

As Bildungsroman: A short story *The Secret Sharer* by Joseph Conrad

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Joseph Conrad was a Polish-born English novelist and a short story writer. The scenario in *The Secret Sharer* should be viewed in the context of the late-Victorian preoccupation with the true self, the better self or the higher self. The prescribed story was first published in 1910. It is based on an actual incident. Here, the protagonist is a young and inexperienced captain of an anonymous ship. Through this paper I attempt to explore the story as a Bildungsroman—meaning a tale of a young man's formative years. This text is identical to Charles Dickens's "*David Copperfield*" and James Joyce's "*Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman*". Bildungsroman is a special kind of novel that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of its main character from his or her growth adulthood. Generally, such novel starts with the loss or a tragedy that disturbs the main character emotionally. It also relates the growing up of a sensitive person who goes in search of answers to his personal queries of life with the expectations that will result from gaining experiences of the world. Conrad's hero, the anonymous captain metamorphoses gradually into a man of confidence and command. He becomes a practical man with tremendous experience after he met, Leggatt. Therefore, this text "*The Secret Share*" of Conrad is a perfect specimen of Bildungsroman.

The story prevails in a sailing ship in a Gulf of Siam at present the Gulf of Thailand. It was heading from Cango to Britain in the context of the second half of the nineteenth century. The story is a first person narrative of an unnamed narrator who is a young captain. The tale begins just two weeks after he joins the job. So, in the first chapter we are introduced an inexperienced and an unsecured young captain. It centers on the struggle and psychoanalytic views of the protagonist. He contemplates on his personal queries in an anew threshold. Thus, the tale consisting of two chapters and gradually we find a sense of 'quest for identity' and adaptability in the protagonist. We can also come across 'duality' and interpersonal features in the story. One night, the captain was standing in the deck and suddenly he saw a half dead and naked body near the ladder. He helped him to elect onto the ship. He later learned that the stranger was a captain of a ship named Sephora and his name is Leggatt. He was a fugitive and a murderer. The narrator found him quite identical.

Thus, the speaker speaks to himself-

"My sleeping suit was just right for his size" (Conrad, p.16)
Again says-*"The shadowy, dark head, like mine"* (Conrad, p.14)

Therefore, we sense a connection of identical and interpersonal in between the narrator and Leggatt. He can be seen as the inner self of the protagonist and further a harbinger of his inner transformation. The inner conflict of the hero is being stressed by the author in the very beginning of the short story-

"...for there was no sign of human habitations as far as the eye could reach. To the left a group of barren islets, suggesting ruins of stones walls, towers and block houses..."(Conrad,p.8)

Perhaps Conrad associated his personal story with the young protagonist. Since, the writer lost his parents and became orphan at a very early age of eleven. Hence, Conrad depicts his own anxiety during his physical and mental growth. Similarly, Conrad's hero can be compared with Joyce's character Stephen Daedalus. Thus, in the story we also find the semi-autobiographical account. Conrad throughout the story implements various symbolisms to highlight the struggle of the protagonist. His fight for existence, identity and individuality become obvious throughout the tale. The young captain transforms from insecure and inexperienced to more confidence and a secure individual. At first, the captain could not realize his position and feel right about being in charge. Later, through his friendship with Leggatt, the secret sharer he finds identity and becomes a confident person. Therefore the title is quite subtle but intriguing. Here, we find mystery, duality, interpersonal, alienation, darkness and silence. During the mundane and dark formative years 'an imaginary friend' whom the protagonist referred as 'double' helped him to change into a better man. Here, we can also see Leggatt as the captain's inner self. Thus, the plot covers the youth of the captain in the high time to become a responsible adulthood. The captain becomes into the sea, an archetypal of spiritual mystery and infinity, death and rebirth, timelessness and eternity and the unconscious. It can also be seen as a resurrection of the young captain. Therefore, Leggatt can also be considered to Lord Jesus. He might have imagine Lord in the amidst of helplessness. The ship can, therefore, be seen as in a balance between unconscious and conscious. Even the blue colour of the sea symbolizes a positive side, truth, and spiritual purity. It also says, that the young Conrad lost hope and felt deserted but the only hope he had was upon the Lord Jesus. So, through this paper I tried to explore Joseph Conrad's short story as a true example of Bildungsroman.

Conclusion

Conrad's short story is also can be read as an adventure story. It will arouse interest to the young readers or teenagers. The various symbols and the role of 'mystery' and

supernatural elements would attract them. Here, we also find a sense of gothic romance and Biblical meanings behind the scenes. The dual nature of the protagonist creates mystery too. We also find a role and power of human imagination in the protagonist. Leggatt and the captain are doubles in appearance. They are identical in both height and weight. And though Leggatt was a murderer and fugitive he was a resolute fugitive because he claims justice in his action. Thus, all the personal queries and doubts of the captain is fulfilled through

the secret sharer. The crime committed by Leggatt says the very obstacles of the growing which is to overcome in the process of maturation. It gives a great lesson to the inexperience to struggle for his life. It is similar like knowledge from ignorance. We can further see it in other angle as- when we first come to this earth we remain dumb and along with observations and through we inculcate the wisdoms and knowledge of the world. Thus, Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* is a perfect example as Bildungsroman.

Works cited

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