



THE DOPPELGANGER MOTIF IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*: A STUDY

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The concept of doppelganger in literary texts is associated mostly with the ready provision for an apparition of a living person. This German word which literally means 'double-goer' is brought into language and simultaneously into the literary tradition as a term first used by the novelist Joann Paul Fredrich Richter in a footnote to his novel *Siebenkiis* (1796). German Romanticism has meditated the development of it in the romantic writers' struggle to reach beyond the already structured platforms for an existence and its limited possibilities, by asserting a simulacrum of characters with slippage of identity and fragmentation of self and exteriorization of an alter ego. Doppelgangers are physical projections that epitomizes the otherwise hidden, secret or unconscious self of a person. They are mostly introduced in settings that are dark and spooky immediately suggesting the horrific nature associated with doubles and it usually happens to the men of solitude and isolation. The 'double' is not completely identical to the original one and their differences is responsible for the dynamic tension that always exists between them.

Academic pane of psychoanalysis tries to decipher in literary texts certain psychological issues, complex motives of the literary personas and layers of psychic threads that constitutes the unconscious of the texts. Day dreaming, un-mindful verbal communications, relatedness to things of distant past are mere symptoms of a psychoanalytic patient very much relevant to Sethe in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The tripartite structure of human psyche constructed by Freud consisting of id, ego and superego holds the root in unravelling human behavior. The psychoanalytic concepts like alter-ego, schizophrenic fantasizing, split-personality or dissociative personality disorders help one to analyze the doppelganger motif in real life as well as literature. There is an attempt on the part of the author to explore these themes in the novel to bring to fore the janiformity of adherent contradicting perceptions and motives that surmounts a human being on usual terms.

Ralph Tymms observes in his book *The Doubles in Literary Psychology* that:

"It was one which fused the extremes of extravagant fantasy and the realistic observation of the mind or psyche, most nearly to the taste of

E.T.A. Hoffman for instance-the most universally read of the *phantasieromantiker*, and doubtless their greatest storyteller – and which became as a result, the romantic *par excellence*. The doppelganger, as Hoffman and the romantics called the double (after Jean Paul Richter’s example) often implied a spiritual affinity linking the physically identical pairs of characters; the emphasis in fact was placed on the magical, occult, psychical or psychological qualities that run through the double’s ambiguous nature” (Tymms16).

Different texts showcases different windows of this double being used. The double sometimes exists just in the imagination of the protagonist while in some it extricates itself in a world where supernatural forces foresee a gothic air. In novels like- R. L. Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Dostoyevsky’s *The Double*, the doppelganger has implicit negative impulses on the central character, the hidden being exhorts more into an animalistic dwelling, while novels like Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* or Joseph Conrad’s novella *The Secret Sharer* inhibits a double that has a positive role to play. It enables the characters to be able to rationalize and thus mature their thinking prospects. A brighter significance of the double is psychologically understood in the later novels. But the overwhelming question that surrounds every reader’s mind is to trace whether this doppelganger is undoubtedly an imaginary character of the protagonist or it possess a real physical presence in the text like the rest. My reading of Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* ensures an exploration of this theme by the author between the explicit yet unconscious protagonist Sethe and the insipid presence of the appearing and re-appearing thing called Beloved. Although Beloved is the name of Sethe’s eldest daughter whom she has killed by slitting her throat and pushing her head against the wall who now asserts a regular visit in Sethe’s ‘re-memory’, her second appearance either as a ghost like presence or as a real physical person which is although not implicitly clear, provides the opportunity for Morrison to employ the idea of doppelganger in the novel under the disguise of Sethe’s baby daughter’s relatedness. There is a two way presence of this theme. One, as a real if also absurd physical encounter of the doppelganger and second as an externalization of what is regarded as split personality of the main character in the novel. In this paper, I would like to explore the embodied copy of Sethe in the character or the ghost named Beloved. Sethe, is more seen as schizophrenic as Mrs Clarissa Dalloway has been in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa has been unaware of the time she has been living in, she behaves both as the young unmarried Clarissa and at the very next moment as the aged Mrs Dalloway that she actually is now. Sethe’s disruption is not in immitigable timelessness but under the voluptuous pressure from her ‘negro grief’ which has turned to take personified forms and disturb her with a sense of guilt. This grief of hers has even mislead her to believe the newly arrived guest in 124 who possessed the same

name as her dead daughter 'Beloved' to be the grown up version of the little one but who accordingly proves to be instead Sethe's double or her doppelganger.

The hovering of a doppelganger characteristic around Sethe is realized for the first time in the chapter beginning with the phrase "Denver's secrets were sweet" (Morrison 34) where Denver exclaims suddenly that from the window outside she can see her mother praying in Baby Sugg's room which is not an unusual site, but, near her mother a white dress has knelt down next and is having her sleeve's around her mother's waist. It is thus declared that- "The dress and her mother together looked like two friendly grown-up women- one (the dress) helping out the other" (Morrison 35-36). It hints at someone being intimately close to her mother. It opens a doubt which will mature later on in the novel.

The arrival of Beloved holds a mystery. The carnival day when she is readied to make her entry in the scene, despite of the roads and places to be filled with crowds travelling to the destined spot of celebration "nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by" (Morrison 60). It is like "a fully dressed woman walked out of water" (Morrison 60). The mystified entry ascertains the unstable identity to be offered to her. And Sethe's encounter with her who bears her dead daughter's name leads her "bladder filled to capacity" (Morrison 61). She has started remembering the past incidents of her water breaking during Denver's birth while crossing the Ohio River after being raped by the School teacher's nephew, and is unable to distinguish at the moment that it is just a memory has felt a need to release herself of the water filled body. This incident appears to me an evidence of her way of relating things with the past, a justification for her future momentary interruptions. Beloved is the most unlikely but the disguised self of Sethe. Beloved is unlikely to be Sethe's double because firstly she holds the name of Sethe's dead child, and secondly, she is presented in most instances in the novel as the ghost who disturbs the household occasionally to take revenge against her mother for killing her and has recently made the physical appearance for attaining the same reason. But these same representations of Beloved according to me are instead not the absolute justifications of being the child's prodigal return itself but draws in actually portraits which explains her to be the doppelganger of Sethe. Some narrative events reflects Beloved to be a possible product of Sethe's split-personality. And the aim of the paper is to claim for such evidences in the text.

Beloved seems to possess pre-requisite knowledge of Sethe's past belongings. While Denver who has lived with her mother has never heard of her mother once possessing even a set of earrings, diamond perhaps, Beloved, the newly arrived stranger knows about it and so could one day demandingly asks Sethe "Where your diamonds?" (Morrison 69) The diamond earrings has been a gift offered to her by Mrs Garner, the lady for whom she has worked for in Sweet Home, Kentucky. Beloved also knows that Sethe has not had much connection with her own mother even when she has been alive, so she puts on the rhetorical question- "Your women she never fix up your hair?" (Morrison 70) to which Sethe replies that,

“My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don’t remember. I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I wake up in the morning she was in the line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light” (Morrison 72).

Beloved’s rhetorical question achieves an affirmative answer reminding readers of her all-knowing capacity when there comes the question of knowing Sethe, and the present situation could be known by none but only Sethe. To these questions put to her mother of which she has no information of, Denver is perplexed. She notices how Beloved has grown greedy to hear Sethe talk. And now

“she noticed something more. The questions Beloved asked: ‘Where your diamonds?’ ‘Your woman she never fix up your hair?’ And most perplexing: Tell me your earrings. How did she know?” (Morrison 75)

This physical being named Beloved cannot be her dead daughter but just Sethe or her double. The baby Beloved has not been living during the above mentioned incidents to know of it as accurately as is shown.

Beloved copies all the activities done by Sethe or tries to perform all that is happening to her. Sethe’s wet legs has induced Paul D to go intimate with his long lost love. Paul D has been one of the first suitor of Sethe when she has first joined them to work in Sweet Home. But as she has decided to pair up with Halle, Paul D stepped back then. But now, after some eighteen years or so when she is lonely and hesitates not, Paul tries to make love to her. And interestingly Beloved also tries to attract Paul D with shinning eyes as Sethe has done with her wet legs although he has not expected Beloved’s seducing at all.

A schizophrenic trace is also evident in the novel when Sethe along with Denver and Beloved visits the site of Baby Suggs ‘Clearing’ spot. Sethe, who has not wanted to indulge in any sort of community rituals has visited the place after many years. She is bound at the time being under a misconception until Paul D opens up the truth before her. According to her, on the appointed day when she even being pregnant could manage to reach the already decided place to unite and leave to join the train which would carry the slaves like them from the plantations in the South to the far off in North where institutions like slavery does not exists, her husband Halle could not arrive. Lonesome Sethe is found out by Schoolteacher and as a sort of punishment his nephew has raped her brutally and teared her back by beating. They have then taken up all her milk from her breast that she has saved for her baby and gave it up to pigs. She has to undergo such trouble all alone, and indeed she allows not the cruel masters to dishearten her, she does not give rape a chance to dissemble her, but her sole grief has been that the person whom she considered her husband, who has been the father of the three children she has already had, he has not joined her in the pre-planned escape programme. There arose in her some distrust against Halle that he might have taken interest in some other women and from that day onwards she regrets marrying him for some eighteen years until Paul D comes to 124. But when Paul D

proves her wrong and comments that Halle has actually witnessed the incident and in utter guilt and grief he has dared not to face her after the misfortune and thus in shame he completely withdraws himself, and instead turns mad and smears butter in his face. When Sethe has had at least her mother-in-law Baby Suggs to talk to and share all her grief, Halle has none, he could not even speak a word because he and his likewise Paul D's tongues have been tied with bit. So he turns up somewhat mad. And now Sethe realising her fault, in extreme sense of guilt visits Baby Suggs once pent up land for clearing to refresh her mind a bit. Sethe sits there and remembers the good old days with Baby Suggs taking care of her neck. And the moment she has tried to feel the fingers again "they were there" immediately (Morrison 112).

"The desire, let alone the gesture, to meet her needs was good enough to lift her spirits to the place where she could take the next step: ask for some clarifying word; some advice about how to keep on with a brain greedy for news nobody could live with in a happy world to provide it" (Morrison 112).

Into the empty space of not knowing Halle even after living six years of married life together, she now rightly resents her cowardice on doubting him. An utter grief pours into her heart, she then wanted some help from Baby Suggs, some advice and so she visits the place of once dwelling of Suggs who is although dead now yet she fantasize Suggs' hands on her neck. But the fingers then on turns stronger, she could feel a choking on her neck and takes it to be punishment or anger on her stupidity by Baby Suggs. But, although Denver and Beloved is said to be sitting just in front of her they have not witnessed this incident of her being choked, bringing into fore a quality in Sethe to daydream events and her already extracted quality of relating things without any awareness of time. It is therefore a delusional moment on the part of Sethe which has happened due to the shocking revelations about Halle proving her judgements as wronged one on behalf of Halle that she has harboured till then. It thus prepares the readers for other such incidents. Although Denver here sees not, yet takes to believe what her mother has to describe of someone strangulating her. Sethe's exaggerated narration of her Negro grief and Denver's loss of connection with the outside world has prepared her to believe in such delusional narrations of her mother. Even Paul D admits the presence of a third being in the house numbered 124, due to effective narrative power of Sethe, her emotional detailing of incidents leading to even her daughter's creative narrations and imaginary exemplifications.

Beloved continues to prove her doubling with Sethe. When Beloved hears the heavy breathing at Sethe's room when Paul D is also in, indicating a sign of physical closeness between the two, she grows very angry. She is angry about the fact that Paul D who often tell her about her sad past and depresses her with retelling of scenes from days in Sweet Home and about Halle and his suffering, leading her to grief stricken days of numbness for which she has to succumb to the stone taken for Clearing while her mother-in-law has been living, yet, she is getting day by day closer to him. Beloved thus tries to do the same with Paul D. Once, while sleeping in the cold house outside 124, for he has been suffering house fits, he is approached at the night by Beloved. She has nothing to speak of but just that Paul D indulge her in some sort of sexual

intercourse. When he asks her- “What you want in here? What you want?” (Morrison 137) all she could reply is “I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name” (Morrison 137). She hoists her skirt to seduce him to perform all that he does with Sethe in usual nights. Moreover, her declaration that she wants him to call her with her name indicates that the name ‘Beloved’ by which she is often referred to is not her actual identity. She may want her to be called by her own name that is ‘Sethe’ of whom she is the representative other part. This incident meets the predicament of an earlier theory which has been observed by Ralph Tymms that the soul or the alter ego was more quintessential a counterpart than the reflection or the shadow of the body and this soul- double moves around freely when the body is asleep, ill or dead and responds to the violence done to the body. John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* says that if the soul could while the body has been sleeping do “thinking, enjoyments and concerns, its pleasure and pain apart, which the man is not conscious of, then such a sleeping soul would have an identity entirely distinct from the waking man” (Tymms 21-22). Beloved is here theoretically proved to be the sleeping soul of the otherwise awakened Sethe.

Beloved, the personified alter ego of Sethe could remember nothing clearly when asked about her past, her family, her identity, apart from the moments attached with Sethe and the household of 124. When she is occasionally asked

“You disremember everything? I never knew my mother neither, but I saw her a couple of times. Did you never see yours? What kind of whites was they? You don’t remember none?” (Morrison 140)

Beloved could just ascertain that

“she remembered a woman who was hers, and she remembered being snatched away from her. Other than that, the clearest memory she had, the one she repeated, was the bridge- standing on the bridge looking down. And she knew one whiteman” (Morrison 140).

The woman she refers to is very unclear and seems a reference to Sethe herself, because it is only Sethe whom she likes to say as her own and as Sethe could recall knowing one good white man that is Mr Garner, Beloved also suggests knowing one such. But Toni Morrison has extracted these phrases from Beloved’s mouth to prioritize the complex yet personified character to have something of her own so that readers could not easily grapple with the fact of Beloved being Sethe’s doppelganger.

Sethe’s apron fits in Beloved, so, whenever Sethe goes for work Beloved wears her apron and dances around the room. Her tendency to be Sethe’s look alike is explained in this way :

“Dressed in Sethe’s dresses, she stroked her skin with the palm of her hand. She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk, the way Sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head. Sometimes coming upon them making men and women cookies or tacking scraps of cloth on Baby Suggs’ old quilt, it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who” (Morrison 283).

The utter difficulty to distinguish who is Sethe and who is Beloved claimed by Sethe’s own daughter indicates a surety of the two being just the two sides of the same coin. There is again a chapter in the novel beginning with the line “I am Beloved and she is mine” (Morrison 248). The first paragraph of this chapter seems to be expressive of Beloved’s thoughts where she feels that she is the same as Sethe and can’t separate herself from her as said-

“I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing” (Morrison 248).

The select chapter is reflexive of Beloved’s mind with exaggeration on the part of the author to extract the mind of the doubled self and what it could think of. The other self could not very easily unite with Sethe as it says,

“In the beginning I could see her I could not help her because the clouds were in the way in the beginning I could see her the shinning in her ears she does not like the circle around her neck I know this I look hard at her so she will know that clouds are in the way I am sure she saw me I am looking at her see me she empties out her eyes I am there in the place where her face is and telling her the noisy clouds were in my way she wants her earrings she wants her round basket I want her face a hot thing” (Morrison 249-50).

The difficulties mentioned are tricks played by the author to confuse the readers with the possibility of Beloved being the double and also of not being. For Beloved, while Sethe is the laugh, she is the laughter; in Sethe’s face Beloved could see hers. Beloved finds a dwelling in Sethe’s face as she declares “her smiling face is the place for me” (Morrison 252). Before meeting Sethe, Beloved has been always in the quest of finding her. She has tried many times to get into her which she expresses through some metaphorical lines in the novel as such-

“Three times I lost her: once with the flowers because of the noisy clouds of smoke; once when she went into the sea instead of smiling at me; once under the bridge when I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not smile. She whispered to me, chewed me, and swam away. Now I have found her in this house. She smiles at me and it is my own face smiling. I will not lose her again. She is mine” (Morrison 253-54).

Beloved is now not in a position to think herself separated from Sethe. The meaning of these quoted lines are ambiguous and hard to interpret. It seems to me to be the conscience of the alter ego, the other self of Sethe. In all her life after the killing of her beloved daughter there has not been a moment Sethe thinks not about her. She is always in her 're-memory' and thus withholds a major position in her imagination and these ambiguous lines with absurd meanings are like exemplified product of the repeated visualization about Beloved in her imagination and thus an outcome in the utmost and abnormal regard and epitomising moment of how could Beloved as a separate would consider what Sethe be like to her. Amidst these abnormal narrations Beloved also is made to recite a poem, in which as a speaker she intermixes her position both as herself and as Sethe, it is more like a conversation between the two selves and expresses thus-

"Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?"

Yes. I was on the other side.

You came back because of me?

Yes.

You rememory me?

Yes. I remember you.

You never forgot me?

Your face is mine.

Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now.

Where are the men without skin?

Out there. Way off. (Morrison 254)

Beloved questions Sethe and also replies being herself Sethe. She could never have known about "the men without skin" a metaphor used for the Schoolteacher and the nephew who has raped her, it is the replica of whatever Sethe draws within her mind and not a deliverance of a different being. And at last, Sethe's part of the speaker confesses that Beloved is the conduct of her mind because for her she is at the same time her sister, which in reality Beloved has never been, her daughter and her face, that is she herself, as is thus expressed-

"Beloved

You are my sister

You are my daughter

You are my face; you are me

I have found you again; you have come back to me

You are my Beloved

You are mine” (Morrison 255)

The author through the poetic expression of Beloved’s identity as all that Sethe wants to consider, opens up thus a way to interpret that Beloved is a creation of Sethe’s imagination. Projection of Sethe and Beloved’s relationship is equivalent to Freudian perspective of narcissism. Narcissism according to him is a kind of obsessive love between two selves, both belonging to the same person. The person loving his mirror image treats the mirror image as if it were another self. He explains it as thus,

“The ego is, in its very essence a subject; how can it be made into an object? Well, there is no doubt that it can be. The ego can take itself as an object, can observe itself, can treat itself as other objects, criticise itself, and do Heaven knows what with itself. In this, one part of the ego is setting itself over against the rest. So, the ego can be split; it splits itself during a number of its functions – temporarily at least”

(Freud’s ‘On Narcissus’ 13,

And after this chapter the schizophrenic split personality of Sethe can be more perceived. Sethe registers Beloved as a personified ghost of her dead daughter and thus plays with her hair “braiding, puffing, tying, oiling it until it made Denver nervous to watch her. They changed beds and exchanged clothes. Walked arm in arm and smiled all the time” (Morrison 282). Beloved wants Sethe’s company for hours to watch the layer of brown leaves. Now, Beloved’s version of Sethe’s perspective begins to dominate Sethe and compels her to do the bitterest of the tasks which Denver perceives as Beloved punishing Sethe for her crime and Sethe also succumbing to what she says. But, instead, these instances are personified presentation of Sethe’s guilt and Denver’s desperation, fear based on seeing her own mother killing her own daughter which both of them have kept inside their heart for years without expressing and communicating it to anyone to be themselves relieved of. Sethe goes without food when there has been shortage of it, for she works no more. Denver sees her pick-eating around the edges of the table and stove, the hominy that stuck on the bottom, the crusts and rinds and peelings of things. The schizophrenic dwelling is hinted at the illogicality when Denver says while due to shortage of food she and Sethe is growing thin Beloved is pumping up, although Beloved could have eaten their parts but when everything is over it is impossible for even Beloved to grow fat, this is then is nothing but Denver and Sethe’s illusion in regards of schizophrenic perception. Sethe has left her job, ended all her savings till then and no one no longer is said to be going out even for shopping. How can Beloved even fatten. Beloved is thus an object of both the mother and daughter’s perception,

with the author trying to expand the then doppelganger to somewhat schizophrenic possibility as of what is commonly called split personality, Sethe performing own role as well as Beloved's role herself unknowingly. Inexistence of Beloved is very much proved when she disappears as soon as the community women comes to tackle her ghostly character's appearance. Denver, the speaker at this section, although says that some thirty women of the neighbourhood has gathered and is shocked when Beloved appears naked with her but with a pregnant belly, never ever mentioned before, and then says that Beloved has suddenly disappeared and is nowhere to be found anymore. Encountered with the reality when Ella punches Sethe when she is to attack MrBodwin, may be relating him with the Schoolteacher who has come likewise eighteen years ago, as she has not much moved far from thoughts of that distant past, Denver has also then come to terms with the actual happening on the front yard of 124, till then just narrating from being away, and so concludes saying that Beloved is gone, as is found in the novel's ending scene- "Disappeared, some say, exploded right before their eyes" (Morrison 310).

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