

THE STORY OF THE SHARED LIVES IN *THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE*

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Abstract

The idea of the doppelganger is a phenomenon that has been questioned in literature and film industry as well as in psychology. Krzysztof Kieslowski in his film, The Double Life of Veronique, discusses the dilemma of a double life of a person, and how two doubles affect each other. Polish Weronika and French Veronique, the two identical protagonists who are not aware of each other's existence, share the same appearance and the same interests in life. Even their experiences in life draw a parallel between each other's lives. Their corporeal relation affects and changes their life paths. Their life paths intermingle; the effect that opens an incorporeal possibility on their minds enlarges their understanding of both themselves and life. In the end, the question is; whose double life we witness or is it designed in a way that in case any damage is done, the other one takes the place, like a puppet which is created double in case of any damage? The parallel in Freud's theory of the uncanny and in protagonists' relationship in the film, on the psychoanalytical level, provides a better understanding of the emotions that Kieslowski builds up in the film, and makes the audience to consider their own experiences and emotions in life. From this point of view, the film presents us many possibilities, different perspectives on the subject of the possible shared lives of the protagonists with the uncanny connection between them.

Keywords: *Doppelganger, corporeal and incorporeal, Kieslowski, Freud, the uncanny.*

VERONIQUE'İN İKİLİ YAŞAM'NDA PAYLAŞILAN HAYATLARIN HİKAYESİ

Öz

Eşruh fikri, edebiyatta ve film endüstrisinde olduğu kadar psikolojide de sorgulanan bir olgudur. Krzysztof Kieslowski, Veronique'nin İkili Yaşamı adlı filminde, bir kişinin ikili yaşam çıkmazını ve iki karakterin birbirini nasıl etkilediğini tartışıyor. Birbirlerinin varlığından haberdar olmayan iki özdeş kahraman olan Polonyalı Weronika ve Fransız

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Veronique, aynı dış görünümü ve aynı ilgi alanlarını paylaşır. Hayat deneyimleri dahi birbirlerinin yaşamları arasında bir paralellik kurar. Bedensel ilişkileri yaşam yollarını etkiler ve değiştirir. Yaşam yolları birbirine karışır; zihinlerinde tinsel bir olasılığa yer açan bu etki hem kendilerine hem de hayata dair anlayışlarını genişletir. Sonunda sorduğumuz soru ise şu olur: ‘Şahit olduğumuz yaşam kimin ikili yaşamıdır, ya da bu yaşam, herhangi bir hasar durumu göz önünde bulundurularak çift yaratılan bir kukla gibi, diğerinin yerini alacak şekilde mi tasarlanmıştır?’ Freud’un tekinsizlik kuramı ve filmdeki kahramanların ilişkisindeki paralellik, psikanalitik düzeyde, Kieslowski’nin filmde inşa ettiği duyguların daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlar ve izleyicinin hayattaki kendi deneyimlerini ve duygularını düşünmesine yol açar. Bu açıdan film, kahramanların olası ortak yaşamları konusunda, aralarındaki tekinsiz bağ ile birlikte bize pek çok olasılık, farklı bakış açıları sunar.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Eşruh, bedensel ve tinsel, Kieslowski, Freud, tekinsiz.*

1. Introduction

Krzysztof Kieslowski’s *The Double Life of Veronique* is about two different women who are identical in physical appearance and very similar in their interests and life choices. Polish Weronika as the counterpart of French Veronique is played by the same actress Irene Jacob, which emphasises their oneness in the audience’s eyes. Although they do not know each other, - except Weronika’s accidental, one moment encountering with Veronique- they feel each other’s presence and/or loss in them. One’s death both becomes the other’s second chance and her loss. Their existence intermingles with each other, and their life-paths cross and affect each other. Justin Derry’s perspective on the film gives us a possibility to look at the film beyond simple interpretations, connecting the film with the body ‘corporeal’ and with the sense, the affect ‘incorporeal’: “*The Double Life of Véronique* opens the possibility for a reading of life and the body as being immanently related to a differential field of indeterminate sense and incorporeal potential” (Derry, 2010: 1). He rightly points out these two terms as the film presents us a connection between the body, idea of doppelganger, intuition, chance, and destiny. Actually, he further explains the meaning of corporeal as “the body’s tendency to extend the boundaries of identity through time and space” (Derry, 2010: 2), and of incorporeal as “the body’s other tendency to extend beyond its boundary... [which opens] possibilities and a future that are inconceivable from any enclosed present” (Derry, 2010: 2). It also brings to the minds the idea of one person who lives two different lives at the same time and the idea of who is created double. In the film, the question of identity, Freudian uncanny feeling that is both familiar and strange, that both identifies and alienates the owner, in other words, the “I” in the “other” are explored. This article aims to present these questions in the film, the corporeal and the incorporeal connection between the protagonists; effects of potentials, coincidences, and decisions in their lives.

2. The doubles: Weronika and Veronique

The film starts with a childhood memory of the protagonists with their mothers who died when they were both in their infancy period. In an upside-down shot, significantly, one's mother shows the stars which are all unique in their forms, and the other's mother shows the patterns of the leaves which are again unique like fingerprints. The characters are unique in some ways but are the same in their appearances, and they have similarities in their inclinations. The upside-down shots are used to create a parallel between two main characters in the film, which is repeatedly emphasised throughout the plot. Veronique's looking at Alexandre through a mirror, use of magnifying glass, Weronika's looking at the landscapes through a marble in the train all emphasize the double life of the protagonists. Marek Haltof comments on the sense of doubling in the film as follows; "*The Double Life of Véronique* is the story about two coinciding paths, the conviction that there is 'another self', that one is not 'alone in the world'..." (2012: 118). The connection between the two characters is almost telepathic, and we can only understand this more explicitly in the second part of the film. The first, shorter part focuses on Weronika's life who is a talented singer and who has a free spirit, living her life joyfully. During her brief visit to her aunt in Krakow, she is invited to a choir audition, which would be an opportunity for her music career. But her music career as a choir singer is a threat to her health because of her heart condition. Despite that she has heart disease and although after she wins the audition she had a warning heart attack in the park, she chooses not to see a doctor and attends the concert which causes her death. Her death on the stage creates an intense effect, she dies while doing what she loves, but at the same time her death is untimely, she dies before she fulfils her dreams. But the camera shot at her funeral attracts attention, we see it from the corpse's eyes, we see the soil thrown onto the coffin as if to signify that she is not completely dead which hints Veronique's existence. Her death becomes Veronique's chance of course as we, later on, find out. Her interests in life, her habits, and the objects she is obsessed with become important when we begin to learn about Veronique. Weronika's music talent, the song she sings before she dies, her starred marble, her portfolio's string that she always plays with her fingers, her ring that she keeps rolling under her eyes, etc. The sense of a double life is emphasised through these details in the film. Veronique also has a starred marble, she also plays with a string, and rolls her ring under her eyes like Weronika does. The song Weronika performs on the stage becomes an important fact in Veronique's life, she also loves the same song, she teaches it to the children at the school she works, but also the song is heard in the background of her life all the time. It is figuratively like Weronika is always there in her life. They both exist beyond Weronika and Veronique's corporeal boundaries as a result of their corporeal responses, they make a parallel between each other's lives mystically, and instinctively Veronique learns from Weronika's mistakes or her choices in life.

Before Weronika dies, she makes a comment to her father and says that she feels like she is not alone in the world. This is a foreshadowing of the existence of Veronique and shortly after she

encounters the tourist Veronique in Krakow, her double, or doppelgänger on a bus. Kickasola explains this dilemma by coining the term “multivalent consciousness”. He takes the “multivalent” from science meaning the state of having more than one valence between molecules and adapts it to the film and says “can one person actually, in some way or another, have two or more simultaneous modes of existence” (2009: 169). When we first met Veronique, she echoes Weronika’s words in a different way; this time she feels her loss in her, she mourns for her death without knowing why she is sorry but feeling alone after a loss of a loved one. Later on, in the film, she confesses that she always felt like she was in two places at the same time, supporting Kickasola’s multivalent consciousness theory.

The Double Life of Véronique (1991) explores the idea of two people who may, in fact, be the same person: a doppelgänger story that suggests something of a forking- path narrative; though they are two distinct persons, we are pressed to think of them as the same person (particularly as they are played by the same actress, Irène Jacob) whose life outcomes were determined by various contingencies. (Kickasola, 2009: 170)

Veronique’s life outcomes, for sure, are connected to Weronika’s, they have parallel experiences, but Veronique survives, unlike Weronika. Veronique feels deep inside that, her decisions in life such as seeing a doctor because she feels something wrong with her heart, quitting her singer career sensing that it might be dangerous for her health, all depends on Weronika’s experiences in life. She senses and learns from her experiences; she does not repeat the same mistakes. Veronique says that she just knows what to do or choose in life, without knowing how. However, in the end, it is again Veronique’s own choice not to follow the same mistakes Weronika makes. It cannot be said that it is completely her destiny. No matter she feels instinctively what to do in order to survive, it is a dilemma of choosing a path; it is a free choice. They both sense each other for their entire lives, and they both make choices both dependently and independently of each other. Their different characters affect their decision in life. One chooses to follow her dreams, other in a more controlling manner chooses not to, because she feels the danger. As Kieslowski indicates “Veronique's constantly faced with the choice of whether or not to take the same road as the Polish Weronika, whether to give in to the artistic instinct and the tension intrinsic in art or to give in to love and all that it involves. That, basically, is her choice” (Stok, 1993: 185). At this point, Annette Insdorf’s remarks are worth to mention as she says “*The Double Life of Véronique*’s central question seems to be blatantly metaphysical: can there be – in God’s spectacle, which includes individual “damage” – a double who prepares us for survival? Or might some of us be the double who is setting the stage for another to live more wisely” (as cited in Haltof, 2012: 117). This point of view is emphasised in the scene of Alexandre’s puppet show at the school in which Veronique works as a music teacher. The show is about a ballerina who dies on the stage and her rebirth as a grown-up butterfly at the end. The puppet ballerina dies while she dances on the stage, and she is covered by a white sheet. At the end of the show, the ballerina is born again as a full-grown butterfly. The connection, the foreshadowing of the show with Veronique’s life is undeniable, a connection she is not aware of yet since she has not seen the photo of Weronika she took yet. The audience can easily identify the ballerina

with Weronika and the butterfly with Veronique. Alexandre also makes Veronique's dolls in double in case they get any damage during his shows. The puppets are identical in appearance and furthermore, they are created double interchangeably, as an alternative or substitute for the other. The double marionette signifies only insurance for the show and for Alexandre. The marionettes symbolise Weronika and Veronique, the doubles, and Alexandre's doll replicas of the two women represent their uncanny relationship. These incidents strengthen Veronique's double life and Insdorf's remarks of one individual who is created double. The story of Weronika and Veronique is more complicated than being a substitute for the other, of course. It cannot be said that Weronika exists just because she gives a second chance to Veronique in life. They are two unique characters, doppelgangers, who sense each other, who share the same bodily features, tastes, and experiences but who have different lives and who exist independently. Body double or doppelganger as a concept can be traced both in literature and in the seven art, the cinema industry. As for our film, the evidence supports the idea of doppelganger. Two protagonists are identical twins, as a figure of speech, as they are not actual sisters, but their appearance is identical, their bodies and even the gestures and habits they have resemble each other. Their love for music, their taste in music are the same. They pick the same songs to perform or to teach at school. They have an extreme talent for music. They also share the bodily weaknesses; they both have heart disease. They both lose their mothers very early and have a very close, caring relationship with their fathers. Like a mirror, they reflect each other, and therefore they feel the existence of the other in themselves. They are incorporeally connected as a reflection of their corporeal tendencies. Their corporeal resemblance affects them emotionally, and we see the effects on their minds. Doppelgangers are traditionally associated with bad luck, with death or with a series of mischievous circumstances. A common myth is that seeing the doppelganger of one's own is a signal of death which is dealt with in the film. As it is mentioned, both Weronika and Veronique feel the existence of the other instinctively, but Weronika dies soon after she actually sees her double on a bus in Krakow. In this scene, Veronique does not see her double but takes a photo of her unwittingly, which is later on discovered by the puppeteer, Alexandre. At this point, Freud's psychoanalysis can be used as a base. Freud in his essay, *The Uncanny* (2003), discusses the strange, unfamiliar and disturbing feeling born from the familiar in relation to the idea of doppelganger. The familiar traumatic events that encountered in the primitive stage of the mind and repressed in the unconsciousness, and when related visuals or situations reoccur in the adulthood, that familiar repressed feeling reveals itself creating a frightening uncanny familiarity. He connects the feeling with the infancy period. A child in the narcissistic stage creates multiple selves, which is an insurance against mortality, an insurance for the ego, and he adds that "... when this phase is surmounted, the meaning of the 'double' changes: having ones been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud, 2003: 178). Freud himself admits in a letter that he feels an uncanny resemblance to Arthur Schnitzler.

I think I have avoided you out of a kind fear of finding my own double [Doppelgänger Scheu] Not that I otherwise tend to identify easily with others or that I should wish to ignore the difference in talent which separates me from you; it is rather that when I read one of your beautiful works I seem to encounter again and again, behind the poetic fiction, the presumptions, interests, and conclusions so well known to me from my own thoughts. (as cited in Kupper & Rollman-Branch, 1959: 109)

Freud's and Schnitzler's early childhood experiences and their interests, choices in life resemble each other which are discussed in Kupper and Rollman-Branch's (1959) article in details. The same uncanny feeling can be applied to *The Double Life of Veronique*. As it is discussed before, the characters have similar experiences in life and have similar inclinations like Freud and Schnitzler. For Weronika, seeing her double, creates the Freudian uncanny feeling, and Veronique indeed becomes the harbinger of death for her. That strange feeling can be traced on Weronika's face when she, for a brief moment, sees Veronique. For Veronique, again in the Freudian sense, Weronika is like her guardian against mortality, the familiar narcissistic stage which turns out as an uncanny relationship. The ballerina shows at the school, Alexandre's two dolls, created for the other's substitute, Veronique's feel of loss like losing some part of her identity when Weronika dies all support this idea. Freud in his article analyses E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1821) in which the young protagonist Nathaniel is obsessed with a frightening children tale and the figure of Sandman in it, who comes and blinds children with sand. Nathaniel identifies the sandman with Coppélius recreating his childhood frightful imaginings of the Sandman that creates the uncanny effect. He also doubles his identification, this time with Coppola. He complicates the reality with the hallucinatory and creates a world in his mind. He falls in love with a doll, Olympia, thinking that she is real. Nathaniel tries to watch her through the binoculars-an object that can provide a better sight but at the same time can mislead the user like mirror or glass. The doll figure is significant both in the story and in the film as Kieslowski emphasises the role of the dolls connecting them with Weronika and Veronique. It is not exactly like in Hoffmann's story, the marionettes in the film contributes the double lives and the uncanny experience that both the characters and the audience feel when watching the film. They are not real beings but indicate the real existence of the doubles. Olympia in Sandman contributes the Nathaniel's state of mind that doubles the uncanniness and his own gaze at the other, alienated from the self, similar to scenes in the film when we see Veronique's strange gaze at Alexandre's marionettes and Weronika's peculiar gaze at Veronique on the bus in Krakow. Freud's connection between the narcissistic stage and uncanny are also explored in Schnitzler's works. In *Fraulein Else*, the inner monologues of Else reveals the conflict she faces on her mind between the superego and id. Her identity is divided between the expectations from her, and the moral standards both she and the society have. She is asked to find money for her father's debts in order to save him from the jail, but Dorsday only accepts to give the money if he can watch her naked for 15 minutes. Else is in dilemma of saving her father, and the feeling of shame that tears her consciousness apart. She becomes isolated and alienated not just from her surroundings and the society she lives in, but also from herself. She looks in the mirror and speaks to herself as if she is talking to someone else.

Am I really as pretty as I look in that mirror? Oh, won't you come closer, pretty Fraulein? I want to kiss your blood-red lips. What a pity the glass is between us, the cold glass. How well we should get on together. Shouldn't we? We shouldn't want anyone else. Perhaps there are no other people. (Schnitzler, 1998: 81-82)

She is self-alienated in the struggle and her ego is damaged. It is a narcissistic breakdown for her which is suppressed in her mind. As Klaus D. Hoppe mentions on Else's psychological condition, "Psychoanalytically speaking we are dealing with the classical conflict between superego and id, with the ego switching sides until it is finally crushed as if between two mill-stones" (1964: 5). Else commits suicide at the end of the novel, but she is still in a war in her mind between death and life. She both wants to survive and die, and that mirror scene in which she speaks to herself, creates a kind of a double effect for her, an insurance against mortality that turns out into a sign of death just like in the case of Kieslowski's film. Along with Freud's theory of the infancy period, Lacan's mirror stage theory which can be found in *Ecrits* (2005) can be traced in the film. Lacan asserts that until the mirror stage the child identifies himself/herself with the mother, and during the mirror stage the child discovers his/her identity as a separate entity. This period is the first self-alienating instance that the child feels. It is alienating because it is an outer image which the child identifies himself/herself as "I" in the mirror. We often watch Veronique looking at her own reflection through the mirror or see her reflection through windows. The scenes can both be interpreted as a reference to the narcissistic stage and to the mirror stage. In both cases, the double, seeing her exact same appearance creates the same unfamiliar feeling. It is both a pleasure and fear encountering the double; the identity is unsecured, it is traumatic for the mind, for the ego, but they also feel a kind of caring security in their hearts, knowing that they are not alone which is also emphasized by both Weronika and Veronique verbally. Therefore, the pain and the pleasure are intermingled in their lives. Weronika after the choir audition feels a warning heart attack, at the moment she feels quite happy, Veronique feels Weronika's loss just after the sex scene and also, after she finds out the photograph of Weronika, she loses herself into a deep cry, her cries become cries of pleasure as Alexandre tries to comfort her by kissing her. The loss is also the gain for Veronique, for she has another chance thanks to Weronika's existence.

Alexandre has an ambiguous role in the film, as his role in Veronique's awareness of her double is significant. He has many roles: as a love partner, as a puppeteer, or even as God in an artistic way. After the puppet show at the school, Alexandre sends Veronique some objects to attract her attention and to meet her again. But the objects he sends also hints Weronika's existence, especially the shoelace. It is very similar to the string Weronika used to play with her fingers, and Veronique does the same after she gets it. More significantly, it is also related to the diagram of heartbeats in front of Veronique. The director connects the shoelace with the life-giving organ of the human body-the heart. In the scene, we see Veronique looking at her test results and the diagram of her heartbeats and while she plays with the shoelace, at one second, she pulls it and makes a straight line which indicates the stopping of the heart, the end of life, the end of Weronika's life. Kieslowski deepens the connection at the scene by giving the

audience a glimpse of Weronika's last performance for the second time. As Derry says, "Each clue he [Alexandre] leaves is doubled by affective, incorporeal resonances that elicit Weronika's uncanny presence. The song Weronika sang when she died is heard in the background, ephemeral images of Weronika at the moment of her death are transposed over scenes of Véronique..." (2010: 3). Unlike Weronika, who does not take the clues of her illness seriously, Veronique learns from the damaged existence of her other-self. She quits her singing career but works as a music teacher in a school and teaches the same song Weronika sings during the concert, which indicates their connection. It is also Alexandre who makes her aware of that she actually took a photo of Weronika in Poland. As she empties her bag, we find out that she has the same starred marble- another connection between them through objects- and the photographs she took during her visit to Poland. With Alexandre's help she finds out the photograph of Weronika, which is a significant awareness for Veronique, as she finally can make sense of her feeling of living two lives at once, and her feeling of loss after her other self's death. The photograph enables her to complete the puzzle she has in her mind. She loses herself into a long and a deep cry after noticing the photo. This moment is a second birth for her, -figuratively similar to Alexandre's butterfly story born out of ballerina's death- born from a loss and just after that moment we remarkably see her rolling her ring under her eyes just like Weronika does, and this again, signifies their connection. Alexandre's role as a partner becomes complicated for Veronique after this scene, and when he makes the double puppet dolls of Veronique, it is finalised. He is no longer the lover figure she wants in her life. His remarks on the possible damage on one of the dolls, and his potential book inspired by Veronique's life such as her double's burning her fingers on the stove and how the other one escapes this by learning the previous one's experience instinctively frightens her, and she leaves the apartment to go to her father's house. Alexandre uses something very private, something mystical, something that causes Veronique's figurative death and maybe a second birth, something that shocks and leaves her in pain, for his book. Veronique, who is now aware of her double, and her effect in her own life cannot accept this, therefore leaves him in cries. "It becomes clear later that this puppet master has somehow acquired knowledge of Veronique's double, Weronika, and is using this knowledge both to seduce Veronique and to fabricate a story for another of his marionette dramas" (Santilli, 2006: 151). Kieslowski himself comments on this part as follows:

I imagine Veronique doesn't spend her life with Alexandre. At the end, you see her crying. She's crying when he suddenly reads her his book and the way she looks at him isn't in the least bit loving, because, in effect, he's used her life. He's used what he knows about her for his own purposes. I think she's much wiser at the end of the film than at the beginning. Alexandre's made her aware that... the other Weronika did exist... He understood, then used it. (Stok, 1993: 182)

After that scene of Veronique's leaving the apartment, she goes to her father's house, which reminds the audience of a person who finds his/her roots, and comfort again in the family house. The camera shot at the scene emphasises this by focusing on Veronique's touching a tree in front of her father's

house. The moment she touches the tree is a sign of a turning point in her life. She turns to her roots, accepts and understands her life, her double, and the uncanny connection between them.

3. Conclusion

The Double Life of Veronique is a film that leads people to think about the uncanny coincidences in life. The corporeal and the incorporeal connection between Weronika and Veronique shocks the audience, the parallel experiences the protagonists have, cause them to think about their own experiences, their decisions, and choices in life. When Kieslowski mentions about his films, he says:

I don't film metaphors. People only read them as metaphors, which is very good. That's what I want. I always want to stir people to something. It doesn't matter whether I manage to pull people into the story or inspire them to analyse it. What is important is that I force them into something or move them in some way. That's why I do all this - to make people experience something. It doesn't matter if they experience it intellectually or emotionally. You make films to give people something, to transport them somewhere else and it doesn't matter if you transport them to a world of intuition or a world of the intellect. (Stok, 1993: 193)

Indeed, the film transports the audience to the world of Weronika and Veronique, in which intuition, senses, emotions, coincidences, multivalent possible existence, choices play major roles. It is quite a unique experience we witness when watching the film. We do feel the uncanny presence, do enter the lives of the two doubles with all its music and aesthetic visual images that connect the characters, and do enter the passionate, intellectual and intuitional, also the beautifully sorrowful world of the characters. The plot is almost poetic, ambiguous, and has striking details that open the door of possibilities. In compact 98 minutes, the director presents us two lives, in full of catchy details. How one takes the message differs according to the perspective. Is Weronika, Veronique's doppelgänger, whose double life is this, how can one explain the mystical relationship between them-is it metaphorical, or is it possible to have a telepathic relationship with one another, is that all coincidence or is it designed, is it possible to have two lives at the same time or is it metaphorical again to emphasise and to make us think about the choices we make in life? Or is it the same Veronique in Poland and France that presents an alternative universe? *The Double Life of Veronique* offers a story with full of possibilities, and all these questions wait for the audience to endeavour on them.

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