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Theme in *The Secret Sharer*

The Polish born author Joseph Conrad is considered as an early modernist. The passion for sea was in his veins and ligaments. He used nautical imageries in almost all of his writings i.e. novels and short-stories. An eminent critic said, "Conrad was always at heart a writer who sailed rather than a sailor who wrote." He employed his own experiences of marine life in his novels and short-stories. To some extent it will not be an exaggeration to say that nautical setting has become a motif in his writing canon. It is also right that though he mainly put his practical experiences of sailing in his writing, there are many writings in his credit which are free from nautical motif.

As he is considered as the early modernist, he not only introduced new topic or subject-matter in his writing, he also brought new technique of writing. Thus, he is not only a modern writer rather a modernist writer. He introduced a new kind of story-telling technique. He started to use embedded narrator in his novels. Thematically, he uses psychologically as a subject-matter of his writings. He, very minutely, peed into the inner psyche of human beings. This is found in almost all of his writings. In this present context we try to look into major theme in *The Secret Sharer*.

As it has already been said that Conrad is a modernist writer and used human psychology as a leit-motif in his short-story. The present story under discussion is not an exception. One such theme in this story is the theme of 'doppelganger'. If we give a cursory look about the origin of the term 'doppelganger', we will find that the term is of German origin. The word is a compound noun and has been derived from two German words—*dopple* meaning 'double' and *gänger* meaning 'walker or goer'. So literally it means a double walker. It is an identical double self of a living person without any umbilical bond. In fiction and mythology doppelganger is presented as a harbinger of bad luck in forms of ghost or paranormal phenomenon. Another term for it is 'twin stranger'.

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Like any other short-stories the present one opens its curtain abruptly. As the story progresses, it may seem to be an old-fashioned tale of adventure. There is no exaggeration of facts. A Captain, his two of subordinate sailor and an absconding murderer from another ship are the characters. From the encounter in between the Captain and the murderer, the duality of each and every person is extracted in the course of the story. The story also depicts how that person resolves that duality to grow. This dual nature in a person's character is also attributed as 'alter-ego'. Here, an analogy can be drawn from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* There Marlow went into Congo Africa, to rescue Kurtz. The journey was both a physical and psychological one. Due to this journey the inner self of Marlow got an illumination besides being illuminated with the stark reality of colonialism in the name of 'white man's burden'.

When the present story begins, from the narrator i.e. the Captain of the ship we come to know that he is a novice in his present profession as a captain and he has been appointed to the present post just fifteen days before the commencement of the present journey. The narrator also admits that he has secured his present position not for his experience but for a certain kind of lobby. That is to say that out of nepotism the narrator has been appointed to this present position. Naturally, he is not mature enough and he has a want of authoritative of voice. But as soon as Leggatt, the absconding murderer from a ship, appears, everything starts to take a new turn.

The rendezvous with Leggatt creates a sea change in the personality of the Captain. From here we find the doppelganger theme in this story. Leggatt is represented as a murderer, who murders one of his crewmen, though unintentionally, not for getting any help from him. So, he is not morally correct. So, it reflects on the immoral part of each and every person's psyche. He also suggests the brutal side and irrational side of human nature. The Captain, on the contrary stands as the emblem of the good nature of human being. He represents rationality and morality of human psyche. The caption is suggestive of the timid nature of man. On the other hand, Leggatt suggest the brave nature of man from his adventurous venture to take shelter in the ship of the Captain absconding from his own ship. The civilised side of man is

represented by the Captain, whereas, Leggatt, represents the uncivilised and uncanny nature of man.

The mixture of Leggatt and the Captain can only build a perfect commander in its true sense. without any of them a perfect commander is unimaginable.

Conrad's employment of doppelganger theme helps readers to put a light into the tunnel of their own psyche. This theme is suggestive of a struggle for a balance between one's rational and irrational, moral and immoral, timid and bold nature. It also focuses on the public and private selves of a person.

Reference:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doppelg%C3%A4nger
2. Cliff Notes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *the Secret sharer* by Dan Moran

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ENGLISH (CC); SEM-III: PAPER- C6T (*The Secret Sharer*)