

**A STUDY OF ‘GOTHIC DOUBLING’ IN STEPHEN KING’S
*THE DARK HALF***

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Doubling illustrates deep anxieties explored in the Gothic regarding the weakening of the distinctions drawn along lines of class, gender, race and nationality, posing threats to the interests of the self. It also raises a cautionary point that a thin line separates good and evil, and while it is easy for evil to infiltrate one’s protected sanctum, it is equally easy for one to fall into the latter’s trappings. As such, everything that seems good must also be held in suspicion of harbouring a negative underside. (“Glossary...Doubling”)

‘Doubling’ favoured by Gothic writers is not a recent fabrication, hence it is an ancient motif which has been visible in literature from centuries. The notion of Double is in fact a version from the German word “Doppelganger” means ‘double goer’ which appeared from Richter’s novel *Siebenkas* in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In many myths and legends, it is possible to find the figure of the Double. Many writers used it abundantly in their works like ETA Hoffman in “Die Doppelganger” (1821), Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* (1818), Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* (1847) Edgar Allan Poe in “William Wilson” (1839), R.L Stevenson in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) etc. In most of these stories as soon as the Double is killed its counterpart dies also signifying the divided selves that are inseparable even after being opposite and contradictory.

The term ‘double’ is often used in Gothic literature. The ‘Double’ and the ‘Gothic’ commonly deals with the idea of ‘otherness.’ The Double is both identical and opposite, presenting how distinct forces can occur in one being and compelling him/her to confront her/his divided selves. In Gothic narratives, the use of ‘Doubling’ intensifies the horror by the sense of

uncanny or the 'Unheimlich' that Freud construed in his theory of the 'Uncanny' in which the features of things familiar to us becomes indistinct and are made strange. Dread is strengthened as a result of realizing a familiarity to that what was feared, the subject comprehending that the fear was inherently innate in his/her psychology. A constituent of the uncanny and the macabre is presented accordingly in Gothic narratives where the doppelgänger or the double emerges by distorting the boundaries between state of the dream and reality, madness and sanity presenting subjectivity into what we perceive the exterior world really is. Literary characters, under a doubled fellowship, can come across or mirror a contrary figure in significant actions, with the similar gesture of the two usually indicative of an implicit likeness and inescapable association between the two. 'Double' also centres the motif of mirroring and in this way forecasting one's fear, anxieties, desires on the other that becomes an unpleasant reflection of the ugly attributes that the self denies to acknowledge as it plays out an internal splitting of the self between the hidden face of immorality and the public face of high respectability.

The motif of 'Double' in Gothic Narratives is employed most of the times to deal with the internal psychological struggle of the character/ characters. The term defines a duality of the self in which a shadow or an alter-ego manifests itself to the original subject, and the subject has a concurrent consciousness of being both his present self and the external other watching himself. There is a tendency to use Double as the motif of evil in the literature usually. The Double characters inclined to be connected with malicious, evil and the demonic in this way, it grants a notion of the subject which is defective, split, threatening or spectral.

Duality inspired both terror and awe whether that duality be manifested in twin birth or in a man and his shadow, or in one's reflection in water, or in a mirror or in the creation of an artefact resembling the exterior self. ("Semiotics")

The term "doppelganger" or "double" has been continuously developing with new inspiration and research found in literature and many other fields. In the current era, treatments of the 'double' have become wide-ranging. By revealing the split- self, the fragmented world and the interrupted words, it stresses the decentering anxieties of present-day people. As Rosemary Jackson explains- "recent studies of the doppelganger in literature have acknowledged its shift in the Romantic period from a supernatural motif to an increasingly self- conscious psychological function" (qtd. in "Gothic Doppelgänger"). The Gothic Double actually is an uncanny motif embracing mostly these two distinct types.

- 1) The dark half or the split personality of the protagonist, an unconfined monster that works as a physical manifestation of a disconnected part of the self.
- 2) The identical double or alter ego of a protagonist who appears to be either a sufferer of an identity theft executed by a mirroring supernatural existence or subject to a paranoid hallucination.

'Doppelganger' or 'Double' blends the supernatural horror with a philosophical enquiry about individual identity and a psychological exploration into the concealed depths of the human psyche. The doppelgänger is undeniably a harbinger of death for its occurrence threatens to terminate the identity of its host. The haunting by 'other self' apparently confirm the presence of the supernatural, but after reading Freud, the 'double' has been understood as a figure of repression rather than a supernatural entity. Double narratives have conventionally been understood in Freudian terms as allegorizing the struggle for power between the ego and the id (or otherwise the superego). More profoundly interpretations have observed doubles as symbolizing particular repressed material.

Stephen King, the bestselling contemporary gothic writer has used the ‘double’ motif in many of his works which allows him to bring into the world the unconscious motivations. The horror of Stephen King has sprung from the traditions and conventions of Gothic Literature and he not only makes references to the traditional gothic tales but also bring in inspirations from them to supplement his work and place himself within the Gothic and Horror tradition. He always gives his readers something ungraspable rather than only describing ghosts in minute horrifying details. As the paradoxical occurrence of both good and evil in a single person remains a central issue in his works, the use of the ‘double’ becomes very useful for him to deal with such issues because the ‘double’ brings out the co-occurrence of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in which the other apparently is the unnameable and beyond description and also emphasizes something very important.

The idea of the ‘Double’ is represented skilfully in *The Dark Half* (1989) by Stephen King. The novel starts with Thad Beaumont an author acknowledged for his literary fiction and to see how it would be received by the public he has also written some novels under the pseudonym, George Stark, to experiment writing under a different genre. The novel actually begins after the discovery of the real identity of Thad’s pseudonym by a law student in Washington D.C. as when he starts to blackmail Thad to reveal his identity, Thad and his wife Elizabeth (Liz, in most part of the novel) decides to expose all this on their own. In this way they get an article published in *People Magazine* declaring the death of Thad’s pseudonym, George Stark. In the article the photograph of Thad and Liz with the fake gravestone labelled-

GEORGE STARK

1975- 1988

Not a Very Nice Guy. (King, *DH18*)

express symbolically the end of Thad’s writing under his Pseudonym. The twist in the story appears at this point when George Stark despite being Thad’s creation seepages from his grave and goes on violently killing the people, he believes involved in Thad’s discontinuing his role as George Stark. It seems that Stark does not want to be discontinued. The fabricated characters coming to life always intensifies the sense of uncanny. The fingerprints of Thad have been found at the location of every murder that’s why the police of Maine believe that Thad is responsible for all the murders. At each murder’s site there is something written on the wall i.e. “THE SPARROWS ARE FLYING AGAIN” (78) and Thad also writes the same words simultaneously anywhere wherever he is without any knowledge. Thad, gradually starts to realize what is happening but he also knows that no one would believe him if he suggested that a fictional character has come to life and has murdered all the people. Through the observation of his twins Thad realizes the type of connection he and his pseudonym George Stark share. As in many scenes in the novel, William and Wendy (Thad’s twins) seem to share each other’s smile, pain, sorrow, laughter and strangely enough even their bruises. While writing an autobiographical journal it also comes to his mind that-

Two different men share the same fingerprints and voice prints and how can two different babies have exactly the same bruise... especially when only one of the babies in question happened to bump her leg. (259)

After finally tracking down the doctor that performed brain surgery of Thad in his childhood telling that a twin of Thad in his mother’s womb was swallowed by him but for some reason it did not die and has somehow managed to become a parasite and grow inside his head. Accordingly, Stark is the manifestation of the twin that never got a chance at life. Just like William and Wendy, Thad and Stark are also connected physically and mentally.

Analysing *The Dark Half* in terms of the Psychoanalytic approaches to ‘Doubling’ one can get many interesting understandings. In *The Dark Half*, George Stark is literally the product of Thad’s mind and he is something what Thad is not, for this reason he is overwhelmingly attracted to George and enjoys his presence, for their union signifies a wholeness of their personality. Stephen King, being a modern gothic writer, emphasis the inert conflict with psychological repression rather than only showing concern with social repression. George Stark, Thad’s pseudonym or his literary creation can be considered the projection of Thad’s own anxiety that now has become flesh and blood. Stark, Thad’s absorbed twin, is raised from the dead by means of writing. The name Stark is selected skilfully as it means ‘clear’ while Stark is never clear in the novel and it also means ‘strong’ which conveys exact picture of the unconscious drive of Thad.

Evaluation of Double Narratives inclined to emphasis on the symbolic significance of the double itself, confusing the role of the protagonist. Stark literally starts to fall apart as his revenge of killing people goes further but he is still violent and powerful. As now he is separated (in some sense) from Thad he is unable of upholding his identity and starts to lose required unity or cohesion. Stark wants to live again and he can only do that by writing and it can only happen when Thad writes Stark’s novels or teaches him to do so. In order to fulfil this wish Stark kidnaps Thad’s family to convince him to get into collaboration. Thad succeeds to get rid of Stark once and for all by almost mystical help of a crowd of sparrows which have been ubiquitous throughout the novel and come into view particularly when Thad begins to experience again his headaches. While writing his autobiographical journal in the form of self- interview, Thad asks himself some questions as-

Question- Does William know he has a bruise?

Answer- No, I don’t think he does.

Question- Do I know What the sparrows are or what they mean?

Answer- Yes.

Question- Does Stark know there are sparrows?

Answer- No, he said he doesn’t and I believe him.

Question- Am I sure, I believe him? (257)

He then thinks for sometime that Stark knows there is ‘something’ and in same way, William must know there is ‘something’ too if his leg is bruised it must hurt but Wendy gives him the bruise when she fell downstairs, William only knows he has a hurt place. And again, starts questioning to himself-

Question- Are the birds mine?

Answer- Yes.

Question- Who is the one who knows? Who owns the sparrows?

Answer- I am the knower. I am the owner. (257)

The above lines describe Stark does not know clearly about the sparrows and it is Thad who knows the sparrows very well as he is the one who has been suffering from the phantom sounds of sparrows and severe headaches from childhood. In order to find the meaning of the sparrows, Thad meets a fellow professor who teaches Folk Myth in the University and finds the answer from him that- “sparrows, Loons and especially whippoorwills are psychopomps” (314) means who conducts the souls between life and death. “They are, in other words, the harbingers of the living dead” (314). To attain that Thad takes benefit of Stark’s lack of consideration and blows a bird- whistle which he got from the same professor and massive flock of sparrows attacks Stark and carries him away to the world he belongs.

In the view of Lacan, as soon as a child has the capacity for language there is a qualitative transformation in his physical structure- he becomes a subject. Thad started experiencing headaches and the phantom sounds of sparrows only after his first story got published. The certificate that Thad got for his first story at his teen age represents the official recognition of his capacity for language. There is no conflict between the self and the other, as long as his ego was not ‘certified’ to be completely developed before getting the ‘certificate.’ In Lacanian theory, the ego is the result of the infant’s identification with his own mirror image. Lacan writes:

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image. (qtd.in Sharpe)

Stark represents the language/the other, that is removed from Thad’s brain in the operation which leads Thad to the future failure which is clear from Thad’s explanation which shows contrast between the books written under his own name which he himself admits hardly anybody has read and the books written under his pseudonym George Stark which are bestsellers.

According to Freud ‘the repressed never rest in peace.’ George Stark is no more present in Thad’s life according to him as he had buried his dark half (Stark) forever. But how can Stark (being his half) rest in peace without seeking revenge. Just like the punishing father he had to come back to take revenge from all who were involved with his ‘mother’ and this desire of revenge is fulfilled through castration. The manner in which all the murders took place makes it very clear- the murder of Fredrick Clawson by cutting his penis, the murder of Homer Gamache with his own artificial arm, Mrs. Bigshot’s murder by cutting his tongue are all symbolic of castration. The removal of the malformed eye from Thad’s head could also be seen as an act of castration. Though the eye doesn’t belong to Thad, it is not even connected to his absorbed twin, thus it aids as a mediator, a source of communication between the worlds of the living and of the living dead. Stark can not write without Thad and even Thad can’t do that successfully without Stark as he provides him the attractive subject matter. The motif of ‘eye’ is visible when Thad while collaborating with Stark orders Liz and sheriff Pangborn to get out of the room and Liz observes that George’s eyes look out from Thad’s face for a moment when he says- “Go on. Get out” (King, *DH* 432). The ‘eye’ motif recur, when in a dream of Thad, Stark appears as an estate agent and Thad finds his wife Liz dead and her eyes has cracks in them- “Her glazed eyes suddenly exploded. Noxious green jelly, sickening warm spurted up into his face” (74). In psychoanalytic atmosphere the Double is seen as a narcissistic device that often affect the love relationship of its subject. The eye motif also suggests the writerly impotence for both Thad and Stark as in the last scene sparrows eat the eyes of Stark and leave two sockets there, which means the writing career of Stark is going to be doomed forever and meanwhile a sparrow also pecks on Thad’s cheek just below his eye which can be taken as a warning that without his half he will not be able to write again.

George Stark, the pseudonym of Thad, being an amalgam of the dark and repressed desires of Thad appears to threaten the very existence and identity of Thad by virtue of his mere presence. He is opposite to Thad physically as well as psychically- Stark has no family while Thad is a family man, Stark prefers a particular kind of pencils while writing Thad prefers typewriter, Thad stumbles around while Stark is a nimble- footed. Despite all these differences there is still something that connects the two. When Liz saw them together for the first time she is stunned-

Watching them was like watching a man do stretching exercise in a mirror. They looked nothing whatever alike- even subtracting Stark's accelerating decay from the picture. Thad was slim and darkish, Stark broad shouldered and fair in spite of his tan, yet they were mirror images just the same... they relaxed at exactly the same time. (420)

Thad enjoys the company of Stark so much and their unity represents a completeness of human personality. Liz says to Alan – "Part of him loves Stark. Part of him love Stark's ... his blackness" (433) "I know" (433) Alan agreed. The complicated love- hate kinship between the two has been exposed in the novel several times, the confusing combination of bitterness and attraction of the two towards each other is clear in the following quoted text-

Question- who brought George Stark back to life?

Answer- The owner. The knower.

"I didn't mean to!" he cried

"But was that true" was it really? Had not there always been a part of him in love with George Stark simple, violent nature... a man who had a sharp, straight answer to all of life's more difficult questions? A man who was not afraid of dark because he owned the dark?

"Yes, but he's a BASTARD!"

Right- and part of you find that SO attractive, doesn't it? (352)

In the novel, both Stark and Thad, especially Thad keep their meetings secret to the outer world and these meetings take place under the cover of darkness and isolation. When one of the colleagues of Thad asks him that what is he doing in the university in the summer vacation, he replies- "Just picking up some Honours files" Thad said. "I'm not going to be here any longer than I have to, believe me" (299). Actually, he was there to attend a phone call from George which at home doesn't not possible because of the presence of the police officers who are taping his phone and most importantly he wanted to talk to Stark all alone. In another scene, when Thad wants to connect to Stark through his third eye for the first time- he waited until Liz gone to bed before going up to his study. "He paused outside their bedroom door for a minute or so on his way, listening to the regular ebb and flow of her breathing, assuring himself that she was sleep" (254). These encounters illustrate Thad's alienation and disintegration from the world and even from himself when he wants to be with Stark. Even when he attends the phone call from Stark in the presence of Liz and all the police officers he finds himself isolated- "Thad heard and saw these things but was separate from them. Separate even from Liz, there was only Stark and him now" (213).

The 'master signifiers' (the special kinds of words) according to Lacan, bear identity and also satisfy the passive narcissistic desires by the symbolic other through offering love and recognition. Subjects being the 'signifier' feel good about themselves and also provides sense of temporal continuity and coherence which is essential to identity. These signifiers can be seen from the urge to maintain one's identity in which one can recognise oneself and recognised by others and from the reaction when someone attempts either to deprive one of these signifiers or to damage the identity bearing signifiers. In *The Dark Half* the 'master signifier' that represent Stark/the symbolic other is the written words- the choiceness of the language. But when Stark comes to life he is not recognised as the subject of these signifiers which is also observable in his own words "Losing necessary COHESION"(270) and he is decaying physically lacking the cohesion. This is the very reason he wants Thad to teach him how to write and when Thad agrees on it he is actually handing over these signifiers to Stark and his life also which is sticking to the signifier-

Both of us know what we're talking about but I don't think either of us could express it in words. Writing is not what we're doing here, not really. Writing is just the ritual we're talking about passing some sort of baton. An exchange of power. (430)

While handing over the signifier to Stark, Thad in return taking his scars, his physical deformity and his sores. In this way the subject of the signifier is changing from Thad into Stark- "Thad fingered the corner of his mouth, which suddenly stung, and felt a fresh sore breaking there. He looked at Stark and saw a similar sore had disappeared from the corner of Stark's mouth(438-39).

According to Lacan, the signifier that represents the subject makes the subject terrified of it and thus the subject identifies with that signifier he is deprived of something from his life, he becomes reduced to the signifier only and what he is deprived of can only make his personality complete which can happen through identification. In the novel, Thad he deprived of Stark and he unconsciously wants to unite or identify with him which is echoed in Stark words when he says- "you know it, when you're fucking with me you're fucking with the best" (39). But the attraction and the urge for union is not there always, the presence of conflict among desires is noticeable when Thad decides to bury George forever. When the desire of identification becomes established, the identity repress all the desires which don't seem compatible with it. Thus, Stark is repressed at the end of the novel and Thad re- accomplish the right over language – the sequence of signifiers- "A separation was taking place. A kind of obscene birth. It wasn't his book anymore. Alexis Machine was with the person who had owned him from the start" (441).

The very idea of the Pseudonym could also be thought as a kind of 'Double'. The pseudonym means an invented name or identity which is assumed by an author to write something which he cannot/ doesn't want to write under his original name. Thad himself says in the interview to *People Magazine* in the book that- "Thinking about writing under a pseudonym was like thinking about being invisible... The more I played with the idea, the more I felt that I would be ...well... reinventing myself" (24). Thad, in this way, consciously creates the different identity or it can be said he himself creates his double to fulfil something which he cannot being the first self i.e. Thad. To bring about a pseudonym is to produce oneself as an 'other'- to avoid one's father. The alteration in the name from Thad to Stark briefly suspend the effect of the father/ superego. But it is the illusion of the author that he can create a permanent alternative identity, it is not possible because the new identity always returns to the previous self. Naming cannot be a pure invention because when one adopts a new name he acquires (unwillingly) the attitudes and nature of the new father from which he has adopted this new name.

Stephen King himself has written under a pseudonym "Richard Bachman" for years which is also believed to be the model of his novel *The Dark Half*. King also expresses his appreciation to his pseudonym Richard Bachman in preserving that "the novel could not have been written without him" (King, *DH* Author's Note). The identity of King's pseudonym also exposed in the same way as of Thad's in the novel. But generating a different name cannot make a different entity. For this reason, the actual Bachman and real Stark were uncovered and that's why- "George Stark's eyes looked out at them from Thad Beaumont's face" (432). As the invention does not entirely disentangle from its creator when Stark comes to life Thad steadily shows signs which were associated with Stark. He feels urge to drink alcohol, to smoke cigarette, to write with black coral pencils with which Stark used to write. Both of them share the mutual relationship and neither of them are able to write without one another. When Thad writes under his pseudonym he is in the state of control taken captive by this alter ego. It is like the 'id' has increased to the surface and the 'ego' has ceased to work.

The theme of Double is emphasized by many examples of doubling, duplicity and uncertainty through out the novel. Thad's dream with Stark symbolises the doubling that whatever he touches turns in to two- "Thad touched the vase and it exploded into shards and a cloud of ceramic powder... he touched the table itself. The wood gave a dry, parched crack and the table split in two...wood floor in two separate pieces" (36). The fingerprints and voice print of both Thad and Stark are same and the children of Thad and Liz are twins which accentuates the motif of doubling in the novel. It is through the action and attitude of the twins Thad comes to know about his actual connection with Stark. Sharing identical fingerprints and a capability for mental telepathy, it becomes more apparent that George has "right to feel insulted"(331). Not even Thad is capable to make clear difference between himself and Stark, "Who are you then when you write, Thad? Who are you then?" (129). In the chapter, in the novel, entitled Automatic Writing Thad lapsed into the Self- interview which characterized a good part of his journal suggested yet another form of duality-

Question- If you took slides of the bruises on my children's legs then overlaid them, would you end up with what looked like a single image?

Answer- Yes, I think you would. I think it is like the fingerprints, I think it is like the voice- prints. (256)

The chapter deals with the writing that emerge automatically without thinking which actually comes from the communication with oneself/ the unconscious and a spontaneous stream of words arise in existence. The unconscious of the writer commands information previously known but repressed. Stark is the manifestation of those repressed desires or immoralities which now push their way back in to Thad's consciousness. George Stark appears to epitomize the familiar turns unfamiliar which gives rise to the sense of uncanny. The violence that inspired Thad to write that kind of novels is actually his urge for hostility which is never clearly specified when he behaves like Thad. Stark identifies with his own creation Alexis Machine just as Thad with Stark, the fear of death and life can be drawn to Thad's helplessness to deal with his own doubleness- "you've got the firepower, all I've got is a bunch of scraggy birds" (439). In spite of the terrorizations that Stark gives Thad, the fear in his voice shows his mindfulness that he is not eventually in control of his fate and that his existence is fully dependent on Thad writing George Stark novels. When Thad refuses Stark to write Stark screams at him but Thad senses something in his voice except fury asking himself- "but was there something more? Was there fear? Pain? Both?" (220)

At the end of the novel even though Thad doesn't die physically along with his double, what used to be happen in traditional Double Narratives, but he changes completely after killing him (not in a positive way). The sheriff Pangborn also is of the view that Thad is not going to be same again. Pangborn thought –

You don't understand what you are, and I doubt that you ever will. Your wife might... although I wonder if things will ever be right between the two of you after this ...your mind knows that but your emotion – they play a different tune, don't they? oh boy. And even if the cave is empty forever, there are the dreams and the memories. (457)

It is because, Thad doesn't genuinely attempt to get rid of George Stark since he constitutes an integral part of Thad's psyche. Thad's wife Liz also states that- "If Fredrik Clawson had not come along and forced my husband's hand. I think Thad would still be talking about getting rid of him in the same way" (202).

As the phrase "THE SPARROWS ARE FLYING AGAIN" (78) is written on the wall at each murder's site and Thad unconsciously writes the same sentence when a murder take place.

After analysing the situation, he comes to the point that Stark doesn't know about the sparrows, it was him who wrote it each time- "I think maybe the reason you don't know about sparrows is because I wrote it. I think part of me was there... I think I'm the only one of us who knows about the sparrows, George. I think maybe I wrote it" (248). In this way Thad becomes aware of the switch of vision between him and Stark he starts to gain control over his relationship with his double. He acknowledges that the reason why Stark is always one step ahead from him is that Stark has been reading his mind and Thad is the one who can watch distantly. Therefore, figuring out the significance of the sparrows not only as 'signified' but also as 'signifier' becomes crucial for Thad. As soon as he got to know about the sparrows from a fellow professor that they are considered "psychopomps" (314) in American Folklore and George is not aware about the sparrows he gets the idea to get rid of him through these fabulous creatures. And when they were writing in the collaboration at the end Thad secretly reiterated the word sparrow in Stark's text and in this way he announces his position as the initial being which brought the end to George's appearance.

The final confrontation of George Stark and Thad and the triumph of Thad obtains a mythological clarification. Directing human souls back and forth, between the land of living and the land of dead, sparrows are able to differentiate between the original/ living one from the dead one and to take the latter where he belongs. However, Thad's triumph may prove of short duration. Because the Double is the everlasting tenant of one self it is not one who follow or haunt for sometimes, being repressed it comes back and looks out at times just to repeat its presence. It is neither a completely internal entity nor completely external. As Dr. Jekyll says in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* "Man is not truly one but two" (Stevenson 70). The term 'double' thus refers to the crucial duality within a single character, on the further belief, that the duality centres on the polarization of good and evil and one, in the end, unable to evolve or to eliminate our baser selves from our psyche. Regarding doubling, Stephen King also states that- "the monsters are no longer due on Maple street but may pop up in our own mirrors- at any time" (Dance 252).

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