and have not included other sources that relate in particular to cultural representations of identical twins. While I acknowledge that the cultural representations to be focused on are not limited to identical twins only but can be seen in other closer siblings like brothers and sisters and what are referred to as 'hetero zygotic' twins. I find them to be more prominent, frequent when concerning identical twins. It is important to note that cultural representations are not the only factors that affect how people understand or react to identical twins but other factors count as well, for instance economic and micro-social factors among others.

The concept of 'representation'

'Representation' was defined by Ussher et al. (2000 , p. 87) as 'one of the many social processes by which specific orders are ceaselessly constructed, modified, resisted and reinstated

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they articulate and produce meanings as well as represent a world already meaningful.' Stuart Hall

(1997, p. 16) postulated that 'representation' means 'the production of the meaning of the concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events'. In this account, representation is concerned with the production of meaning through language. According to Hall, without different forms of representations it would be impossible to make meaning of the world we live in. This argument is based on the assertion that meaning depends on the systems of

ideas, concepts and pictures which are then used to stand for or represent the world. The images and concepts give us the ability to refer to things which can be inside or outside our minds.

Representation works as a system that involves organising, grouping and categorising many concepts and establishing complicated relationships between them. It is on those relationships between things in the real world, those that are real or fictional, the events, objects, people and

43

the conceptual system which serve as the mental representations that meaning depends on (Hall, 1997). These accounts of representation raise the question of the role of popular fiction.

A theory of fiction

Gottschall (2012) argues that a message sent across through a fictional is more readily received and meets less critique than a nonfiction message based on facts that is designed to persuade people. He argued that when a message comes in a non fictional vehicle loaded with facts, people read as if with their intellectual shields up. Yet if the message comes in the form of fiction people get so absolved into the story and drop their guard thereby allowing themselves to be emotionally moved unconsciously influenced. Hall (1997, p. 340) asserted that the word 'fiction' carries the notion of separation from real life and that may lead to 'dismissal of fiction as harmless entertainment or worse, time wasting money-spinners driven by profit driven entertainment industry.' He argued that there is a circulation between what we read in novels, watch in films and public discourse.

Furthermore, Hall pointed out that there are different genres for written and visual fiction which drive and emphasise particular representations from different angles and these include among others, comedies, horror, documentaries, soap operas, romance, thrillers and sitcoms. Various genres used in films and novels to represent twins paint and emphasize a particular picture about them. This point is important to this study because it makes it possible to analyze cultural representations of identical twins from the perspective of various genres. The different genres employed in written and visual fiction are of great significance to this study because the society and the twins draw from their portrayal to a certain degree and form their understanding of identical twins on such basis. Discourses that circulate in the society about identical twins are likely to impact on how identical twins perform their identities since identity is affected by culture

and some of the discourses take their origin from visual and written fiction.

According to Rushdie (1992) films and novels have been widely used across different cultures as vehicles to discuss perceptions of the world. Fleishman (1992) made the point that fictional events we may read about or watch in films take their meaning not in a vacuum but from real communities and are also constructions through use of language and visual symbols under the influence of specific cultural histories and present. For instance, fictional characters in films and literature are sometimes drawn in relation to history, cultures and real people alive or

dead so they may relate to actual experiences (Chatman, 1990).

Lothe (2000) noted that different story types derive from different cultures and these take different forms within each cultural frame work ranging from myth to songs. Chatman (1990) remarked that films and novels often make comments on real life issues. Furthermore, according to Lothe (2000), in fiction, be it in film form or in written literature, we see a reflection of what people have experienced, how people have been formed by those experiences and what has happened in the past. Lothe (2000, p. 8) further noted that 'The relationship between narrative prose literature and narrative film thus confirms the point that those narratives which are part of the world around us assume different forms and are expressed in many ways.'

It is crucial to note that identical twins are used in books and films as metaphors for any number of different views which novel writers and film actors want to put across and at times these are not really about the experiences of identical twins but mere representations of what film

and novel writers think about identical twins. Hall (1997, p. 83) argued that a documentary film 'is mediated through the perspective of the person making it' for instance the person's own culture may be a mediating factor. The representations I will focus on are portrayals of identical

44

twins in films and literature because they may relate to a certain degree with actual experiences of identical twins.

Cultural and social representations

Research indicates that social representations connect an individual with their society and people make use of them to understand common sense aspects of everyday life (Moscovici 2001).

They serve the purpose of facilitating and making easy the interaction between members of the society by giving meaning and sense to their world. These social representations have been defined as 'a set of concepts, statements and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter- individual communications. They are the equivalent in our society to myth and beliefs systems in traditional societies: they might even be said to be contemporary version of common sense' (Moscovici, 2001, p. 18). Discourse is said to be the backbone of social representations and

there is a circulation between what we read in novels, watch in films and public discourse (Potter and Billig, 1992). It is further asserted that the process of relating narratives allows room for social representations to be changed or created as well as repeated. What is or can be told in a narrative is influenced by the setting from which it is told but both the setting and the story are not independent of the wider social representation. Furthermore it is assumed that people will always check their position in the boundaries of their cultural frame to make sure that whatever they tell in their narratives conforms to it (Murray, 2002). These have a tendency to be socially dynamic because they are created and recreated over and over again as social interaction continues in everyday life. I now want to turn to the representations of films in selected films and

novels.

Themes from films and novels

I examined a broad sample of films, novels and plays from the early sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century over a period of time where identical twins are used as main characters or major themes. The sample deliberately included very old plays, novels and films, of various genres as well as examples of the late twentieth century and twenty first century to show the changes that have been taking place over the years on the cultural representations of identical twins from the late sixteenth century and also to demonstrate the continuity of some very old representations as reflected in recent films and novels I will cite under this sub title. The genre of the play, films and novels considered for or used in this paper include among others thrillers, horror, comedies, crime, erotica, romance, political and mystery. The following list of novels

plays and films were accessed initially analysed and considered for use as examples of twin themes. The films I analysed were: *Sister-Sister* (Bass, 1982); *Dead Ringers* (Croneberg, 1988); *Deadly*

Sibling Rivalry (Culpepeer, 2011); *Basket Case 1* (Henelotter, 1981); *Basket Case 2* (Henelotter, 1990); *Lies of the Twins* (Hunter, 1991); *The Parent trap* (Swift, 1961) and *Twelfth night or what you will* (Branagh, 2013). The novels I analysed were: *On the Black Hill* (Chatwin, 1996); *Tweedledum and Tweedledee* (Bles, 1967); *Gemini* (Tournier, 1981); *The Solid Mandala* (White, 1966); *Jaroslav Kaczynski*

Loses His Political Compass (Puhl, 2011); *The Eighth Wonder of the World* (Christine, 1985); *The Kray Brothers*, *The Image Shattered* (Cabell, 2002) and *Facts About Twins* (Fahy, 2010). Besides the novels and films on this list, I also analysed the story of Esau and Jacob in the Bible and Shakespeare's (1602/2014) play *Twelfth night or what you will*. Shakespeare's (1602/2014) text is the oldest source in this paper after the old Testament of the Bible and I included it here for three reasons. This is firstly because William Shakespeare played an influential role in the development of Western

45

literature, and secondly I use his play as an example which expresses the common themes very clearly and emphatically as it features two sets of identical twins. Thirdly, this and other plays of William Shakespeare are still played in theatres today and this makes as much a current play as an old one because of its current continuing role in western culture.

From the above sample I chose specific films, novels and one play to use as examples of twin themes. The selection was made based on the prominence and clarity within the examples of

twin themes seen generally across the sample. I specifically focused on themes in films, novels and plays because I wanted to analyse something where the narrative qualities are visual and clearer. The other reason why I choose films, plays and novels is that, unlike television programmes and still images which probably are not as rich and extensive in cultural currency, they are culturally long lived. Looking through the novels, films and the play cited above I noticed that the following themes feature prominently in western culture through novels, plays and films: Identity confusion; failure to separate; jealousy and possessiveness; intimacy and sameness; and rivalry as well as complementary halves. In this study I am not claiming to carry out a systematic analysis of films and novels. Instead I seek to show how identical twins are represented in the Western culture. My analysis of these fictional representations will also, alongside work on social representations, adopt ideas from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) on 'thematic analyses'. The films and novels are important because popular culture may potentially validate or invalidate particular representations about identical twins. The validated and invalidated representations may have different effects on identical twins as some may draw from identical films and novels to understand themselves. Besides, the way identical twins are represented through films and novels appears to ignore some of their experiences and this will be

also seen in some of the films and novels I cite. Bordwell and Thompson (1997) argued that novels and films carry a valuable narrative dimension because they feature the most important elements of a narrative: time, space, plot, cause and effect. I will now focus on the themes.

Identity confusion

A tendency to impose certain values, identities and a misrepresentation of identical twins through films and novels can be clearly demonstrated in the theme of 'identity confusion'. Films and novels that construct and reflect the theme appear to promote the traditional stereo types which assume that if people are identical twins they should have similar rhyming names and should also be similar in their personalities. This representation appears to undermine the individual differences which identical twins are entitled to like any other person. In the play *Twelfth Night, or what you will* (Shakespeare, 1602/2014) for example both sets of identical twins are

given same first names and this not only ties their identity together but it effectively imposes identity confusion and a sense of oneness. Their individuality is further downplayed by a deliberate avoidance of using their second names.

In the play two sets of identical twins of exactly the same age are featured. Two women give birth in the same hotel at the same night and both give birth to male identical twins. The mother of one set being very poor sells her twins to the other woman who is rich and married to a business man so they can be servants to her twins. All sets were depicted in the play as identical not only in physical features but in personalities. Each set shares a similar first name. The names of the twin siblings by a rich woman were Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse. The set bought from a poor woman to be servants to Antipholus twins was called Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse. The second names were not used by the twins in their childhood years to deliberately allow room for confusion (Branagh, 2013)

46

In the film *Lies of the Twins* (Hunter, 1991) there is break way from the cultural stereo type of assumed personality similarities to some extent which is reflected in the play '*Twelfth Night or what you will*' by Shakespeare (1602/2014). Identity confusion is indirectly implied in the film *Lies of the Twins*. However we see elements of that identity confusion being deliberately imposed and

promoted again through the similar rhyming names, James and Jonathan. The physical similarity of identical twins is represented and pathologised by depicting it as a tool employed by twins for philandering and other immoral habits. Male identical twins are represented as people who would

take advantage of their looks to manipulate woman and enjoy it without any feeling of remorse. The film also indirectly portrays identical twins as people who have some telepathic tendencies; though studies that explored twin telepathy for example Lykken (1982) found no evidence of twin telepathy.

This is a romantic love film featuring a set of male identical twin brothers Jonathan and James McEwen and a woman called Rachel Marks as main figures. Telling the brothers apart is next to impossible; the brothers are literally identical in their physical appearance. Jonathan is so passionate about his job. His girlfriend is hardly able to keep him off his work for a romantic time in their closet. James impersonates his brother on a number of different occasions to get his way to Rachel. He is very adventurous and experiential when it comes to love making. Rachel finds herself in dilemma of making a choice between the two boyfriends. Before coming to the decision point, Rachel meets a lady by the name Sandra Shearer who shares her experience with the McEwen brothers. It happens that ten years ago Sandra found herself in a similar situation. She had dated Jonathan but was later seduced and lured away by James. As a solution to her dilemma, Rachel packs her bags and gets ready to leave town. On her way she passes by James' office at his work place. To her utter surprise she meets both James and Jonathan in the same office. All the three who make up the love triangle are gathered together. Both twin brothers say and maintain that, 'I am Jonathan'. Without verbally communicating about it both twin brothers expect Rachel to point out the actual Jonathan. Rachel stands there totally confused running her eyes from one twin to the other but she simply cannot tell them apart. The twin brothers appear to lose patience and their tempers are rising. They violently push Rachel into a corner and start wrestling with each other. Rachel stands over like a price to be collected by the winner between the brothers. One of the twins, James dies in the fight. Rachel finally comes to a decision that the twin brothers are both incapable of loving any other person except themselves. She bids a farewell to a friend, Elle and leaves for Europe where she hopes to find a job and earn a lot of money (Hunter, 1991).

In the play, *The Twelfth Night or what you will* and the novel *Lies of the twins* the individual identity of identical twins is ignored, dual identity is imposed, identity confusion is also imposed, promoted and made the focus of attention. Identical twins and members of the society drawing

from the above play and film may struggle to appreciate the uniqueness and individuality of identical twins because the representation of identical twins in the sources cited undermines individual identity and uniqueness.

Failure to separate

There is a general issue about representations, attachment and separation between siblings that is intensified when the representations are about twins, reading the story of *Papin sisters* from Reader's (2001) version one can tell that this kind of very close relationship where siblings are so close and bonded such that they can hardly stay apart from each other is not exclusively for identical twins as most films and novels would make it appear to be. The French

47

sisters Christine and Léa popularly known as the *Papin sisters* were not twins but their relationship and way of operating reflected a lot of things that are seen across the novel and the film I cite under this theme and others but it appears western film makers and novel writers turn a blind eye

on those aspects of relationship when they are not in identical twins. To mention just a few here, they both worked as maids in various Le Mans homes, they preferred to and always worked together wherever they could, both were extremely reserved, laid back, quiet and retiring young women, who kept themselves to themselves and seemed to be interested in no one else but each other. When they were put in separate prison cells after killing their employers' wife, Christine could not cope with the separation from her sister; she had acute longing for her which caused her extreme distress. Above all, the testimony given during their trial showed that, one of them, Christine was very dominant in that relationship (Reader, 2001)

In the novel *The Solid Mandala* (White, 1966) identical twins are presented as people who 'breathed the same air' an assumption which further undermines and demeans the individual uniqueness of identical twins while imposing and promoting strong sense of sameness and similarity about identical. They are further portrayed and put on the spot as people who are dissatisfied about their lives because of having an identical twin sibling, a representation which appears to single out and pathologise identical twins when there are many other people out there who are more dissatisfied about different aspects of their lives, e.g body weight. They are further presented as people who can be hardly happy in life because they have to work hard most of their

adult life to appear different from their twin sibling. Such a portrayal appears to suggest that there

is something wrong about similarities between identical twin siblings.

Now when we turn to fictional representations in the writer of the novel *The Solid Mandala* (White, 1966) presents identical twins as two people who are 'stuck together for life against their will'. The twin brothers Waldo and Arthur Brown are presented living together and sharing a bed until they reach an advanced age of seventy. The author described their relationship

as one that was so close to an extent that they 'breathed the same air' (White, 1966). The twins live in a street called nowhere and their lives seem to take after the name of the street and go nowhere but circulate within the confines of closed world of twin ship. The twins are always together and walk hand in hand like newlyweds would do and have done so from a tender age up to the old age. Arthur is presented as unwise and subordinate servant of his twin brother Waldo. Arthur is tender, loving and to him the most important thing is maintenance of twin ship. He values and does all he can to ensure and preserve 'oneness and wholeness' with Waldo his co twin. He wanted them as 'one' to relate with others 'outside' (White, 1966).

Dead Ringers (Cronenberg, 1988) is a film where identical twins were used as a metaphor for dependency and vulnerability among other things. They are depicted as people who function fully and competently when they function as a pair not individuals. That appears to cultivate a culture about identical twins that says an identical twin is not a complete human being when he

or she is alone, he or she needs someone around them to make them a 'fully functioning whole'. In this film we again see the promotion of telepathic superstition, when characters used for identical twins claim that whatever goes into ones' body goes to the other also. This kind of representation fills popular culture with myth and strange beliefs about identical twins resulting distorted perception of identical twins by other people. Another metaphor that identical twins are

used for in this film is that of uniformity, for example, both identical twins change names and both feminise their names. In that, individual uniqueness of identical twins is further demeaned while similarity is promoted. Above all, being an identical twin in this film and the novel cited above is portrayed as confinement that those who are born into it face a life time struggle fighting for an escape route.

The film features a set of identical twins, Eliot and Beverly Mantle who as young boys shared a common keen interest in medical science. Their personalities are however remarkably

48

different. A set of twins is born strangely connected to each other. Beverly claims to lack an independent nervous system but one that functions hand in hand with that of his twin sibling. They both further claim that whatever finds access into the other twins' blood stream also finds its way into the other twin's blood stream as well. The twin brothers prefer to have their names feminised into Bev and Ely. Elliot is reserved but Beverly is outgoing and mixes well with people in social contexts and likes women. The reserved twin falls in love with one of their clients but fails to make advances to the woman because of his reserved and laid back nature. The extrovert brother approaches the woman in the guise of his brother to propose love to the woman on his behalf. In the course of the whole film the twin brother's step into each other's shoes covering up each other's backs (Cronenberg, 1988).

The film and novel I cite here brings me to the conclusion that identical twins are seen or are made to appear in contemporary popular culture like people who are born trapped by their twin ship and they spend most of their adult life trying to break away from the trap. That representation appears pathological because it seems to be suggesting that something is wrong with being an identical twin. Again, I notice that identical twins are represented as incomplete and

incompetent individuals who dependent on their identical sibling for competency and wholeness. These kinds of representation might potentially promote a negative view of identical twins in the society. People drawing their understanding of identical twins from such representations might view identical twins as 'parasitic' individuals who lack competency function without assistance.

In addition to that, identical twins drawing from such representations may have their confidence and

self esteem negatively affected.

Jealousy and possessiveness

In the film *Basket Case 1* (Henenlotter, 1981) one twin sibling is presented as having some strange and unnatural powers. That on its own presents identical twins as 'different from everyone else'; it potentially spreads and promotes particular kinds of representations and stigmas

around identical twins. Above all, in this film identical twins are represented as people who are unable to live independent of each other because they are so jealous and possessive of each other.

The possessiveness and jealous in the film paints about identical twins a picture which appears to exaggerate the way things can be between identical twin siblings.

The film features a set of twin brothers born joined together. One is called Duane and

the other is called Belial Bradley. Belial is also deformed so badly such that his looks are scary and

monstrous. After the separation Belial is expected to die but he amazingly survives. He becomes a parasitic twin dependent on his brother who carries him around in a basket case. Later in the film Duane suddenly finds in himself a strong desire to separate from his twin brother and escape

from the twin closet. For the first time he gets into a relationship with a woman. She is called Sharon. When Belial finds out about Sharon, he uses his seemingly super human powers to kill Sharon so he and his brother can be together (Henenlotter, 1981).

The novel entitled *Gemini* (Tournier, 1981) begins with a representation of joint identity.

It goes on to assert that identical twins live in a world of their own and are very close friends that 'reject othernesses'. Like in the film Basket case¹ cited above, in this novel identical twins are presented as people who are struggling to break away from the trap they were born into. Jealousy and possessiveness are brought in as a tool that stops that from happening. The identical twins who are the main figures in the novel, Jean and Paul are so much identical to an extent that they are both referred collectively as 'Jean -Paul' as if they are a single indivisible unit. Jean views the sperm cell from which they both came from as a 'prison cell'. Tourane (1981) portrays the cell in

49

question as one that makes and keeps the twins Jean-Paul more similar than different. It is the one that causes such unity between the two 'likes' and keep them from 'otherness'. The relationship of Jean-Paul twins is described by the author as a closed circle, fragile, not flexible, self-sufficient and creating for the twins a little island of their own. Jean-Paul twins are able to effectively communicate with each other in a silent language. Jean, One twin brother longs desperately for experiencing life outside 'the isolated Island of their birth', twin ship. In an effort to achieve this he leaves his twin brother and travels extensively with no particular destination in mind. In the words of Tournier (1981, p. 196) Jean was in search of 'otherness and solitude.'

Jean

put a lot of effort while away from his brother to maximise their differences by each new experience he had. Back home Paul makes it his task to make sure he gets the cell restored with him and his brother inside, he follows after him (Tournier, 1981).

Looking at the way identical twins are represented in the film and novel cited above, the implication is that potential romantic spouses might have reservations in getting into serious committed relationships with identical twins fearing problems from the other twin who might not be ready or unable to let go of his or her sibling.

Intimacy and sameness

While representations of special bond and similarity in identical twins can serve as a platform where problems of individual identity and constant comparison can emanate and create many other problems, it should be appreciated that everyone needs to be around people who understand them better and for identical twins probably it is their twin sibling because they share a joint common history. Such representations do not only remind identical twins about what they have in each other but they also promote, support and in a way encourage them in the way of life they were born and grew up in.

The novel *Tweedledum and Tweedledee* (Bles, 1967) presents the relationship of the identical twin siblings as closer than that of a married couple. The novel portrays the life style of the twin brothers as ignoring the 'outside world' because they live in their own world. Probably it is such exaggerated representations of identical twins' closeness and intimacy which cause some people to be mythical, superstitious or telepathic in their thinking about identical twins. The author of the novel presents the twin siblings as born three minutes apart, died two minutes apart, both died of heart attack having lived together the rest of their lives. That representation of identical twins appears to paint a picture that everything about identical twins is identical and whatever happens to one happens to the other also (Bles ,1967)

In the novel John and William Bloomfield are identical twin brothers, '*Tweedledum and Tweedledee*' (Bles, 1967). The twins live together all their lives, they are born three minutes apart from each other and both died of heart attacks two minutes apart. The twins are said to be living in a world of their own, fully self-sufficient as a pair, unmindful and impervious to everyone else. The relationship of the Bloomfield's brothers was described as one closer than that of married a married couple. They do not need in their lives any close friends. Their life style ignores the outside world and no one is given a chance to come into their inner circle. James and William are the only children their parents have. Though it is not proven the brothers are believed to be having an incest homosexual relationship between them. The suspicions rise from among other things, their life style which closely identify with what the author calls gay stereo types. The twins die aged 61, it is difficult to tell them apart and the confusion is worsened by the fact that they keep their documents together in one pocket of one leather bag (Bles, 1967)

50

There is a possibility that people who may use the novel cited for this theme as a reference frame of understanding identical twins may shun them having the impression that they are not sociable because they have no need of forming friendships with anybody else except their twin sibling. Identical twins may find themselves isolated as a result.

Sibling Rivalry

It is important to note that non twin siblings may compete for among other things, praise from parents, and some other things like affection and attention and that may have the effect of rivalry being generated and operating among siblings, this shows that rivalry problems are not exclusively isolated to twin relationships only although western fiction appears to emphasise it mostly on twins.

The identical twin sisters featuring in *Sibling rivalry* (Culpepeer, 2011), Jana and Callie, are bitter and fierce rivals of each other. The fierce rivalry starts from their childhood life. It stays with them and continues to grow until they are mature young woman. They compete with one another and each is trying to prove he or she is the best. In the course foul play is adopted against

each other and this brings bad blood between the identical twin sisters. It happens one day in the middle of the journey from a family meeting that the girls find themselves in a hot argument.

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argument developed into a strong war of words to an extent that the driver loses control of the car and it veers off the road causing a serious accident. One twin's sibling, Jana is badly hurt and immobilized in the accident. Her rivalry twin sister takes advantage of her state; instead of helping she suffocates her in an attempt to kill and eliminate her and pretend that she died in an accident. After that Callie assumes two identities and roles, that of hers and that of her sister to keep everyone in the dark about her twin sister. No one is noticing or suspicious about anything for a while (Culpepeer, 2011).

This way of representing identical twins can potentially generate and promote an unhealthy competition in identical twins. Some may possibly be encouraged or influenced to prove a point to their sibling. Other than that, the representation may give the society an impression that identical twins can take advantage of their physical similarity to commit serious crimes and get away with it. That impression will cause identical twins to get a negative reaction from the society and be treated with suspicion.

Complementary halves

The film *Sister, Sister* (Bass, 1982) portrays two identical teen age girls taking advantage of their similar physical looks to deceive and achieve goals. This representation can be seen as painting a pathological picture about identical twins and may potentially build mistrust and suspicion around them from members of the society who are non twins. *Sister-Sister* (Bass, 1982) features two identical twin sisters who live their lives as complementary halves. They discover that where one has a weakness the other one has strength. They maximise that advantage by

working together as complementary partners to achieve their goals and to overcome their limitations. At school they both have subjects where they are very good and some where they are not doing well. Luckily for them, they realise that with all subjects where one is not good the other is exceptionally good. Taking advantage of their identical looks, they write exams for each other so both can pass all subjects. One specialises in exams where she is good and writes both

51

hers and the ones for her sister. The other one does the same. Throughout the film the twin sisters work together as a team and they achieve a lot by doing so (Bass, 1982).

Members of the society who may watch and draw their understanding of identical twins from the above film are likely among other things to view identical twins as parasitic individuals who can hardly survive or cope with life challenges on their own as individuals. Other than that, it is possible that employers influenced by this kind of representation might question the authenticity of any qualifications that identical twins may produce when applying for jobs potentially leading to reluctance in hiring them. Above all, identical twins may be influenced and encouraged to some extent to see themselves as incomplete and incompetent without the help and support of their twin sibling.

Conclusion

This paper presented an analysis of cultural representations on a selection of texts (films, novels and plays). It should be noted that these texts spread over from the early sixteenth to the twenty-first century. They range from the time of William Shakespeare to modern day films and novels. I did not have space in this brief paper to look at the changes of the representations over a long time. Another paper might specifically look at the changes of cultural representations of twins across centuries and the specific ways in which twins are looked at in different genres of films, plays and novels. I would expect these fictional representations to be different in documentaries where identical twins actually produce text by speaking for themselves. It could have been also possible to do an analysis on the different ways in which male and female identical

twins are represented but that is not the focus of this paper. Unlike empirical psychological research, this paper did not seek to discover 'facts' about or how twins are but looked at the cultural representations of twins only. These are representations of the Western culture. I expect them to be different to non-Western cultures where oral tradition is used and films and novels are less important. I could have ordered these different fictional representations chronologically but I wanted to show how these different themes run across different texts.

From my interviews with twins, I also know that there are other forms of cultural knowledge which twins draw from which come from psychology which is why in the broader project I include the history of psychological research on identical twins. I have not included that here because of space and have only focused on cultural representations. For future research it would be interesting to also look at the way in which psychological ideas are part of these cultural

representations and how older texts like Shakespeare feed into psychological research.

Above all, other than showing that particular themes are being constantly found in different media at different times this paper has provided a socio-cultural analysis context for those interested in doing research on twin's identity or the accounts of their lives.

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52

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