



**Universitat de les  
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Facultat Filologia Espanyola, Moderna i Clàssica

**Memòria del Treball de Fi de Grau**

The Double in *William Wilson* and *The Secret  
Sharer*

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**Grau d'Estudis Anglesos**

Any acadèmic 2018-19

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Abstract: This paper analyses and compares the figure of the double in Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson* and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. It will examine how this theme is already present within the titles of both stories and how it is influenced by narrative perspective. Using Lubomír Doležel typology of the theme of the double it will then categorise and compare the ones present in the short stories.. It shall then provide different readings and interpretations for these doublings. Finally, it shall prove that the differences between the use of the double in the two stories are a reflection of the literary movements to which they belong.

Key Words: Double, Narrator, Uncertainty, Modernism, Gothic

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## **Introduction**

*William Wilson* is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). It was originally published in 1839 in *The Gift: a Christmas and New Year's Present for 1840* and later collected in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). The plot follows from childhood till adulthood the bitter rivalry between two characters who resemble each other in every single detail. *The Secret Sharer* is a short story written by Joseph Conrad (1857-1924). It was written in December of 1909 and published a year later in *Harper's Magazine*. Two years later it was included in *Twixt Land and Sea*. Taking place on a ship, the story portrays the first voyage of a recently promoted captain. The captain's journey will be marked by the encounter with man who appears to be his double. The protagonist will hide this man on his ship and eventually risk his ship and crew to secure the sailor's freedom. This essay is concerned with the presence of figure of the double in both stories. It will describe and compare how it is used by both authors. In order to do so, it will first focus on the titles and narrators of each story in terms of how they relate to the doubling. It will then examine in detail the nature of the double and afterwards, it will provide different interpretations for it. Finally, it will look at the literary movement to which each authors belongs and argue that it explains and reflects how they use the figure of double.

## **Titles and Narrators**

The idea of the double or doubling is already part of the titles of both stories, which hint and play with two possible interpretations or readings. For only having two words, *William Wilson* is very revealing. The first word, *William*, can be read as "Will I am", as if the narrator is asserting that he is the original William and that his double is nothing more than a copy. Will can also be interpreted in the sense of mental capacity or discipline, therefore implying that the narrator is the one in control of his mental faculties. Similarly, *Willson* or "Will's son" may be viewed as a possible suggestion that the narrator is the literal or metaphoric son of his double and or the son of will, as in mental capacity or discipline. Likewise, *The Secret Sharer* also plays with two meanings. As Cedric Watts points out in the Oxford Edition, originally "in the magazine text, the title was 'The Secret-Sharer', which means 'the sharer of a secret'" (2008, 228). This "sharer" could either be a reference to the protagonist or to his double Leggatt since they both are aware of each other's secret: Leggatt's crime and the captain's estrangement and feeling of inadequacy with his crew. The second possible interpretation, which Watts considers more appropriate and defines as "the unhyphenated

version, which means ‘the person who secretly shares’” (2008, 228), could neatly fit with Leggatt, the hidden passenger on the boat. However, the captain could also be this “person who secretly shares” (228) since he is frequently sneaking away from his crew to speak in his private chambers with Leggatt.

Like the ambiguous titles, the reader should be wary of placing their full trust in the narrators. In both stories, the plot is explained through a first person subjective point of view and after some time has passed since the final encounter with the double. Throughout the two narratives, there are several details or moments which reveal the unreliable nature of the two narrators. In *William Wilson*, the first and most obvious one is the fact that the narrator’s name is not William Wilson: “Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation” (Poe 2008, 66). Besides changing his name, he also decides to omit certain details and events of his life “I do not wish to trace the course of my miserable profligacy here” (75). Furthermore, the narrator makes it clear to the reader that he is terminally ill or close to death: “Death approaches (66); and he even calls into question his perception of reality: “And am I not now dying a victim to the horror and the mystery of the wildest of all sublunary visions?” (66) Even if we accept his current judgement as completely truthful, it is still possible to doubt the objectivity of the narrator’s perception of the events when they were happening. The first feature of himself and his family that he reveals is that they have always possessed an “imaginative and easily excitable temperament” (67). As he moves on to his school years to detail the first encounters with his double, he confesses that he “was never able to ascertain with precision, in what remote locality lay the little sleeping apartment assigned to myself and some eighteen or twenty scholars” (69). It may be argued that this is not far from the norm for most children but this confession may also be read as hint or clue, pointing to a faulty perception of reality and therefore calling into question the nature of the events that transpired during his school life. Similarly, before the second encounter with his double, the narrator explains that at the time he was “Wildly excited with wine” (76). Besides these two moments, the event that reveals, without a shadow of a doubt, the narrator’s unreliable grasp of reality is the final confrontation with his double. Firstly, because he misconceives the distribution of the room: “The brief moment in which I averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce, apparently, a material change in the arrangements at the upper or farther end of the room. A large mirror, —

so at first it seemed to me in my confusion— now stood where none had been perceptible before” (Poe 2008, 83) and secondly because it is finally revealed that his supposed double is his reflection in the mirror “It was my antagonist —it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution. His mask and cloak lay, where he had thrown them, upon the floor. Not a thread in all his raiment —not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, *mine own!*” (83).

Although far less explicit and to a lesser extent than Wilson’s narrative, the unnamed protagonist of *The Secret Sharer* also proves to be a less than trustworthy narrator. The passing of time seems to have muddled the captain’s recollection of the events. When the captain of the *Sephora* comes aboard his ship, he is unable to recall the man’s name “(it was something like Archibold- but at this distance of years I hardly am sure)” (Conrad 2008, 197). Unlike William Wilson, who consciously chooses to remove the name of those involved, the narrator of Conrad’s story does not seem to do it purposefully. Further evidence that the captain’s memory of the events is slightly muddled, can be found in the possible mixing of dates: “The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water)— the fourth day, I say” (206). Unable to remember the exact date, he has to remind himself of other details in order in order to reassure, probably himself and the reader, that he is correct. Like with Poe’s story, the narrator’s unreliability is not simply reduced to his memory of the events. Throughout the story there is evidence that it is difficult to be certain to what extent the captain was able to grasp the situation objectively. Before Leggatt comes on to the boat, the captain remarks that at that time he was feeling unease and discomfort with his new position, his ship and even his crew: “My strangeness, which had made me sleepless, had prompted that unconventional arrangement, as if I had expected in those solitary hours of the night to get on terms with the ship of which I knew nothing, manned by men of whom I knew very little more.” (182) As soon as Leggatt is on the boat he begins to describe him such terms as “my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror”(186), “my secret self” (195) and even more explicitly as “my double” (186). If they were so similar wouldn’t captain Archibold have confused the protagonist with Leggatt when he came onto the ship? Is it not strange that the protagonist is the only person aboard his ship that ever sees Leggatt? Even the captain himself at the end of the story is calling into doubt his own perception and questioning the nature of

his supposed double: “When at last I did I saw him standing bolt-upright in the narrow recessed part. It would not be true to say I had a shock, but an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted” (Conrad 2008, 207). Perhaps the uncertainty of some elements of the story is not simply the product of a faulty memory or mental distress but of conscious forgetfulness and just like William Wilson changes his name to avoid the scorn of his fellow men, so does the protagonist of *The Secret Sharer* let some things slip his mind. If Leggatt, is the murderer captain Archibold believes him to be, then the protagonist harboured a criminal and later endangered his ship and crew to help him escape. Thus it wouldn't be surprising if he omitted, changed or misremembered aspects of the story in order to avoid any possible punishment or reprisal for his actions.

Regardless of their similarities and differences, at the core of the narrator's two stories is a doubling or the presence of a character that appears to be identical to them. This phenomena is the driving force behind both narratives and as Juliana de Nooy points out “The double represents a transgression of the unity that defines character, a transgression that sets the story in motion but that must be resolved for the narrative to end” (1991, 20). This is true for both stories: in *William Wilson* the reason that sends the narrator into “a profligacy which set at defiance of laws, while it eluded the vigilance of the institution.” (Poe 2008, 75) is the discovery that his playground rival is in fact his double. In a similar manner, the decision to hide Leggatt is what creates the opportunity for the captain to test “how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly” (Conrad 2008, 181). Furthermore, the plot is resolved in each story once the double has disappeared: Wilson's downfall is made definitive when he destroys his double: “henceforward art thou also dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope!” (83); and the captain is able to achieve “the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.” (217) by saving his ship after Leggatt has left it.

Although superficially similar, the doubling in each story is different. This becomes evident if take into consideration Lubomír Doležel's typology of the figure of the double. According to this analysis, there are three types of doubles: “the theme of Orlando”, “the theme of Amphitryon” and “the theme of the double” (De Nooy 1991, 20). Additionally, he makes three distinctions within the theme of the double on the basis of their “modes of

construction” (De Nooy 1991, 20): “1) The double is constructed by fusing two originally separate individuals” (468); 2) “2) The double is engendered by the division of an originally single individual” (469); “3) The double is engendered by the process of metamorphosis” (469)” (1991, 20) as quoted in *The Double Scission: Dällenbach, Doležel, and Derrida on Doubles* by Julianna de Nooy. Taking this into consideration, it seems that what appears in Edgar Allan Poe’s story is the theme of the double. The doubling in *William Wilson* seems to fit almost perfectly with Doležel’s definition of this particular type of double: “two alternating incarnations of a single individual coexist in a single fictional world. (464)” as quoted in *The Double Scission: Dällenbach, Doležel, and Derrida on Doubles*. (1991, 20); and in regards to it’s construction or origin it would be the result of an original division. Besides the ending, evidence for this can be found in the fact that the narrator remarks that his double “bore the same Christian and surname as myself” (Poe 2008, 70) and that they were born on the same day (71). Moreover, both characters entered school the exact same day and were believed to be brothers (71). In terms of physical appearance the narrator also tells the reader “we were of the same age, but I saw that we were of the same height, and I perceived that we were even singularly alike in general contour of person and outline of feature” (72).

If the characters remarkable degree of similarity is unambiguous, the same cannot be said for the their coexistence. Both William Wilsons inhabit the same space but the the tale’s resolution seems to imply that the double is the product of the narrators mind or imagination. During the final confrontation with the other William Wilson the narrator reveals that were he believed to be his rival, there was only “a large mirror,—so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image,” (83). The other William Wilson’s last words leave almost no shadow of doubt of his true nature: “You have conquered, and I yield. Yet henceforward art thou also dead -- dead to the world and its hopes. In me didst thou exist -- and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.” (83) Additionally, before his rival’s final words, the protagonist describes that “he spoke in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said:” (83) Even before the plot’s resolution, there are signs that the double is a fabrication of the narrator’s mind. Besides his unreliable nature, which has already been discussed, there is also the fact that the other Wilson is only acknowledged by him. During his school years he finds



comfort “in the fact that the imitation, apparently was noticed by myself alone” (Poe 2008, 73) but is still puzzled by it: “That the school, indeed, did not feel his design, perceive its accomplishment, and participate in his sneer, was, for many anxious months, a riddle I could not resolve” (73). On top of that, there is also the double’s voice and the manner in which he speaks. First we are told that he “had a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time above a very low whisper.” (72) which would seemingly differentiate him from the narrator but he soon discovers that their voices share the same key and that unmistakably “it was identical, and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own” (73). Another piece of evidence that demonstrates that the double is a figment of the narrator’s imagination is the constant pursuit he subjects him to. Wherever the protagonist goes, the other William Wilson mysteriously and suddenly appears with the only goal of sabotaging his plans: “Scarcely had I set foot in Paris ere I had fresh evidence of the detestable interest taken by this Wilson in my concerns. Years flew, while I experienced no relief. Villain! -- at Rome, with how untimely, yet with how spectral an officiousness, stepped he in between me and my ambition! At Vienna, too, at Berlin, and at Moscow!” (81)

Despite the strength of the claim that that the double is a product of the protagonist’s imagination, there are certain inconsistencies or incongruities in the story that perhaps point towards the contrary. When the other William Wilson interrupts the narrator’s card game and reveals that he has been cheating, the other players quickly seize him and ask him to leave. (78-79) The fact that the door opens and that other players hear what the other William Wilson says and act in accordance with it, suggest that he is a real physical presence. However, it is also plausible that it is the narrator who utters the whispers. The doors could have been open by a current of wind, which could explain why each candle in the room is extinguished (79). Moreover, they never actually see the other William Wilson “The darkness, however, was now total; and we could only *feel* that he was standing in our midst.” (79) The other moment that strongly points towards the possibility that the other William Wilson is real occurs immediately after the protagonist leaves the card game. While he is leaving the house a servant stops him and gives him his cloak. However he remarks that “I perceived my own already hanging on my arm, (where I had no doubt unwittingly placed it,) and that the one presented me was but its exact counterpart in every particular. The singular being who had so disastrously exposed me, had been muffled, I remembered, in a cloak; and none had been

worn at all by any of the members of our party with the exception of myself.” (Poe 2008, 80) If this is the double’s cloak, then it is clear physical evidence that there is another William Wilson and that he is present in the real world. However, these inconsistencies can be rationalised if we accept Nancy Berkowitz Bate’s reading of the story. What she proposes is “a reading of the tale as a dream narrative in which the narrator, not his double, is the spectre—a dream persona, doomed to inhabit the fictive world of which his double dreams.” (1999, 27) By switching the roles between characters and the rules and nature of the world they inhabit, Bate is able to resolve the inconsistencies present in the narrative. As she points out “Those elements of “William Wilson” that are often accounted for by the “lunacy” of the narrator may just as easily be considered typical elements of dream narratives.” (1999, 27).

Unlike Poe’s story, *The Secret Sharer*’s doubling fits more with what Doležel defines as “The theme of Amphitryon, where two perfectly similar individuals coexist in the selfsame world (464)” (De Nooy 1991, 20) as quoted in *The Double Scission: Dällenbach, Doležel, and Derrida on Doubles*. However, what distinguishes it from the theme of the double is that at first it “appears to defy the idea of originary unity but ultimately reinforces, for the identity of the two (their doubleness) is revealed to be an illusion.” (De Nooy 1991, 20) Like the two William Wilson’s, Leggatt and the captain are physically similar. The narrator describes him as “my own reflection” (Conrad 2008, 186) and when he sees his double sleeping in his chamber he remarks that “he must have looked exactly as I used to look in that bed”(194). Just like Poe’s characters, the doubling does not stop there and “The likeness extends to social class, professional background and occupational situation: both are ex-Conway boys, and thus members of a British social and maritime elite; both have the tone, style, phraseology and assumptions of gentlemen rather than of the working class.” (Watts 1977, 25). However, in contrast to William Wilson’s double, Leggatt does seem to be a real, distinct individual that is separate from the captain. Leggatt, unlike Poe’s double, does have a name of his own, implying a much more higher degree of personal autonomy than his counterpart in *William Wilson*. He also appears to be a real physical presence in the world that is recognised by others. This is illustrated when captain Archibold of the *Sephora* comes aboard the ship to ask if the protagonist and his crew have seen Leggatt (197). Someone from outside the ship, who is not the narrator recognises and talks about the supposed double. This is evidence that Leggatt an autonomous being, that does not spring from the narrator’s mind. At no point

during William Wilson is the protagonist's double so clearly acknowledged by other characters. The double in Poe's story is the result of a division of a single individual but in *The Secret Sharer*, the doubles are, despite their many similarities, individuals with differentiated personal identities.

In *The Secret Sharer* there is no moment of ultimate revelation, at least in regards to the doubling. There is no moment, such as the mirror scene in *William Wilson*, where the tale's secret is unveiled. By the end of the story, the reader must weigh the evidence and decide whether he chooses to trust the narrator. The question is not so much if Leggatt was the captain's double but if he was ever on the ship at all. The truth is that the captain is the only character that ever sees and speaks to Leggatt. It is equally true that when Leggatt comes on to the ship, the only person on deck is the captain and that he then spends most of his time hiding in the captain's quarters. Both characters only speak to each other in whispers, which could be justified as a precaution to avoid being caught. These are all rational explanations or justifications but there is no way to fully prove without a shadow of doubt that Leggatt was on the ship. For example, like in *William Wilson*, the whispering could be read as proof that there was never a double on the ship, especially if we take into consideration that the captain described feeling "that queer sense of whispering to myself." (Conrad 2008, 196) when he spoke to Leggatt. Furthermore, at one point he characterises his double as a "grey ghost" (188) and following with this idea he later remarks that his encounter with Leggatt "was like being haunted." (207) Ultimately, the narrator, like the reader, is no longer certain of what he has seen: "Can it be, I asked myself, that is not visible to other eyes than mine?" (207)

Besides Leggatt, Archibold can also be interpreted as a sort of double that reflects and contrasts with the protagonist. Both characters are captains of ships, one young and the other old, one with little or no experience in a position of command and one with at least "fifteen years." (198) Captain Archibold is searching for Leggatt, while the protagonist is hiding him. However, the most important difference between them is their reaction in front of a critical situation. According to Leggatt's account, when confronted with a critical situation that endangered his ship and his crew, captain Archibold was unable to fulfil his duty: "all his nerve went to pieces altogether in that hellish spell of bad weather" (191). Oppositely, at the end of the story, the protagonist is able to take command of his ship during a dangerous

situation, saving his crew and achieving “perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.” (Conrad 2008, 217)

### **Finding Meaning in The Double**

The nature of the double in *William Wilson*, that is, one which stems from an original being and the resolution of the conflict between the two main characters give weight to the idea of reading the story as a representation or metaphor of psychological conflict. Taking a cue from the title, the tale can be understood as a battle between wills. The other *Willson* would be the protagonist's conscience or a personification of his morality that attempts to assert itself and control or ameliorate his worst impulses. There is evidence in the text that the other William Wilson is the narrator's moral compass. Regarding his double he admits that “his moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom, was far keener than my own;” (Poe 2008, 73) Furthermore, after leaving school, he only encounters his double when he committing acts of dubious moral standing. A fact of which he is fully aware: “in no one of the multiplied instances in which he had of late crossed my path, had he so crossed it except to frustrate those schemes, or to disturb those actions, which if fully carried out, might have resulted in bitter mischief. Poor justification this, in truth, for an authority so imperiously assumed! Poor indemnity for natural rights of self-agency so pertinaciously, so insultingly denied!” (81). There is a certain irony in the wording he chooses to express his frustration since his rights of “self-agency that are “denied” are opposed by himself. The rivalry between the two William Wilson's is a conflict between the narrator's desire to indulge himself in all pleasures, regardless of the morality of his action and his moral conscience that rebels against such actions. The narrators final victory is in fact the exact opposite, by eliminating his double he silences any sense or morality that could challenge his behaviour. This ultimately causes him to become “an object for the scorn, for the horror, for the detestation of my race.” (66)

Following with the theme of psychological readings, psychoanalysis is also a rich lens through through which William Wilson can be interpreted. In *"Oh Gigantic Paradox": Poe's "William Wilson" and the Jungian Self*, D.J. Moores uses Jungian theories of psyche to analyse the story. According to his reading the rivalry between the two William Wilsons is a representation of a neurosis in which between the conscious ego and the unconscious shadow are at odds with each other. The narrator as the conscious ego is unable to recognise the unconscious shadow as part of itself. This is because the “shadow consists of the unwanted,

undesirable, loathsome character traits and impulses the ego finds distressing. Because such aspects of self pose a significant threat to the ego, they are repressed, buried in a trash heap in the unconscious. Whereas Freud reduced unconscious energies primarily to libido, Jung left open the possibility that the shadow could also contain anything the ego finds threatening and thus rejects.” (Moore 2006, 33) The double’s actions and attempts to foil the narrator’s plans are a rebellion of the shadow self demanding its recognition. The protagonist’s inability to accommodate to the other William Wilson are contrary to what is considered from a Jungian perspective to be positive psychological development. By choosing to destroy his shadow he is condemning himself to “live in a state of psychic disease in which he will be only half a man, only half of a polarized, contradictory state of unconsciousness vying with consciousness for control of ego.” (35) Moore also adapts his Jungian interpretation to Bates’ subversive reading in which the narrator becomes “the spectre—a dream persona, doomed to inhabit the fictive world of which his double dreams” (2006, 27). The conflict is unchanged but the role is switched, the narrator now becomes “the shadow persona whose impulses are a constant source of distress to the sleeping subject.” (Moore 2006, 40) The other William Wilson’s actions are therefore attempts to correct or reject “his darkness” (43) and his supposed destruction is “a kind of divorce agreement in which both parties, half-conscious of each other’s existence, agree to divide up the psychic assets and properties.” (45)

Yonjae Jung also reads the story through a psychoanalytical lens but from a Lacanian perspective. According to this reading “the second Wilson can be seen as the first Wilson’s Imaginary double of the self or specular *imago* reflected in the mirror.” (2000, 386). The conflict between the two characters is therefore “a reproduction of the infantile mirror stage which structures the subject himself as his own rival and accordingly provokes the paranoid violence and aggressivity.” (Jung 2000, 392). The narrator’s disdain for his double stems from his inability to internalise “the Law or Name of the Father that allows him to enter the Symbolic order.” (393) Since in his early childhood he was allowed free reign to fulfil all his desires, he lacks a strong paternal figure or authority. Therefore there was no “Oedipal identification” (398) that could have avoided his current situation. The protagonist is ultimately “trapped forever in the dual Imaginary structure when he forecloses what Lacan calls the paternal metaphor, or the Name-of-the-Father, embodied in the figure of the father.” (398) The freedom, the protagonist’s freedom he supposedly achieves by eliminating

or destroying his double is in fact the exact opposite because fundamentally “The narrator, like the Lacanian paranoid ego in the mirror stage, assumes his own mastery and autonomy, but it turns out to be nothing more than his *méconnaissance*.” (Jung 2000, 398-399)

Beyond the realm of psychology, Preyser believes that the story is an expression of sociopolitical anxieties. In the narrator’s rejection of his double, who is equal to him in almost every single aspect, “the truly gothic quality of the democratic predicament, as the truly gothic quality of the democratic predicament, as seen by Poe, comes into view, for democracy at one stroke turns every citizen into a potential competitor and makes the individual democrat declare war on his own desires” (Preyser, 2010, 103) Similarly, Bate’s also sees in *William Wilson* a form of social critique. In her inverted reading of the tale, the narrator’s existence is a direct challenge to the foundation of cartesian rationalism. He is a being that thinks but does not exist. In direct opposition to the scientific rationalism of his day, in “*William Wilson*, Poe promotes the dream as an alternative to philosophy/science as a source of Truth” (Bate 1998, 32)

Despite the differences between the two tales and their doubling, *The Secret Sharer* has also been subject to psychological readings. Reading into Conrad’s biography, Meyers sees Leggatt as “a paternal surrogate” (2015, 248). In Conrad’s father and Leggatt, he sees two men who “have committed a serious crime for a higher cause.”(248): saving the ship and fighting for Polish independence. In return for their actions “Both men were or soon would be unjustly convicted, expelled from their home and forced into exile.(248) The captain and Leggatt become vessels through which Conrad can explore his relationship with his father. Unlike his father, Leggatt is able to escape and be free and ,unlike Conrad who was only a child when his father was exiled, the captain is instrumental in helping him escape. What Conrad manages to do through the fiction is to free “himself from his subservient position as an imprisoned and impotent child and becomes a forceful man in charge of his father’s destiny.” (248)

Taking as a cue the narrator’s initial musing: I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly. (Conrad 2008, 181) Leggatt is also often seen as a source for personal knowledge or development. Focusing on the points of view of the story , Hoffman argues that Leggatt’s presence “creates the objectification of self through identification” (1962, 651). He provides

an opportunity for the narrator to test his inner doubts in the real world. ship. “Without Leggatt's crisis to serve as an outward reflection of his inner self, his conception of himself would remain subjective” (Hoffmann 1962, 651). The encounter with double’s purpose is to provide an answer to the captain original question of his true character. Likewise, Folsom sees Leggatt as a the source of “an insight which enables him to assume the role of commander” (1971, 17). Through his double’s account of his experience on the *Sephora* and captain Archibold’s behaviour the narrator understands “not to make the mistake of allowing his orders to be discussed rather than obeyed” (Folsom 1971, 19). Thanks to this newfound knowledge, the captain successfully saves his ship and leaves behind any sense of estrangement between himself, the ship and the crew. The relation between the protagonist and his double is not always seen as simply unidirectional. In *The Matter of Conscience in Conrad's The Secret Sharer*, Williams points out that Leggatt: “Even as the captain's other self, he represents this weakness as well as strength, and depends upon the captain to provide the same kind of moral support that the captain found in him.” (1964, 627) The encounter between them is mutually beneficial, however Leggatt seems to become dependent on the emotional created between them (627). In order to break it, the captain decides to risk his ship, his crew and his position to give him “In essence, this matter of conscience was a demonstration of sympathetic understanding that momentarily involved the risk of sharing Leggatt's doom in order to justify deserting him” (627)

Making a connection between Nietzsche’s critique of society and Conrad’s critique of Victorianism, Stanley W. Renner puts forward the idea that in *The Secret Sharer*: “Conrad dramatizes in fictional form the very process of healing that Nietzsche prescribes in his psycho-philosophical ramblings.” (2012, 147) The narrator’s initial feeling of estrangement towards his crew represent how “he is beginning to part ways with the prevailing morality embodied in the crew.” (151) His desire to put to the test his true character express a willingness to “know all of himself, including that hidden or buried self, of which his uneasy sense of strangeness and impulses of nonconformity have been intimations.” (151) Meeting his double and hiding him in his personal quarters is the next step in his process of psychological development. By letting Leggatt come on to his ship, he metaphorically “invites the other self-buried deep in his psyche to come into his consciousness.” (152) Captain Archibold’s appearance on the ship looking for the captain’s double represents the

“the institutionalized moral strictures of the culture ingrained in the narrator’s own mind” (Renner 2012, 154). By rejecting Archibold and everything he stands for the protagonist is further advancing his personal journey of self-discovery. Having protected himself and Leggatt from outside influence, the narrator is now ready to set him free and what this essentially means is that “on the figurative level the narrator is taking the next, crucial step in healing the sick division in his psyche.” (157) The dangers the captain exposes himself and his ship echo how “becoming healthy by liberating the lower, self-asserting, instinctual, animal self is a lonely process, it is also dangerous.” (157) By saving his ship, the protagonist has not only avoided a tragedy but also achieved psychological well-being.

Moving beyond a psychological readings, *The Secret Sharer* uses the protagonist, Leggatt and captain Archibold to challenge assumed notions of justice. Conrad puts forwards several moral conundrums that have no clear answer. Is it moral for the captain to harbour a supposed murderer on his ship without the consent of his crew? Is Leggatt’s murder justified, since according to his account it was the only way to save ship? Are captain Archibold’s motives pure? He faltered during a time of crisis and left the fate of the *Sephora* in the hands of his crew. Is he looking for Leggatt because he wishes to save his reputation or because he wants to bring him to justice? No authoritative answers rises to these questions. Like the question of whether or not Leggatt was ever on the protagonist’s ship, Conrad forces the reader to take sides in a world of uncertainties.

### **Conrad’s Modernism and Poe’s Gothic**

Ultimately the differences between the the two stories and the manner in which they deal with the the theme of the double is the result and consequence of literary movement to which the authors belong. Poe is perhaps the most famous author of American Gothic and Conrad is one of the earliest representatives of Modernism. In his fiction Poe used the “the conventions of Gothicism to create fine psychological fiction.” (Fisher 2002, 82) and so it is reflected in his treatment of the double. Although at first appearing have a supernatural origin, as is common in many tales of American Gothic (73), the doubling is revealed to be the product of a mystified and frail mind. The narrator’s unreliability is also part of Poe’s exploration of a troubled psyche and the disorientating architecture’s purpose is to mirror the character’s psychological confusion. The manner in which he characterises and differentiates the doubles is also reflective of American Gothic. The difference between the hedonistic and decadent



protagonist and pure and honest double can be interpreted as an expression of social anxiety caused by the strong presence of puritanism in American society. While echoing Poe's interest in psychology, Wilson's ultimate fate also embodies the same anxiety. The protagonist's downfall is caused by his inability to reconcile with his double and put an end to his inner crisis. This failure is what leads him to persist in his debauched behaviour and this results in his exclusion from society.

The doubling in *The Secret Sharer* illustrates several features of Conrad's blending of 19th century literary tradition and Modernism. If the doubling in Poe's story was the expression of psychological anguish, in Conrad's story its purpose is to create a moral test for the captain. This is a clear example of the influence that "Victorian novel, of individual moral choice" (Graham 1996, 204) has in Conrad's narratives. However, the presence of the double subverts and undermines the initial objective realism that the story presents itself with. This modernist subversion is furthered with the unreliable nature of the narrator and unprovable account of the double given of his experience on the *Sephora*. This echoes how Modernism "came to define itself in opposition to the positivistic, mechanical view of the universe that saw meaning as objective and single," (1996, 213). Although the tale concludes with the protagonist successfully overcoming his moral test, the encounter with the double leaves many unanswered and unanswerable questions that have been mentioned previously. The refusal to end the story with clear cut answers is modernist, in the sense that it highlights the insufficiencies and limited perspective of human consciousness and also part of a larger thread of Conrad's fiction that questioned and challenged Edwardian society and its values.

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