

Encountering Self as Another: The Motif of Double in Dostoevsky’s Novel “The Double” and Jose Saramago’s Novel “The Double”

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Abstract

The concept of double is not new in the literature. It pervades as a perennial motif in almost all the literary styles, periods and genres. This theme is used in movies and literature by film directors and writers to trace the unseen, unsaid, which has always been suppressed by the rational discourse. The concept of double in literature is a construction of traditional culture; myths, legends, religion. The central premise of the motif of double is the paradox of encountering self as other. This paper is an attempt to study theme of double in Dostoyevsky’s novella “The Double” and Jose Saramago’s Novel “The Double” and how doppelganger becomes a threat to identity.

In its broadest sense the concept of duality or double is used in many fields of science and arts, in particular: in linguistics, physics, psychoanalysis, in cultural studies and literary criticism. Specific field of knowledge focuses on its specific characteristic values, for example: In physics the dual nature of light and matter, in linguistics “double negation”, “reduplication” of words(चलते- चलते, कहते-कहते) etc. In mythologies doubles are seen as magical portability of soul, plurality of sacred, indivisibility of divine beings (Avatars in hindu mythology: Durga’s nine avatars, Vishnu’s avatar). In cinema and literature double has been extensively used as a device to depict the experience of a character, his mental processes, split personality, uncanny appearances etc.

The concept of double is not new in the literature. German word “Doppelganger” is used for this phenomenon, which literary means “double-goers”. This term was brought into the literary tradition by the German novelist Jean Paul Richter. He defined the term “Doppelganger” as “so people who see themselves are called” (Froncoise Ghillebaert, Disguise in George Sand’s Novels, 2009). This definition does not suffice to explain the concept of double in modern literary criticism. Modern literary critics widely agree with Albert Joseph Guerard that “the word double is embarrassingly vague as used in literary criticism” (Albert Joseph Guerard, Stories of the Double, 1967). Double in modern literary criticism is viewed from two basic positions: the ontological and axiological i.e. to see this phenomenon through the prism of existential questions and the specifics of perception of reality, as well as from the point of view of religious and moral values inherent in particular era, which play an important role in paradigm of artistic

consciousness. If we study the double of primitive, they were considered as a symbol of eternal life (Avatars in Hindu mythology), but later in modern civilization it developed as an omen of death. In gothic literature motif of double is used to create uneasiness, turbulence and trepidation, it is a device to evoke an uncomfortable reaction; horror. In primitive it was consoling one but in modern civilization it appears “bad” and threat to individuality.

The theme of double or duality pervades as a perennial motif in almost all the literary styles, periods and genres. The fictional double, unlike double in physics or linguistic, is a construction of traditional culture; myths, legends, religion and incorporated semantic changes in respective cultures. The double is very often understood as an aspect of personal and impersonal life, a creation of unfulfilled desires (Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, 1919). The concept of double is used in movies and literature by film directors and writers to trace the unseen, unsaid, which has always been suppressed by the rational discourse. The central premise of the motif of double is the paradox of encountering self as other. In literature the theme of double has always been used as a device to explore the interrelationship between “I” and “non- I” of self and other. The double is an attempt by the writers to show human’s chronic duality and sense of incompleteness. If we consider doppelganger narratives from romanticism to postmodernism, there are mainly two types of double: External double and Internal double. External double is duplicated figure of a character as an identical self or alter ego and internal double is an attribute to consciousness of a character (they are basically polar opposite selves):for example the double in Dostoyevsky’s novella, “The Double” is an alter ego of the main character, created by paranoid hallucination and double in Robert Luis Stevenson’s “Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” is a result of protagonist’s split personality, where protagonist acquires two different personalities within himself. It could be said that Dostoevsky’s double is external as protagonist claims to see his double outside his self and Robert Luis Stevenson’s double is internal as his protagonist behaves differently in day and night, a case of split personality. However the difference between these two types of double appears to be only formal, because both are creation of fragmented self. In both the cases, External double and internal double, protagonist mostly seems to be victim of identity theft caused by paranoid hallucination or supernatural presence or division of his self. In Dostoyevsky’s works we can even find a third type of double, who is not an identical double, or split personality but a different character, who shares similar worldview to the main character, for example in the novel “Crime and Punishment” Svidrigailov, Luzhin and Razumikhin are ideological doubles of the main character Raskolnikov (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky’s Polyphonic Novels*).Dostoyevsky to the greatest extent embodied in his works has the Christian view of duplicity, according to which the dual state of a person occurs when soul of a person struggles with his thoughts, desires and passions which is so strong that it can separate the soul from God and kill it (*Sincerity and Duplicity*). This paper is an attempt to study the theme of doppelganger in Dostoyevsky’s novella “The Double” and Jose Saramago’s Novel “The Double” and how doppelganger becomes a threat to identity.

The novella “The Double” was written at a time when at the age of twenty four, Dostoyevsky himself was struggling to find his own personal and literary identity(Daniel Rancour Laferriere, *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*,1989). “The Double” is a story of a titular clerk who fails to develop and maintain his own sense of himself. Golyadkin is a “small man”, a clerk, who is troubled by his own ambitions. He wants to be loved, admired and appreciated. He is obsessed with the feeling of “self assertion”. His own identity is dependent upon the validation of others. Golyadkin always worried about what others might be thinking about him. Always seek validation of others. His is a weak personality. Although Golyadkin

thinks about others perception about him but he rarely interacts with other people. There is always one sided conversation which is going on in his head. Even if when he does exchange words with people he is always conscious of their expectations from him, what others want to hear from him. He becomes so conscious that he does everything possible to avoid any conversation. Throughout the novella we see his own sentiments, thoughts, suspicion echoing in his head.

In the very first paragraph of the novella we are introduced to Golyadkin's indecisive, confused and self critical nature. While getting up from his long sleep he was not sure whether he is awake or still dreaming, whether all that is happening around him is for real or continuation of his dream. First thing he does after getting up is to run to mirror to check that everything is all right:

“What a thing it would be if I were not up to the mark today, if something were amiss, if some intrusive pimple had made its appearance, or anything else unpleasant had happened; so far, however there is nothing wrong, so far everything is all right”(2).

Later, when Golyadkin was seen in rented carriage by his two colleagues and then by his boss he tries to hide himself in the darkest corner of the carriage. He first tries to deny the fact by pretending that he was not seen, failing which he pretends that it is not he, but someone else who looks like him: “It's quite all right, this is not me at all, Andrey Phillipovich, it's not me at all, not me, and that's all about it”(5). Here Golyadkin denies his existence because he is over concerned with what other people think of him and how they regard him. He desperately wants to impress others but afraid of their disapproval. Golyadkin always tries to abdicate any sense of responsibility in order to avoid insult by others, to protect himself from painful feelings: “I am simply an onlooker, an outsider-nothing more, whatever happens- it's not my fault, that is the fact of the matter! That's how it should be now”(5). His intention to “stand aside” and withdrawing of his self into his “corner” or underground and easily giving up his space becomes the major reason of the birth of his double. His double intrudes into every aspects of his life external or social life, he becomes a threat to his existence and results into a narcissistic nightmare. Golyadkin feels persecuted by his double, in identification with him. He tries to control his double in order to control aspects of personality projected in his double but he fails to do so, instead he feels controlled by him. Now Golyadkin's identity is under threat. His double “robbed” his identity. The twin crimes of robbery and murder could be seen as identity theft of Golyadkin by intrusion into his space by his double. Golyadkin's dream in which his every step creates yet another double hence multitude of doubles mocking at him could be interpreted as disruption and fragmentation of his ego where he completely loses control over himself. Golyadkin is so lost in so many preconceptions that he fails to see beyond his delusions and ultimately succumbs to his double.

Unlike Dostoyevsky's double Jose Saramago's double is not a creation of main protagonist's disturbed psyche. His double is literally an external double. Saramago tries to make his double as realistic as he can. In his novel Jose Saramago seeks answer of very pertinent existential question; what would happen if someone confronts another person, identical to him in every respect. How possibly it could be decided that who is original and who is duplicate? What would happen to the personal identity of both the person?

Saramago's main character, Tertuliano Maximo Afonsois, is a “small man”, History teacher by profession. He is very shy and slightly depressed. His identity is threatened when he catches sight of his identical double in a movie, suggested by a colleague, a mathematics teacher.

His identical double is a junior artist, who has a very small role in the movie, (of a hotel receptionist). Whose name does not even appear in the cast list. Tertuliano's first reaction, after sighting his identical double in the movie, was of shock and fear:

“...there it was, the frozen image of clerk at the reception desk...Tertuliano Maximo Afonso got up from the chair, knelt down in front of the television, his face as close to the screen as he could get it still be able to see it, It's me, he said, and once more he felt the hairs on his body stand on end...” (14)

Tertuliano tries hard to rationalize it by saying that “there is no shortage of resemblances in the world”(16) but presence of his exact identical person in the same city is “terrifying revelation of the existence” to him. Tertuliano Maximo Afonso has to find out more about his double. In order to identify his double, Tertuliano decides to watch all the films by the same production company. He watches almost dozen a films of the same production company in which his double played roles. Finally he succeeds in his endeavour and finds the name of his double- Daniel Santa Clara. Tertuliano now determined to “find him and meet him”. He elicits his double's address as well as his real name Antonio Claro from the production company by writing a letter on the name of his girlfriend Maria da Paz, because he wanted to find his double “without anyone knowing and without him (double) suspecting”(77). Tertuliano eventually meets his double Antonio Claro. When Tertuliano and Antonio Claro establish that they are actually identical in every respect, they feel loss of their identity and individuality. They were identical in every respect; fingers, veins, wrinkles, and moles everything was identical, they were even born on the same day. It becomes extremely important for them to find out who is original and who is duplicate. After disclosing time of their birth they establish that Antonio Calro, the actor was born half an hour before Tertuliano, hence Antonio is original and Tertuliano is the duplicate. Initially they decide to move on but both feel that their identity is being “robbed” by another. They could not tolerate the existence of the other and start competing with each other. Wife, girlfriend, mother, and job everything else takes the back seat and both of them get busy in proving their “uniqueness”. Ultimately both of them come out as losers.

Dostoevsky's protagonist Golyadkin and Saramago's protagonist Tertuliano are very similar in many ways. Both are undistinguished, unnoticed “small man”, they are quiet, subservient and feel out of place in their social circle. Both of them possess feeling of insignificance and belittlement. However, unlike Golyadkin, who lacks the ability to differentiate between self and other, Tertuliano holds his identity together, and creates a boundary between him and other. Tertuliano, unlike Golyadkin, never willingly gives his space to anybody, he fights back when somebody tries to usurp it from him: for example he protests against paternalistic behaviour of his colleague, in the very end of the novel when he gets a call from another double he loads his gun and goes to meet his double, which shows that he will have his way.

The theme of doppelganger is common in both the novels but Dostoevsky and Saramago treat it in their own peculiar ways. The only similarity between both the novels is limited to the common title- The double. Dostoevsky's double is an alter ego of his protagonist. His novel is about divided self, whereas Saramago's about self. Saramago portrays his double not an idealized self of his protagonist, his double exists in reality; he is not a result of his protagonist's psychopathological condition. However, theme of intrusiveness and usurpation of identity is common in both the novels. The protagonists of both the writers react in the similar way when

confronted with their doubles- both feel threatened by the presence of their doubles and experience identity theft.

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