1. Introduction

The problem of the double personality has been of central concern to man from primitive times to the present. In essence, the appearance of the Double is an aspect of man’s eternal desire to solve the enigma of his own identity. By seeking to read the riddle of his soul in its myriad manifestations, man is brought face to face with his own mysterious mirror image, an image which he confronts with mingled curiosity and fear. This simultaneous attraction and repulsion arises from the inherently ambivalent nature of the Double, which may embody not only good, creative characteristics but also evil, destructive ones. In the most complete sense of the word, the Double is the form given to any and all personifications of man’s ego in both the psychic and the physical world.

The theme of the Double has its origins in the earliest tribal traditions and superstitions which regard the shadow, the reflection, and the portrait as equivalent to the human soul. The evolution of the Double in mythology and literature is traced in detail by Otto Rank who analyzes the gradual shift from the conception of the Double as the immortal soul to that of the Double as the symbol of death. Recently, the validity of the Double in real life has been confirmed on a scientific basis by modern psychologists in their investigations of the schizophrenic personality.

The subject of the Double, then, is significant on several levels: sociological, philosophical, and psychological. In the nineteenth century, this many-faceted figure became a favourite topic in Romantic literature. Preoccupied with the development of all phases of the self, the Romantics found in the Double an intriguing expression for the multiple, irrational forces in man. By the creation and extension of a new personality, man’s intricate, paradoxical nature could realize itself more fully. Perhaps the most important result of this recognition of contradictions in man’s character was a fresh insight into the complex question of identity.

The forms which the Double takes in nineteenth century literature are as diverse as the comparisons and contrasts of personality which they express. As Rank writes, the gamut of variation runs “from the naïve, tragic, almost pathological loss of one’s real self through a superimposed one.” In passing, it is possible to refer to only a few examples of the differences in the treatment of the Double, which may, for example, appear as a shadow, reflection, portrait, brother, twin, phantom, or hallucination.

Edgar Allan Poe portrays the Double as a personification of conscience in “William Wilson,” but this incarnation of the Double as a guardian angel is rare, representative as it is of the primitive concept of the Double as immortal soul. More often, the Double assumes the evil repressed characteristics of its master and becomes an ape or shadow which presages destruction and death. This is the case with Robert Louis Stevenson’s Mr. Hyde and Oscar Wilde’s portrait of Dorian Gray. Each of these distorted Doubles reflects, by its increasing power over the original, the growth of degradation and disintegration in its counterpart.

In such situations, where the Double symbolizes the evil or repressed elements in man’s nature, the apparition of the Double “becomes a persecution by it, the repressed material returns in the form of that which represses.” Man’s instinct to avoid or ignore the unpleasant aspects of his character turns into an active terror when he is faced by his Double, which resurrects those very parts of his personality which he sought to escape. The confrontation of the Double in these instances usually result in a duel which ends in insanity or death for the original hero.
It is this dangerous embodiment of the Double in two of Dostoyevsky’s novels which is the subject of our paper. The device of the Double, although an omen of doom, is instructive since it often reveals hitherto concealed character traits in a radical manner and thus frequently throws unreconciled inner conflicts into sharper relief. However, the recurrence of the double personality in Dostoevsky’s novels is more than a mere technique for clarifying the psychic oppositions; it is the core of Dostoevsky’s own polemical philosophy.

It is not enough to create a category of Doubles as Ernest Simmons does and to classify every pair of Doubles under the same heading without making certain careful detailed distinctions. Granted, the Double in Dostoevsky’s novels is emblematic of his central concept of the duality of man, but each pair of Doubles has its own unique qualities, so that the task is to differentiate between subtleties of relationship, between physical and psychic likeness and differences, attractions and repulsions. Each split character takes form according to the condition of the psychic state, and a detailed study of these manifestations of the Double personality reflects additional light upon the essential discord from which the division grew.

The stories of Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin and Ivan Fyodorovitch Karamazov mark the approximate beginning and end of Dostoevsky’s writing career. Although Ivan has been closely analyzed by critics, Golyadkin is seldom devoted over a few paragraphs of comment, and we feel that he deserves a good deal more than a rapid summary since his truly the “psychological embryo of all ‘split’ characters created by Dostoevsky.” In our study we shall emphasize symbolic motifs used to accentuate the division of the ego and point out parallels, where relevant, to other Doubles in nineteenth century literature. AS Golyadkin and Ivan illustrate respectively the seed and the final fruit of the series of Doubles in Dostoevsky’s novels, a comparison and contrast of these two figures should serve to indicate the vast range and vital relationships in Dostoevsky’s development as a writer.

It would be both precarious and presumptuous for a novice in psychology to attempt a clinical analysis of the Double; yet, in considering the literary form of the Double, it is helpful to have a certain amount background in the psychological sources and symptoms of schizophrenia. Thus the basic theories of the split personality may be briefly noted in this paper, but our chief problems here is not to diagnose mental maladies, imposing order from the outside. Rather, we shall stress the intrinsic technique of the stories themselves and seek to find in the concrete expression of divided character the abstract conflicts which are the polarities of Dostoevsky’s universe.