

# Analysis of Emotional Paralysis in *Dubliners* in terms of Personality Structure

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**Abstract**—*Dubliners* is one of James Joyce's early works which portrays the miserable life condition of the middle and lower class people in Dublin in the early 20th century. Joyce has presented to the world in this collection a "dear dirty Dublin" which is suffused with morbid and lifeless atmosphere. "Paralysis" is the most apparent character of *Dubliners*. In this hopeless city, people are shackled by the doctrines and life burdens and have lost ability and passion to pursue true love. Instead, they have gradually fallen into the abyss of emotional paralysis. The present thesis will select two short stories "Eveline" and "Clay", which depict the life of young and middle-aged Dubliners, as examples to discuss the theme of emotional paralysis in *Dubliners*. The Freudian theory of Personality Structure will be applied to analyze the behavior and thoughts of the two protagonists to see how the ego, id, and super-ego operate to affect their mental and physical activities, and how their emotions finally become paralyzed.

**Index Terms**—James Joyce, emotional paralysis, personality structure

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. James Joyce and the Paralysis in *Dubliners*

James Joyce, the Irish novelist and poet, is generally considered as one of the most prominent literary figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born in a wealthy family on the decline, he had lived abroad as expatriate for most of his life. Though rarely staying in his country after his young adulthood, he cared much about the social environment in Ireland and the living conditions of the Irish people. Most of his masterpieces, including the collection of short stories *Dubliners*, his novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, are set in Ireland, and all of them are concerned with the political, religious and emotional state of the country and the people living in it.

*Dubliners* is a collection of short stories published in 1914 by Grant Richards Ltd. It depicts the life and paralyzed state of the middle and lower class people who lived in the early 20th century Dublin. In that period, Ireland was facing the triple pressures of British colonization, Catholic church, and Irish nationalism. As it was under the colonial rule of England, the Irish could not attend the House of Lords and had very limited power in politics. Throughout centuries there had been Irish nationalists such as Charles Stewart Parnell launching campaigns and independence movements against England, but all ended in failure. In addition, the corrupt Catholic church had also added to the misery of Ireland and Irish

people [1].

Under this circumstance, Irish people could not see the hope of the complete independence, nor could they find comfort from the church, Ireland was filled with the atmosphere of despair and paralysis. With the distress towards the social situation and the attempt to "present Dublin to the world" [2], James Joyce decided to write *Dubliners*. According to the letters which Joyce wrote to Grant Richards, the expression "Dubliner" is a special title to him, which is completely different from the term "Londoner" and "Parisian". It's a capital city for thousands of years, and yet emits an "odor of corruption" [3]. But due to the strong criticism towards England and detailed depiction of the people's paralytic state in the stories, it takes *Dubliners* 9 years to be finally published, during which it had been rejected by 22 publishers [4]. Though facing the severe problem of living, James Joyce never accept the publisher's demand of revising. He said in the letter to Grant Richards that his purpose of writing *Dubliners* was to create a chapter of the moral history of Ireland, and he chose Dublin because it's "the center of paralysis" [5]. Paralysis is the central theme of *Dubliners*, and emotional paralysis is an important section of it.

*Dubliners* contains 15 short stories, each depicts the events which happens to certain Dubliners. The collection is arranged in the order of childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life. The two stories "Eveline" and "Clay" which are involved in the present thesis belong to the category "Adolescence" and "Maturity" respectively.

### B. The structure of the Thesis

The present thesis aims to discuss the theme of emotional paralysis in *Dubliners* in the light of Personality Structure, including the concepts of "id", "ego", and "super-ego".

In this paper, the id, ego, and super-ego of Eveline and Maria will be analyzed to see how the id, ego, and super-ego affect their behavior and mental activities. Then, there will be a comparative study of the two heroines to see the similarities and difference in their life attitude and emotional needs.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

So far, journal articles and dissertations about *Dubliners* in Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) mainly focus on three topics: the theme of the work; the writing techniques; and the thought embodied in the work. In this chapter, journal articles and theses which are closely related to the present thesis are reviewed as follows.

### A. Studies on the Emotional Paralysis in *Dubliners*

Among all the journal articles and theses about *Dubliners* in CNKI, altogether 186 of them deal with the theme of

Manuscript received May 12, 2017; revised July 12, 2017.

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paralysis in *Dubliners*, among which most writers tend to select those more famous short stories like “The Dead” and “Araby”. Two theses focus on the topic of emotional paralysis, they are “Emotional paralysis--Analysis of James Joyce’s *Dubliners*” and “Manifestation of emotional paralysis--in ‘Araby’ and ‘Eveline’”. The former analyzed the theme in light of the social background, but didn’t write much about the mental activities of the characters; the second one, on the other hand, focused on the essential elements of writing, that is, the background, plot, and character building, and tried to find out how the theme of emotional paralysis is expressed through these elements. Both two theses are related to the present thesis in topic, but different in research method and content.

#### *B. Studies on Dubliners based on the Theory of Personality Structure*

Among the 186 journal articles and theses about *Dubliners* in CNKI, only 13 of them are written from the view of Personality Structure. “Sound of Silence--A Lacanian Psychoanalysis Applied to *Dubliners*” written by Liu Sha looks at the character’s mental activities from the view of Lacan’s theory of mirror stage. “The solitude of *Dubliners*--A Neo Psychoanalytic reading of Joyce’s *Dubliners*” written by Cai Xiujuan analyzes the loneliness of *Dubliners* by using Fromm’s psychoanalytic theory. Though there are some common problems in these articles and theses, such as simple analysis and short length, at least they have introduced a new psychoanalytic approach to the research of *Dubliners*.

#### *C. Significance of the Present Thesis*

Firstly, among the 186 thesis about the paralysis in *Dubliners* presented in CNKI, only 4 of them have done a detailed analysis on emotional paralysis, others have just analyzed the theme “paralysis” in general. In view of the research space in this aspect, the present thesis focuses on paralysis in emotional aspect only.

Another innovation of the present thesis is that it applies a Freudian theory of personality structure to analyze the behavior, words, and mental activities of the characters in order to study the theme of emotional paralysis.

### III. THEORETICAL BASIS

The major theory adopted in the thesis is the theory of personality structure proposed by the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud.

#### *A. The Theory of Personality Structure*

The early Freudian theory holds the idea that personality is composed of two levels of awareness: “the unconscious” and “the conscious” [6]. The unconscious is the major component of personality which consists of 5 parts, thoughts, emotions, memories, desires, and motivations which exist out of our conscious mind, yet influences our ideas and actions. On the other hand, the conscious is the minor component which refers to the part of our mental processing that people sanely think about. Later on, Sigmund Freud developed his theory, and in his later work *Ego and Id* he proposed the famous tripartite personality

structure, which divides personality into three parts: ego, id, and super-ego. The id follows the so-called “pleasure principle”. It represents and manifests the idea deep in mind, and strives for the satisfaction of all desires and wants. These desire will never disappear no matter satisfied or not, instead, it remains in the mind as the unconscious. Ego is the part of personality that follows the reality principle which operates to reconcile the conflicts between id and super-ego, and to satisfy the needs and wants of id in a socially acceptable way or an appropriate occasion. Super-ego follows the “morality principle”. It’s the part of our personality which reflects the moral standards, ethics, and social common sense rooted in the mind which are acquired through education. It’s the inner voice that judge right and wrong.

According to Freud, both id and super-ego are unrealistic. They follow their own principles and these principles sometimes do not meet the social ethnics. Under this circumstance, ego has to weigh and satisfy both sides as much as possible. However, the ego is obviously partial to the id. It always seeks opportunity to make the desire of id fulfilled while pretending to care about the reality. But since its behavior is monitored by the super-ego, it won’t be immune from the punishment of fear and guilt. In order to ease the uncomfortable feelings, the ego will set up the so-called defense mechanisms, which can prevent the individual from feeling bad by manipulate, deny, or distort the reality from the unconscious level [7].

#### *B. Specific Research Questions*

Question 1: How do id, ego, and super-ego affect the behavior and mental activities of Eveline and Maria, and how is the theme of emotional paralysis manifested through the two heroines?

Question 2: In what ways are Eveline and Maria similar with and different from each other?

### IV. THE THEME OF EMOTIONAL PARALYSIS IN DUBLINERS

James Joyce has presented in these fifteen short stories a paralytic Dublin which is featured by the inefficient government, corrupt church, emotionless people, and stagnant social life. This chapter will study the id, ego, and super-ego of Eveline and Maria, which are the protagonists of “Eveline” and “Clay”, during their thinking and doing things to see how the three parts of personalities affect their behavior and mental activities, and how the theme of emotional paralysis is manifested in these two short stories.

#### *A. The Emotional Paralysis of Adolescence--“Eveline”*

Eveline is the heroine of “Eveline”. In the short story, there is a furious conflict among the three parts of her personalities while she makes the life decision. In this chapter, Eveline’s behavior and mental activities will be analyzed from the view of personality structure. After that, the effect that her id, ego, and super-ego have on her decision will be presented, and how Eveline’s emotional state becomes paralytic through the conflict of her personalities will be analyzed in detail.

##### *1) The analysis of Eveline’s personalities*

Eveline’s id, ego, and super-ego together affect her life decision making, and her hesitation and struggle between

choices actually reflect the struggling among the three parts of her personality. Eveline is a girl who lives in a poor family with her younger brothers and her abusive father, and she has carried all the family burden on her shoulder after her mother's death. From the description of her life condition, it's clear that Eveline's id has long been suppressed by the hard life, until she meets Frank, a sailor who is kind, outgoing, and cares about her. He wants to take Eveline to Buenos Aires, where they can get married and start a brand new life. At this moment, Eveline's id is aroused: "in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married - she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been" [8]. Her id tells her that she wants to escape with Frank, because as a young girl, she needs to be cared and valued, and she deserves a life of her own, which is much better than the one she's living now. And as long as she goes with Frank, all that she wants deep in her id will be fulfilled soon. What's more, she knows clearly that if she stays, her life story will be just like her mother's: "that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness" [9].

But just as the desire in her id is aroused, the moral restraints in her super-ego appears. It reminds Eveline of her promise to her mother: "strange that it should come that very night to remind her of the promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together as long as she could" [10]. It keeps telling her that no matter she is happy or not, she has to keep her promise to stay and support the family. Gradually, her determination of leaving wavers, she's caught in a dilemma. Her ego struggles between her id and super-ego as she sits still beside the window, though "her time was running out" [8]. Suddenly, her super-ego reminds her of her father, "Her father was becoming old lately, she noticed; he would miss her" [9]. Father is no longer a nice man, but indeed he is getting older and older. The brothers are still young, who will take care of him after her departure? The super-ego is telling her: don't leave! Your father needs you. You can't be so selfish and think about yourself only. This time, Eveline is nearly persuaded, she even starts to feel that her life in Dublin is not "a wholly undesirable life" [9].

Though the call of morality is constant, her id deep inside is still strong. All of a sudden, it reminds her of her mother's words before death: "Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun (Derevaun Seraun: The end of pleasure is pain.)" [11]! Remembering this, Eveline's id suddenly becomes restless: if all the sweet dreams will be dashed, then why not live in the moment and enjoy the life now? Thinking about this, "she stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness" [8].

Her id and super-ego are fighting the last battle as she finally gets to the port. When she holds Frank's hand and stands on the wharf, a burst of fear suddenly comes over her. Now she's suffering the most severe torture of her super-ego. It keeps blaming her for leaving Dublin, leaving this familiar place in which she has spent her whole life, leaving her young brothers and old father to seek her own

happiness in an unknown country. Thinking of this, her ego again falls into dilemma: "she felt her cheek pale and cold and, out of a maze of distress, she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty" [12]. At this final moment, her mind is overwhelmed by guilt, fear, and sadness. She can't take a step though she knows that Frank is calling her. Intensive thinking has driven her crazy. Eventually, her ego can't stand the torture of the super-ego anymore and collapses: "No! No! It's impossible" [13]! Under the severe struggle between her id, ego, and super-ego, Eveline has fallen into the abyss of emotional paralysis: "she set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" [14].

## 2) *The emotional paralysis manifested in "Eveline"*

Eveline's emotions become paralytic as the conflict between her id and super-ego becomes irreconcilable. On the one hand, her id inside has all those fancies and hopes towards the future. "in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married" [8]. But on the other hand, after the long time of hard life, Eveline has gradually lost her subjective consciousness. Instead of creating the future herself, Eveline tends to pin her hope on others and waits to be saved. "Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her" [9]. Since she is incapable of giving herself happiness, the only two choices she faces is whether to seek the salvation from others or to continue her boring and difficult life. But the most tragic thing is that she can not even make a choice. Under the pain of the personality struggle, her brain becomes blank, and she is not capable of deciding but to ask the God for help. "She prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty" [9]. At last, her ego surrenders to morality, and there's no doubt that Eveline will go back to her hopeless life and repeats the life course of her poor mother, who is caught in the abyss of paralysis and dies of insanity. Both of them are the epitomes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lower class Dubliners, especially female Dubliners. Although their ids long for happiness and freedom, their egos don't have the strength to fight against the reality. So in the end, most of them will have to surrender to the super-ego, taking up the responsibilities of the family to live a paralytic life till they die.

## B. *The Emotional Paralysis of Adulthood- "Clay"*

The short story "Clay" is about a middle aged woman named Maria who lives a seemingly good but actually paralytic life. In this chapter, Maria's behavior and mental activities will be analyzed from the view of personality structure.

### 1) *The analysis of Maria's personalities*

Maria is a person whose moral and religious belief in her super-ego overtops the emotional desire in her id. She is a kind and warm-hearted woman. In the laundry house where she works, whenever there is a quarrel, people always find her to be the peacemaker; she is clean and industrious, the copper boilers she has wiped are as shiny as mirror. However, though being popular among acquaintances, Maria seems to have no interest in men. She has not married yet, and has

hardly dated anyone. She devotes her whole life to work and church, and has barely thought about her personal life. Even so, the id inside Maria actually has the desire for love and marriage. During the afternoon tea, women in the laundry house are sitting together and chatting about the things they may get in Hallow Eve, (It's the Irish Halloween tradition to grab things while blindfolded, and the things people get forebodes their destiny.) "Lizzie Fleming said Maria was sure to get the ring and, though Fleming had said that for so many Hallow Eves, Maria had to laugh and say she didn't want any ring or man either; and when she laughed her grey-green eyes sparkled with disappointed shyness" [15]. Though she claims that "she didn't want any ring or man," the "disappointed shyness" in her eyes has betrayed her and reflected the secret emotional needs in her id.

Due to the chronic emotional emptiness, Maria has gradually bred a subtle narcissism. The night before she visits Joe, whom she once took care of during his infancy, she tries on her best skirt and her dress boots. Standing in front of the mirror, "she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body" [16]. She adores her body so much that she even looks at it with "affection", and uses "nice", "tidy", "diminutive" to describe it. However, from the description of her appearance in the story, "very, very small person indeed, but had a very long nose and a very long chin" [17], we can tell that she's not pretty at all. According to Freud's view, when a person suffers from emotional deficiency and has nowhere to place his or her "libido", which refers to one part of personality which cause sexual desires, the part of libido that has been withdrawn from the external world will be directed to the person's ego, and results in narcissism, and Maria is an example of it. Her ego can't satisfy the sexual desire of her id in reality, so in order to make up for the absence of the lover, she has to seek comfort from herself. Besides, her lack of emotional life also results in her sentimentality. She cares too much about other people's evaluation of her, and tends to magnify others' attention to her. On her way to Joe's house, she gets into a bakery to buy cakes. When the saleswoman asked Maria by the way that if she is buying wedding-cake, Maria "blushes and smiles," but actually the young lady is just asking out of politeness. Also, when she finds out that she has left the cake on the tram, she "nearly cries outright" because she thinks that she has let everybody down, but actually no one really cares much about the cake. Maria's sentimentality actually results from emotional needs of her id. Deep inside her heart Maria hopes to be noticed and valued by others, and so she tries her best in order to please others to get their attention.

To some extent, Maria's life is tragic and ironic. Her super-ego requires her to be faithful and hardworking, but she can't get any comfort from her faith, nor is her life getting any better because of her hard work. Instead, she suffers from emotional deficiency and works in a laundry house which is set by the government to reform the prostitute, living and working with Protestants. Her id has strong desire for love, but she can't realize it, and always pretends that she doesn't need it. When she meets the old

gentleman on the tram, her secret but restless id is aroused. She listens to him talking and "favour[s] him with demure nods and hems" [18], and when she farewells him, she thinks that it's nice to know "a gentleman even when he has a drop taken" [19]. However, the flame of love quickly dies out when she finds out that she has left her expensive cakes on the tram just because she was nervous talking to him, and she starts to blame her fault on the gentleman. "Maria, remembering how confused the gentleman with the greyish moustache had made her, coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment" [20]. Maria's ego has become timid through longtime loneliness. She doesn't believe in love anymore though her id still longs for it.

As for Maria's relationship with Joe's family, From Maria's view, Joe has treated her as his true mother and is really nice to her. "Often he had wanted her to go and live with them, and Joe used often to say: 'Mamma is mamma, but Maria is my proper mother'" [21]. Though she always considers them as her closest friends and even her children, and believes firmly that Joe loves her, their relationship is actually not as close as she has expected. They meet each other only once a year, and Maria behaves like a guest at their home. Beside, when Maria tries to be the peacemaker of Joe and his brother, she finds that Joe doesn't really want to accept her advice.

From the evidence above, it's obvious that Maria has been living in an imaginative world created by herself in which everyone admires and values her. In that world, she doesn't need a husband, and all she needs to have is a pretty body and the admiration from others. She keeps suppressing the emotional needs of her id, and at the same time keeps magnifying her personal image, aiming to create a figure which completely matches the requirement of her super-ego. In the end, her ego fails to reconcile the conflict between her restless id and the strict super-ego and finally collapses, resulting in her emotional paralysis. And that is why Maria gets "clay", which symbolizes death in Celtic culture, at the Hallow Eve. James Joyce is suggesting that Maria is another victim that falls into the abyss of emotional paralysis.

## 2) *The emotional paralysis manifested in "Clay"*

Maria is a tragic figure who lives a paralytic life unconsciously. On the one hand, since she cannot get happiness in her real life, she has immersed herself in illusions. In Maria's imagination, she has made herself a much more popular and attractive woman than she really is. But on the other hand, Maria is so satisfied with her imaginary ego that she has ignored her real life condition. In reality, Maria has no children or family. She does an insignificant job and has not yet found a boyfriend. Although it's suggested in the story for more than one time that her id still has fantasies about love, however, due to her long time suppression of desire, she has already lost confidence and ability to attract men. Under this condition, finally, Maria's ego is paralyzed, so is her emotional life. The clay she gets in the Hallow eve declares the death of her emotions, and the prayer-book she gets in the second round indicates that she will be a devout Christian who lives under the doctrine for the rest of her life. Eventually, it's proved that Maria's life is the victory of her super-ego.

## *C. A Comparison of the Emotional State between Eveline*

and Maria

Though Maria and Eveline are of different age groups, they're similar in many aspects. In this part, a comparative study of these two characters will be done to see in what ways their emotional state are similar, and how the theme of emotional paralysis is manifested in them.

1) *Attitude towards life*

Both Eveline and Maria belong to the lower class citizens in Dublin. Eveline works in a store as a shop assistant while Maria works as a washer in the laundry. For Eveline, Ever since her mother was dead, she has taken over the responsibilities of supporting the whole family, so though she is only nineteen, the life burden on her shoulder is already heavy. Besides, she lives in a broken family with a father who is not good to her at all. As for Maria, she needs to get up early every morning and do the boring dish washing day by day. She is a pious Catholic, but because of her work, she has to live and get along with the Protestants. These two characters toil every day and never have time to enjoy their life, but both of them seem to accept the life condition passively, never thinking of changing their social status or creating a better life using their own hands. For Eveline, though she has the desire to escape, she is actually waiting others to save her. And Maria, though she lives a poor and plain life, she has not realized it at all, and always magnifies her position in the society as if she is successful. For example, while on the way to the Joe's, she is planning what to buy, and thinking that "how much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your pocket" [15].

2) *Id's desire for love*

Both Eveline and Maria has strong desire towards love in their id. For Eveline, she is always busy working to support her family, and has no time to think about herself, until Frank appears in her life. She clearly remembers the first time she meets Frank, "he was lodging in a house on the main road where she used to visit. He was standing at the gate, his peaked cap pushed back on his head and his hair tumbled forward over a face of bronze" [19]. That is the first time in her whole life that she can smell the fragrance of love and future. She wants to go with him and escape from this paralytic city though she barely know what the unknown country will be like. Because this is the call of her id.

Unlike Eveline, Maria doesn't admit the secret emotional needs of her id. Through her whole life, she always tries to cover up her desire by deceiving herself that "she doesn't want any ring, or man." But in fact her seeming disgust and embarrassment towards love is a manifestation of her desire. She is just nervous, but not disgusted about love.

3) *Ego's timidity towards love*

Throughout the story Eveline's ego is making the decision about whether to escape with Frank or stay in Dublin. Obviously her id is anxious to go. Just as Frank's calling on the pier: "Come! Come!" That's the calling of the bright future, that's the calling of the id inside her. But finally, she is frightened by the guilt towards her father and the fear of the unknown. Her ego loses courage at the last moment, and surrenders to her timidity.

As for Maria, Her ego is afraid of trying to love. She has kept her heart closed for so long and cannot easily open it to embrace romance. When she meets the old gentleman on the tram, although her id has felt the hope of love, instead of chatting with him, she is just sitting there listening to him talking, and agrees him with "nods and hems". And when she realizes that she has lost her cake on the tram because of her nervousness facing the gentleman, all she feels is shame and vexation and disappointment. These all shows the timidity of her ego. She is afraid of trying, or to put it more specifically, she is afraid of the bad outcome that love may bring. Her ego has already become timid and paralyzed after long-time loneliness and the constraint of the super-ego.

V. CONCLUSION

Eveline and Maria's stories have confirmed the statement that "the ego is not the master in his own house" [22]. Both of their id have the human instinct of pursuing love and better life, but their ego are not free to satisfy the desire of the id due to the suppression and constraint of the super-ego. Year after year they follow the doctrines and fixed moral codes to live their own life without determination to break through, and gradually they become living dead who are caught in the abyss of paralysis and have no strength to escape.

Just as Sigmund Freud stated in *Leonardo da Vinci*, "the psychic development of the individual is a short repetition of the course of development of the race" [23]. The paralytic state of Eveline and Maria's emotions in *Dubliners* are epitomes of all Dubliners' conditions. In this morbid and hopeless city, all the people despite their gender and age are living with chains. They repeat the daily routine without emotions or desire just to continue their lives, and as they grow older, the virus of paralysis will spread around them and permeate their thoughts and behaviors. The city of Dublin, just as Joyce has described, is "the center of paralysis". And *Dubliners*, as a "chapter of the moral history of Ireland" [24], is an alarm bell which always rings.

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