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Doubling and Multiplying the Self/Story in Catherynne M. Valente's *The Ice Puzzle: Readers, Writers, and the Best of All Girls*

Veronica Schanoes
CUNY Queens College

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Doubling and Multiplying the Self/Story in Catherynne M. Valente's The Ice Puzzle

Readers, Writers, and the Best of All Girls

After I presented a paper at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts some years ago, I was asked the following question: Is there a difference between the doubled self and the multiplied self? I was giving a paper on the doubled and multiplied self in two unusual fairy-tale revisions, Kelly Link's "The Girl Detective" and Catherynne M. Valente's *The Ice Puzzle*. Link's short story is a reworking of, among other narratives, "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," a fairy tale about twelve princesses who, despite being locked in their bedroom by their father every night, manage to dance their shoes to pieces. Valente's online novel¹ is a reworking of, among other narratives, Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen," a fairy tale uncharacteristic for Andersen in that its protagonist, Gerda, is not tortured terribly, despite being a little girl. Gerda sets out on a quest to rescue her best friend, Kay, from the clutches of the evil Snow Queen, who holds him hostage as he tries to complete a puzzle made of ice; doing so would win him his freedom and a new pair of skates.

In my answer to the question at the conference, I noted that both "The Girl Detective" and *The Ice Puzzle* celebrate the multiplicity of many of their characters, seemingly in opposition to Sigmund Freud's notion of the doppelgänger as essentially uncanny and threatening, and I posited that this difference is in some way gendered, as well as genred—that in feminist fantastic discourse the double was a figure to be welcomed and admired rather than feared and/or destroyed (destroying oneself in the process, of course). After moderating the panel, Cristina Bacchilega asked the question that generated this expansion: Is the multiplied self different from the doubled self? Of course,

as Bacchilega must have known, the answer is yes. There is a significant difference between the representations of the doubled self and the multiplied self in these radically experimental texts.

This is a difference I neglected to address in my book on fairy-tale revisions, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale*. There I engaged with the phenomenon of doubling for female characters and in feminist theory regarding feminine subjectivity, particularly as it involves mothers and daughters. During a brief consideration of doubling outside that dyad, I discussed Link's "The Girl Detective" and the joy associated with the multiple possible selves of the protagonist and the twelve dancing bank robbers without realizing that they represented a significantly different dynamic from that of the simple double. I failed to realize this difference even though most of the doubles I studied represented danger and menace to their protagonists, often in the form of a competitor, whereas Link's multiple selves told quite a different story.

In Valente's startlingly beautiful online novel *The Ice Puzzle*, Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" is refracted and transmuted into a variety of settings. None of these shards recreates the original plot of the fairy tale, but each one tells a tale that, by overlaying "The Snow Queen," suggests not only kinship but also a path not taken by the various tales. The story is doubled and multiplied, often in the most elliptical, poetic ways. The novel is conceived of as a puzzle itself, and with each chapter termed a shard, the implication is that something—Andersen's original story?—has been shattered.

Consider a shattered mirror and its refractions; each shard shows its own reflection, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. However, the shards are associated with the shards that make up the Snow Queen's shattered mirror of ice, part of which is the ice puzzle that a little girl is trying to solve in one of the novel's through-lines. In each chapter or shard, certain words are surrounded by a pattern of broken glass. The reader pieces these together at the end of the book—they fall into the shape of a broken mirror—which puts the reader in the position of the child, and thus of the Snow Queen herself, because we find at the end of the novel that, when the girl successfully completes the puzzle, she becomes the new Snow Queen. Thus it is *us* who the shattered mirror is reflecting—various versions of ourselves as the selves of the Snow Queen—suggesting that we are our various cultures' tales and that, because all these shards or chapters come together to make up one novel, so too do all these tales and various selves come together to make up one identity. Valente refers to the shattered mirror as the myth-mirror; it is a mirror used to reflect the self into different shapes, and that is precisely what the novel does. It uses different myths as mirrors of one another and of one female character. If myth is a way to make meaning out of our lives,

and I believe that all narrative is, then here it becomes a way of creating ourselves as multiplied selves.

The depictions of multiplied selves in this text are quite different from the uncanny and threatening doubles described by Freud—or are they? It is true that by multiplying stories and selves in these ways, Valente bridges the gap between “I” and “not-I” and that such multiplication seems to be endorsed by the novel. But what of Bacchilega’s query? What is the relationship between the doubled self and the multiple self?

Although I begin with both Link’s and Valente’s pieces, I focus mainly on *The Ice Puzzle*, because it so clearly provides different valences to the doubled self and the multiplied self. Valente shatters Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of “The Snow Queen” into twenty-five chapters or shards. Every other shard recounts a tale about the figure we know as the Snow Queen from a variety of cultures, ranging from a tale of the Japanese Yuki-Onna, to the Greek Demeter and Persephone, to *The Nutcracker’s* Sugar Plum Fairy, to Queen Frostine in contemporary versions of the board game Candy Land. The identity of the Snow Queen, Valente implies, can only be known by understanding the stories of all her possible incarnations; the Snow Queen’s identity is inherently multiplied, doubled, and divided.

An ongoing story in the interspersed shards chronicles the efforts of a little girl, abducted by the Snow Queen and chained to a chair, trying to solve the puzzle of the shattered mirror before she freezes to death. We find out that the current Snow Queen herself endured the same test, and when the girl successfully completes the puzzle, she will become a double of the Snow Queen: “Suddenly there was two of everything: two women, two gazes knotting themselves across the half-mist, and two Mirrors” (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). Ultimately, the girl takes over the Snow Queen’s role, extending her identity to yet another self, and the previous Snow Queen is restored to humanity, revealed to be Andersen’s Gerda, and she slips, unnoticed, out the door.

In Kelly Link’s “The Girl Detective” the twelve tap-dancing bank robbers, who are also figures for the twelve dancing princesses of the Grimms’ “The Worn-out Dancing Shoes,” are completely indistinguishable. They are almost always described as a collective (“They wore tiny black dominos,” “They spun,” “They were carrying purses”; Link 243), and there is even some indication that the Girl Detective might be one of them, or might be related to them, or might be another version of them, as they wear the same underpants and all have long, long legs. When the Girl Detective and the princesses end up at the same nightclub, the narrator refers to the group of women as “the girl detectives,” saying, “In the mossy glow, they all look like the girl detective. Or maybe the girl detective looks like all of them. They all look so happy” (264). This proliferation of girl detectives occurs at perhaps the most joyful, climactic moment

in the story, when the Girl Detective is reunited with her long-missing mother, and the princesses, the Girl Detective, her mother, and the waiters in a Chinese restaurant that leads to the underworld celebrate in a whirling, dizzying, extravagant dance.

Even when she is separated from the twelve tap-dancing bank robbers, the Girl Detective's identity encompasses a great many potential selves; the narrator tells us that "some people say that she is not one girl but many—that is, she's actually a secret society of Girl Scouts. Or possibly a sub-branch of the FBI" (Link 254). Even the narrator is implicated in the Girl Detective's multiplicity: "At least I don't think that I am the girl detective. If I were the girl detective," he/she writes, "I would surely know" (245). Self and other are ineluctably intertwined in this story. In one passage, titled "Why We Love the Girl Detective," the narrator speaks in the first-person plural, constructing her- or himself as a multiplicity as well (247).

But there is nowhere a closer identification or doubling than that between the Girl Detective and her missing mother, who is at least as talented at creating multiple selves as her daughter is: "Her mother is also a master of disguises. If we fail to know the girl detective when she comes to find us, how will the girl detective know her mother?" (Link 251). Such a multiplicity of possible selves undoes the possibility of "knowing," or containing either mother or daughter in a single form; and when they finally do reunite, it is impossible to distinguish them: "Someone says, 'Mom?' Someone embraces someone else. Everyone is dancing. 'Where have you been?' someone says. 'Spring cleaning,' someone says" (263). Identities remain merging, multiplied, and conjectural.

In fact, the chameleonesque nature of the Girl Detective means that she can be anybody's double. At the end of the story, the narrator tells us that

I thought I saw the girl detective in the bar in Terminal B . . . disguised as a fat old man . . . someone sat down next to her. It was a kid about twelve years old. She had red hair. She was wearing overalls. . . . I realized that [the old man] wasn't the girl detective at all. . . . It was the kid in the overalls—what a great disguise! Then the waitress came over to take their order. . . . Maybe *she* was the girl detective. (Link 265)

The girl detective's multiplied identity allows her to be anywhere, anyone, at any time, which is of course a great help in her line of work. In "The Girl Detective" multiplied selves signal happiness, celebration, and mastery.

As in "The Girl Detective," the locus of the divided self in *The Ice Puzzle* is strongly associated with mother-daughter relationships. The Snow Queen refers to the previous Snow Queen, the one who forced *her* to complete the puzzle, as her surrogate mother, and Valente describes the doubled relationship

between the Snow Queen and the Summer Queen, who tries to hold Andersen's Gerda as she seeks her companion Kay, kidnapped by an earlier Snow Queen: "And who is to say her [the Summer Queen's] daughter is not the Queen of Winter, and who is to say her daughter is not herself, turned inside out and frozen . . . glowering at the injustice of her separation, self from self" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). The two are figured as Demeter, the fertility goddess who grants humanity agriculture but also the angry mother of an abducted daughter who destroys the earth's bounty; and Persephone, the Queen of Death. (Step) mother and daughter are similarly doubled in the shard that recounts Valente's version of "Snow White," in which Snow White and her stepmother see each other only when they look into mirrors, and Snow White accompanies her rescuing prince to his castle only to find that he has a daughter from a previous marriage, a daughter with black hair, pale skin, and red lips.

Even our current Snow Queen, the one who has abducted the little girl who becomes her successor, is shattered into a multitude of selves. The giant mirror in her palace of ice, the centerpiece of the story, has been shattered into pieces, and "the glass ruptured her face, inverted it, caused schisms and rifts in her cheekbones, her eyelashes, her earlobes. She was broken like a Picasso" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). Ruptured, inverted, schismed—the many aspects and parts of the Snow Queen come together not only to make a whole but also to create a thing of beauty, a work of art.

In fact, to the Snow Queen, it is the idea of a unified self that is monstrous. When out and about, "In a great sheet of window she caught the unfamiliar image of herself, unrefracted by the snow-mirror, the myth-mirror . . . but this was not the Snow Queen, this was not her own shattered face. . . . This was a monster" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). The earliest Snow Queen, who first shattered her mirror, drew power from the multiple reflections: "How like a puzzle it was, the Mirror still whole, yet utterly destroyed. The other woman [the reflection] was cleft into dozens, a prism of schismatic snowflakes spiraling in at each other. . . . She felt herself flare" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). Whereas the singular reflection, representing the unified, homogeneous self is a horrifying monster, once the mirror is smashed, the fragmented, multiplied reflections reinvigorate the Snow Queen.

Just as "The Girl Detective" implicates its narrator in its multiplying selves, so too does *The Ice Puzzle* implicate the reader. The final chapter is an illustration of a mirror with blank spaces for words that are scattered throughout the text, recognizable by the design that surrounds them. The reader's doubling with the young girl—and therefore with the Snow Queen herself and, even further, with Valente—comes as the reader seeks out the proper words with which to compose the puzzle that ends the novel. Here the reader takes on aspects of the murderous Snow Queen and of the creating writer, suggesting

that these figures are also doubles of each other (a reading that is borne out by the fact that for several years, until recently, Valente used Yuki-Onna, a folkloric Japanese spirit, or *yokai*, a beautiful yet murderous snow maiden, and the protagonist of one of the earliest chapters of *The Ice Puzzle*, as her screen name on her blog).

It is true that Valente's novel celebrates the multiplied Snow Queen and by extension the multiplied stories that she inhabits. But it is equally true that the double, the single doppelganger, is still a threat. Consider the moment before the earliest Snow Queen shatters the mirror, a moment I conveniently elided when discussing the positive valance given to the multiplied identity in this novel. Before shattering the mirror, the Snow Queen looks into it and realizes that "it left her with an unpleasant feeling, this self watching self watching self. It was as if there was another woman, fairer and more terrible than she, and this other woman was taking the best of her little ones, leaving her with only scraps. The other woman ate all her joy. . . . It was a reflection yes, but the act of watching herself had slowly begun to leech some vital, secret fluid from her flesh" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). The double becomes a competitor, one who outdoes her—who is somehow more Snow Queen than the Snow Queen ("fairer and more terrible")—and who is slowly devouring her.² In doing so, this double, this reflection, is likened to the children whom the earliest Snow Queen stole, who, in this time before the shattered mirror, freeze to death while eagerly trying to drink the water their warm mouths melt from her icy flesh. But instead of freezing to death and adding to the Snow Queen's power, this double drains and consumes her. The solution is to shatter the mirror, leading to the powerful scene in which the Snow Queen is restored.

Before this encounter, though, we have learned that the first Snow Queen loved her reflection; indeed, like Narcissus, she would spend hours gazing at it: "She loved her reflection in the utter stillness of the blue-banked ponds, and pried the ice from its cask of earth, setting it aright against a black-barked tree. She drew up her knees before its glistening surface, and watched her pale face" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). And what initially draws her to the first child she destroys is her reflection in his eyes: "In its blue-black eyes she could she herself reflected, as in her ice-mirror, and was enchanted by the doubled image" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*). In these earlier sections, the Snow Queen is not put off or threatened by her reflection. Rather, she "loves" and is "enchanted" by it. So the question is not merely about the difference between the doubled self and the multiple self; it is also a question of what has changed—what has turned the double from a figure of narcissistic love and enchantment to a threatening competitor?

This is not a question that is illuminated by psychoanalytic theory regarding the role of the double in literature, folklore, or the psyche, because in those

accounts, the double is static; it is inherently threatening, inherently destabilizing, an irruption by definition. In "The Uncanny," Freud gives the double its own category in the list of things that are inherently uncanny and unsettling, along with objects that should be alive but aren't, objects that aren't alive but look as though they should be, and recurring events: "The double has become an object of terror, just as the gods become demons after the collapse of their cult" (Freud 143).

Otto Rank, in his landmark study of the use of the double in folklore and literature, posits that the idea of the double was initially a positive coping mechanism, a defense against the fear of mortality, an expression of the notion of a soul that it is detachable from the body and so will live on after the body's demise. As Freud puts it in his discussion of Rank's work, "Having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (142). But what Rank finds in culture after culture and text after text is a series of negative superstitions and beliefs regarding doppelgangers, shadows, and reflections. He finds no folk belief or tradition in which seeing one's double, or being separated from one's shadow or reflection, is lucky or a predictor of a long, healthy, and happy life. Rank and Freud may imagine a remote, archaic past, a prehistory in which the double is loved and enchanting, one that corresponds with the *Ice Puzzle* passages regarding the Snow Queen's initial response to her reflection, but they do not provide us with any folkloric evidence of its existence.

In "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny," Mladen Dolar posits the uncanny as the essential locus, the nerve center where all the elements of psychoanalytic theory come together: "It is the dimension where all the concepts of psychoanalysis come together, where its diverse lines of argument form a knot. The uncanny provides a clue to the basic project of psychoanalysis. . . . One could simply say that it is the pivotal point around which psychoanalytic concepts revolve" (Dolar 5). He goes on to argue that the uncanny as we know it, particularly the double, is an aspect of modernity:

There is a *specific dimension of the uncanny that emerges with modernity*. . . . In premodern societies the dimension of the uncanny was largely covered (and veiled) by the area of the sacred and untouchable. It was assigned to a religiously and socially sanctioned place in the symbolic from which the structure of power, sovereignty, and a hierarchy of values emanated. With the triumph of the Enlightenment, this privileged and excluded place (the exclusion that founded society) was no more. That is to say that the uncanny became unplaceable; it became uncanny in the strictest sense. (Dolar 7; emphasis in original)

Is this the shift that Freud and Rank imagine, the shift that Valente's novel is portraying? The shift from prehistory, during which the locus of the uncanny is enshrined as a source of power, to modernity, during which that locus is effaced, shut out, and disavowed? I suspect not. For one thing, Rank's studies find that the threat of the double long precedes modernity. It is not associated with positive values in early or premodern belief. For another, Dolar's analysis seems to me to make the mistake of assuming that the premodern is synonymous with simplicity; the uncanny "was assigned to a religiously and socially sanctioned place in the symbolic from which the structure of power, sovereignty, and a hierarchy of values emanated" (Dolar, 7). Surely no human society has ever been as lacking in complexity as that analysis would have it—the uncanny could not simply be assigned to a sanctioned place and thereby defanged. To understand that, one need only look at literary and political history to see exactly how contested power, sovereignty, and hierarchical values were during the premodern era—for example, the Wycliffite rebellion or the suspicion with which Margery Kempe was regarded by those holding religious power.

The distinction between the Snow Queen's enjoyment of her reflection and its becoming a threat does not seem to me to correspond to anything in the text that can be mapped onto the shift between premodern and modern societies. Instead, the shift that marks the Snow Queen's negative experience of her reflection is her interaction with a human child, whom she suckles as she slowly freezes it to death. This convergence suggests an engagement with maternity and femininity as the trigger for the double's metamorphosis from reassuring companion to threat. Does motherhood, even the most deadly sort, necessitate an alienation from the self so profound as to make a previously embraced aspect of the self a competitor?

In *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory*, I identify motherhood—specifically, mothering a daughter—as the central topos of doubling in feminist fairy-tale revisions and in revisions of classical myth (Valente also considers both types of tales together in *The Ice Puzzle*). This doubling often portends disaster for both mother and daughter. In Tanith Lee's *White as Snow*, Arpazia (the mother) goes mad and is executed and Coira (her daughter) narrowly escapes a similar fate; in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which I read as a revision of the Demeter-Persephone myth, Sethe is almost killed by the woman she believes is her dead daughter returned to her, and *Beloved*, the daughter, runs into the woods and literally falls to pieces; Melanie in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* understands herself to have caused her mother's death by wearing her clothing. If the alienation from self associated with mothering in Valente's text is part of these disasters, how can this breach be healed? Or are those of us who are mothers (particularly of daughters) simply

doomed? Or does the solution, the salvation, lie exactly in the embrace of the multiplied identity, as opposed to the identity simply doubled, polarized, and frozen?

Surely, if the multiplied identity and story are characteristic of anything, they are characteristic of postmodernism with its valorization of pastiche and bricolage, the kind of polyvocal celebration of “difference” that can make postmodernism so very annoying, because so abstract a concept can quickly become meaningless if not downright vacant.

Amy Mullin notes that we are often quick to equate diversity with multiplicity, as though an ideal, or even a normative community, self, or component part were homogeneous, and thus heterogeneity must be equivalent to separation: “Many theories . . . conceive of diverse selves as multiple selves, composed of relatively fixed and agent-like parts or aspects, which are sometimes described as little ‘selves’ within the self.” Mullin continues, “Parts of persons and the communities in which (it is imagined) they feel at home are seen as fixed and unchanging, without conflicts and tensions of their own” (Mullin 2). Surely, Mullin points out, all this does is reify the notion of the unified subject, by characterizing diversity within a subject as fragmenting that subject into smaller homogeneous units. She advocates an understanding of heterogeneity that allows for diversity without separation, a concept that allows for mingled differences within individuals without splitting them into homogeneous components.

And surely this is what Valente’s novel does anyway. After all, it is not merely a collection of disparate stories. Valente specifically refers to it as “a novel in pieces,” emphasizing its wholeness as much as she does its shattering. And several of these shattered tales are interwoven, because they are divided into chapters that alternate with each other and with the more contained stories in other chapters. The point of telling the story of the Snow Queen along with the stories of Persephone, Demeter, Snow White, Yuki-Onna, Queen Frostine, and Sedna is to consider how their differences inform their similarities, to mingle them together and demonstrate how they create a whole rather than preserve a bounded separation. But what has that to do with the varying valence of the Snow Queen’s unbroken reflection?

If neither psychoanalytic theory about the double nor theory concerning postmodern multiplicity holds the key to understanding the different responses to the nonunified self that Valente presents in *The Ice Puzzle*, then how are we to proceed? I suggest a return to and closer examination of the novel itself and its context in the rapidly changing world of contemporary publishing. In doing so, I find myself once again struck by the correspondence between the shattered character of the Snow Queen and the structure of the text, which I found so compelling when I wrote the conference paper that began this

project. At the time, I identified a correspondence among the reader, the captive child, and the Snow Queen. The reader literally pieces together words from the various chapters and tales of the novel to construct the message in the “mirror” at the end of the story; the captive child has as her task fitting the shards of the ice puzzle/mirror back together; and the Snow Queen, who once was that child and whom that child will become when she completes the puzzle, is closely identified with the writer. I suggest that these considerations about the relationships between reader and writer, and not psychoanalytic anxieties or postmodern concerns about identity, are at the heart of the novel’s complicated meditation on the relation between the subject, its double, and its multiples.

Returning to the textual moment when the reflection ceases to be a source of fascination and enchantment and instead becomes a competitor, a threat, and a drain involves not one character and her reflection but two characters and the reflection of one of them. When the Snow Queen is alone with her reflection, she is happy, content to sit with legs folded and contemplate herself. The significant difference is the introduction of the child, a second subject, into the scene. It is then that the reflection becomes a threat. The Snow Queen, we have seen, is identified with the story or stories and with the writer. It is the introduction of a reader that makes the difference.

The double, as Rank would be the first to point out, is both the self and the opposite of the self: “Apart from the figure of the double, which takes the form of various types, all these tales [Rank has recounted a number of literary depictions of doubles in this chapter] exhibit a series of coinciding motifs. . . . We always find a likeness which resembles the main character down to the smallest particulars. . . . Always, too, this double works at cross-purposes with its prototype . . . predominantly ending in suicide by way of the death intended for the irksome persecutor” (33). In other words, the only way the protagonist can free himself from the persecution by the double is through murder, a murder that always results in the death of the protagonist himself.³ It negates us while it duplicates us; this dynamic is often reflected in literature by having a character’s double destroy his life through irreparably ruinous behavior while simultaneously acting out the character’s own repressed desires. Indeed, the destruction can be accomplished by acting out the character’s repressed desires, demonstrating that all protagonists carry their antagonists within them. The double merely externalizes that which is already innate but hidden in the protagonist, which is, according to Freud, what makes it uncanny, because the uncanny is that which is meant to be hidden and secret but which is instead brought to light.

Similarly, the writer in isolation always carries a reader within her, and this confluence of identity is unproblematic—so long as she operates in

isolation. But the presence of another reader complicates matters, and it becomes all too easy to construct a Manichean binary between writer and reader. Certainly all writers are readers; it could not be otherwise. But the revisionist in particular is acutely aware of her role as a reader even while she writes. Angela Carter, the revisionist extraordinaire, once wrote, "Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts" (Carter, "Notes," 69). But when held in opposition to a reader, it is all too easy for the writer to be considered apart from her role as a reader. And so it is not the Snow Queen's double that is a threat that is sapping her of her strength. It is the idea that the Snow Queen can be only the Snow Queen and not the little girl, or any other incarnation, that is the threat.

Similarly, any writer ossified into a writer only and not a reader, not, in the revisionist's case, the folklore devotee—that is a threat, because a writer without source material will soon lose her power entirely. The revisionist writer needs to read, and needs to read widely, as the reader of *The Ice Puzzle* cannot help but realize. *The Ice Puzzle* encompasses Andersen's story, Yuki-Onna of Japan, Demeter, Persephone, the Nutcracker, the Norse Skadde, Snow White, Candy Land, the Inuit tale of Sedna, the Norse Hel, the Hawaiian Pele and Poliahu, and the Russian Baba Yaga. This is a novel that could only be written by a writer who is also a reader, one who reads both widely and deeply. To position the writer as separate from the reader is to destroy the writer.

Of course, although every writer is a reader, not every reader is or can be a writer. And indeed, most of the time, the children who attempt to do the Snow Queen's puzzle fail and die. Most of the various tales rewritten by Valente as versions of the Snow Queen involve death, usually the death of the unfortunate mortal who meets her but sometimes the death of the Snow Queen herself. It is, the Snow Queen tells her young captive, "only the best of girls" who can complete her puzzle, and become writers themselves. These best of all girls, the multiplied writer-readers, the writer who is also the reader, not only of one but of myriad tales, is the writer rich in power and potential. It is no wonder that after smashing the double and generating multiple versions of herself—both story and writer—that the Snow Queen "felt herself flare in her returning."

This reading, which emphasizes the overlap between writer and reader and the need for the writer to have a multitude of sources and roles to draw on, seems apt when considered in light of Valente's career. Catherynne M. Valente is a writer who has been a trailblazer in developing ways to support herself both inside and outside traditional publishing. Currently, big-press publishing is in a parlous state, and it can be quite difficult for a writer to make a living. Valente has constantly innovated ways of bringing her writing to

market that keep her in close contact with her readership and on a more equal footing with these readers than ever before.

The Ice Puzzle originally appeared as a serialized novel, a chapter at a time appearing on the Internet. Readers could follow the story as it developed by using Paypal to send a \$10 payment to Valente in exchange for a personalized password to the novel chapters. Several years later, Valente's *New York Times* best-selling novel, *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*, originally a fictional children's novel mentioned in Valente's successful adult novel *Palimpsest*, came to life as a similar venture. Already a novelist publishing with a big-name press, Valente and her partner suffered a severe financial setback in 2009. In an attempt to rescue herself and her partner from dire straits, she posted the following on her blog: "Starting Monday, I will start posting chapters of a full-length novel version of *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. I will be writing it in real time, posting every Monday. It will be free to read—but please know that the sheer calories to make my brain create it require funding, and I would very much appreciate your support. Pay whatever you like for it, whatever you think it's worth ('Circumnavigating Fairyland,' <http://yuki-onna.livejournal.com/2009/06/11/>)" (Valente, "Rules for Anchorites"). This direct outreach to her readership was a resounding success; within the first day of the project's announcement, Valente received enough money to keep her family afloat for another couple of months.

Between *The Ice Puzzle* and *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*, Valente developed the Omikujū Project, which is, in Valente's words,

an experiment in cyberfunded art. It is an old-fashioned approach to new-founded literature, the shortest path from author to reader. It is a secret and marvelous communication, a unique way for you to read stories unavailable in any other venue, in any other way. It is a network of tales, a community. It is whispering in the dark; it is a fireside confession. On the fifteenth of the month, subscribers will receive either a PDF or a mailed letter containing one short story or poem not less than two-thousand words or 150 lines, and any other literary flotsam I can find to send you. These stories are not published elsewhere without permission of the community, except in the collected anthologies, which occur every two years. The mailing is the heart of the project: printed on high quality paper, autographed, and sealed with a scarlet wax stamp, they are stunning collectible artifacts. (Valente, "Omikujū Project")

The intimacy this project elicits between reader and writer, along with a sense of shared control, is notable: *these stories are not published elsewhere without permission of the community*. Although a personal mailing to one or two hundred people is not, perhaps as intimate as a girl doing a puzzle, supervised by the puzzle's creator, it is considerably more personal than traditional publishing methods. Further, the recently collected book mentioned in Valente's description is accompanied by illustrations "created by the subscribers of the project." Art made by fans of *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* was a large part of that project's publicity push as the chapters were being posted.

As noted, *The Ice Puzzle* ends with a poem pieced together by the reader from words from the previous text surrounded by jagged lines, representing the words as shards of ice. The poem includes these lines: "You are the child / and now / you are the monster / you are the shard / and the shape / the mirror is mute glass / it shows only your face / repeated endlessly broken as a bone / this is your face / fractured by assembly / . . . / you and the mirror eat each other" (Valente, *Ice Puzzle*).

Rather than representing a truth of the psyche, the distinction between the threatening double and the empowering proliferation of multiple selves in Valente's *The Ice Puzzle* represents the specific relationships that writers such as Valente and Kelly Link, who with her husband Gavin Grant founded a successful small press, chart among their roles as readers, their roles as writers, their readers' roles as readers, and their readers' roles as creators. As these roles blur, intermingle, and interweave—at least for the best of all girls—through writers' inventive publication and survival strategies, the forms of those writers' novels and short stories must also change, and perhaps the best of us may win our freedom, the whole world, and even a new pair of skates.

Can this multiplicity rescue the doubling posited as inherent in motherhood as well? It seems that for Valente, the goal is successful motherhood, because the Snow Queen is released when the next little girl completes the puzzle. Similarly, the reunion of mother and daughter in Link's "The Girl Detective" is cause for joyous celebration, surrounded by the twelve dancing bank robbers. In the context of multiplicity, the double is no longer threatening, no longer a nemesis, but one beloved self among many.

Notes

1. After having been available online for nine years (2004–2013), Valente took down the text in anticipation of a print version, which has yet to be released.

2. This double, then, is quite true to Sigmund Freud's and Otto Rank's conception of the double, which I discuss later.
3. A contemporary example would be the movie *Black Swan*.

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