
The Rebirth of Eveline in Her Motherland

HAZAL BURCU KISLAK
English Studies
Free University of Berlin
Germany

The omnipresence of paralysis throughout James Joyce's short story collection, *Dubliners*, is not only reflected in his portrayal of Dublin as a city of decay, and the Dubliners as suffering from psychological hemiplegia, but also manifested in Joyce's statements about his short story collection (Walzl 221): "My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis" (Friedrich 421); "...I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis, which may consider a city" (Walzl 221). My interpretation of this paralysis that entirely suffuses *Dubliners* will focus on the story of "Eveline", a psychologically paralysed young Irish woman, torn between her two choices, whether to stay in Dublin forever or leave it for good (Walzl 224-225; Werner 35-36). My approach will be based on the analysis of the pervasive signs of paralysis through a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, in particular, the Freudian concept of "das ozeanische Gefühl" (the oceanic feeling), which is a strong, unbounded urge to reunite with a maternal womb-like security (Freud 72). As Freud points out in his book *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur (Civilisation and Its Discontents)*, the oceanic feeling is "a sensation of eternity, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded-as it were, 'oceanic'" (64), and it "exists in many people, and we are inclined to trace it back to an early phase of

ego-feeling”(72). Considering Freud’s emphasis on the oceanic feeling as “another way of disclaiming the danger, which the ego recognizes as threatening it from the external world” (72), it can be stated that having encountered the paralysing forces of Dublin, Eveline, in an attempt to “disclaim the danger”, retreats into the oceanic feeling, which is nothing more than, as the critic Henke emphasized, “an infantile fantasy of pre-Oedipal bliss” (63). In this sense, through the Freudian concept of the oceanic feeling, as well as on the basis of Henke’s study of “Through a Cracked Looking-Glass: Desire and Frustration in *Dubliners*”, I will examine Eveline’s oceanic feeling, which stems from her psychological hemiplegia, and connect it to a self-created world of fantasy.

Ultimately, given the open-ended conclusion of “Eveline”, I will examine the probable consequences of Eveline’s experience of the oceanic feeling, which, in the end, make her remain in the Motherland, Ireland, where she, as an Irish fetus, has the possibility of a metaphorical rebirth as an alternative to a metaphorical death. Indeed, I will, ultimately, go beyond Henke’s emphasis on Eveline’s final metaphorical death by losing herself in her oceanic feeling, and her passive childish desire to retreat into a world of fantasy, thus becoming a victim of the patriarchy by repeating her mother’s unpleasant fate (62-64), and instead claim that Eveline has the possibility for rebirth through breaking free from her infantile oceanic fantasy, and realizing her potential to set free from the nightmare of repeating her mother’s past life of servitude. In this sense, this study provides a new psychoanalytical reading of a canonical, much analysed literary work, “Eveline”, through offering an exploration of Eveline’s future capability for personal development.

The *Dubliners* is based on Joyce’s consideration of Ireland, especially its capital city Dublin, as the centre of corruption, paralysis and demoralisation, which suffuses the story of “Eveline” (Walzl 221), just as “the odour of dusty

cretonne” spreads throughout Eveline’s room (Joyce 37). Indeed, Dublin’s paralysis is mainly caused by the patriarchal discourse of Dublin, which, as we shall see, is also connected to Eveline’s mental deterioration, her experience of the oceanic feeling, along with its related consequences. The patriarchal discourse in Dublin is apparent, firstly through the authority of the patriarchal father figure (Henke 63), Eveline’s tyrannical drunk father, who had reduced the life of Eveline’s deceased mother to one of lifelong servitude (Gibbons 207-208). Her mother’s fate foreshadows Eveline’s subconscious inclination to be confined to the domestic sphere, a life of slavery as well (Henke 62). Secondly, the patriarchal discourse is also implied through the dogma of religion, the unquestionable power of the Catholic Church, which is manifested through the authority of the absent aged priest, “a fetishistic reminder of ecclesiastical power” (Henke 63-64), and Eveline’s blind obedience to the authority of religion, her inability to break the vow that she made to God and her dying and irrational mother (Werner 37) “to keep the home together as long as she could” (Joyce 41). Thirdly, Dublin’s paralysis is also connected to the era of modernisation and industrialisation in early twentieth century Ireland (Peel 123-125), hinted in the depiction of the construction of the “bright brick houses with shining roofs” on a field (Joyce 37), where children used to play, revealing the destructive nature of the urbanisation process on Dublin and the Dubliners. Indeed, this modernisation process causes the Dubliners to become dysfunctional, impersonal, materialistic and self-centred (Peel 123-125), which is manifested not only in the depiction of the materialistic thirst of Eveline’s father, and his demands for her salary, but also in the emphasis that Eveline is considered as nothing more than a commodity in her work, and “her place could be filled up by advertisement” instead (Joyce 38). Lastly, the paralysing nature of Dublin life is interwoven with the identity of the city itself, which is hinted at the motif of the ‘window’ in “Eveline”, which entraps and confines Dubliners, reducing them to a life of passively

observing the world outside without actively taking part in it (Ruthmann 4-10). In a nutshell, Dublin, in the era of modernisation, is dominated by patriarchal discourse, leading to the corruption of the city itself, along with the dehumanization of its society.

These paralysing forces and the dehumanization of Dublin society are manifested in Eveline's descent into a state of psychological hemiplegia. Haunted by the memory of her deceased mother's life of misery, Eveline, a nineteen-year old girl, longs to run away from the domestic violence of her alcoholic father: "...she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations." (Joyce 38-39). Eveline also wants to escape from the weary monotony of her daily life (Gibbons 207-209):

"Home! She looked around the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years, wondering where on earth all the dust came from" (Joyce, 37-38). She wants to sow the seeds of a new life by leaving her home behind: "Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home" (Joyce 37) with her gentle lover Frank, who, she believes, could provide her with a life of happiness that she has been longing for, in far-off Buenos Aires. However, it is not an easy decision for her to make (French 451): "Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question." (Joyce 38). Her hesitation causes her to become psychologically torn between her choices of "a childhood pledge of filial duty" at home and "an exotic fantasy of personal happiness" in a far-off country (Henke 62). An experience of epiphany, the fear of replicating her mother's past "that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness" alerts her: "Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her." (Joyce 41), but this experience remains short-lived (Walzl 446a). Indeed, she is still under the strong impact of her domestic and moral responsibilities, as well as haunted by her promise to her mother to "keep the home together as long as she could" (Joyce 41), all of which prevent her from her desire to embark on a

new phase in her life. Eveline's past clings to her, just as she clings to her letters she has written to her father and brother (Joyce 40-41). She also becomes nostalgic about her past memories, which begin to seem to her pleasant instead of dreadful: "Her father was becoming old lately, she noticed; he would miss her.

Sometimes he could be very nice." (Joyce 41), "It was hard work—a hard life—but now that she was about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable life" (Joyce 39). Eveline's mental state is clearly negatively affected by the paralysing identity of Dublin, and she is torn between staying in Dublin, and struggling with the merciless reality of life or running away from Dublin, and, as we shall see, descending into an oceanic feeling of a world of fantasy.

In order to examine Eveline's unstable mental state from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, the perspectives of Freud, as one of the most significant psychoanalysts, on the psychoanalytic theory should be accentuated: Freud claims that the individuals' behaviours are mostly shaped by their subconscious motives. Thus he places the subconscious mind at the centre of the psychoanalytic theory. Through his "topographical division of the psyche", he claims that the subconscious mind belongs to one of the three mental stages ("the conscious", "the pre-conscious" and "the unconscious"). Each stage being based on "different levels of awareness". The subconscious mind is "a repository for traumatic repressed memories", and "the source of anxiety-provoking drives, which are socially or culturally unacceptable to the individual". It can also be in charge of most human behaviour. He connects this "topographical division of the psyche" to "the structural theory of the mind"; "the id", "the ego", and "the superego", all of which operate "in different levels of consciousness". The id, based on "the pleasure principle", is "the unconscious reservoir of drives", hence it requires "immediate satisfaction of its urges, regardless of undesirable effects". The ego, based on "the reality principle", is the realist part and mostly active in both

“conscious and preconscious levels”. It is also the mediator between the id and superego. The superego is based on “the individual’s ideals derived from the values of his family and society, being the source of guilty feelings and fear of punishment” (Rowell). Moreover, in his book *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur (Civilisation and Its Discontents)*, Freud accentuates that “the pleasure principle” of the id is mostly dominant in the early course of the infantile development. The relationship of the fetus with its mother is mostly characterised by a feeling of deep connection and bliss, as well as by the satisfaction of the needs of the id. After the birth of the infant, the pleasure principle of the id still dominates, and the infant feels instinctually united with his mother, seeing her as an indistinct identity (Lear 174-176; Freud 66-67). Indeed, this situation continues until the mother ceases breastfeeding. The ego, on the contrary, comes into existence when the breast is taken away, and the infant develops a sense of self-consciousness through the realisation that his mother is detached from him, and there is an existence of the external world, which, unlike his mother’s womb, is full of obstacles and dangers (Freud 66-68). The superego is formed during the infant’s upbringing, and shaped by cultural constraints (Freud 123-26). As it is also emphasized, the individuals, at some point in their lives, can experience a struggle between the id and the superego to gain control in the personality. This struggle leads to severe anxiety, which is followed by the feelings of guilt, embarrassment, shame etc. (Ryckman 34-35). To prevent the ego from being overwhelmed with this power struggle, and to cope with this anxiety, the individuals can experience the oceanic feeling as a defence mechanism of regression, which is a deep instinctual urge to regress into the womb (Freud 74-85). As Freud notes, the oceanic feeling is “another way of disclaiming the danger, which the ego recognizes as threatening it from the external world” (72). This defence mechanism of regression leads the ego to enter into an earlier stage of development, since it is not able to manage the anxiety maturely (Ryckman 35). Moreover, the

excessive use of the defence mechanism leads to a separation from reality, and the individual begins creating a world of fantasy (Ryckman 86-87). This world of fantasy is infantile, and accordingly, can be experienced unconsciously. Eveline's psychological paralysis, as we shall see, can be analysed from these psychoanalytic points, mentioned.

Analysing Eveline's psychological hemiplegia from the Freudian psychoanalytical concept of the oceanic feeling, it can be stated that Eveline's behaviour is mainly controlled by her subconscious mind, which is overwhelmed with her "traumatic repressed memories" (Rowell) about her dead mother's unpleasant life, as well as by "anxiety provoking drives" (Rowell); such as her urge to leave her family behind, and elope with a man, whom she believes would provide her with security, comfort, love etc. However, since such anxiety provoking drives would be "socially or culturally unacceptable to the individual" (Rowell), her mind is divided between "an exotic fantasy of personal happiness", which is dominated by the pleasure principle of the id and "a childhood pledge of filial duty", which is dominated by the superego, in addition to the values, and morals of Dublin society (Henke 62). In other words, Eveline experiences a struggle between the id and superego to gain control in her personality, which leads to severe anxiety, along with feelings of guilt, embarrassment and shame. Indeed, in an attempt to prevent the ego, being overcome with this anxiety, Eveline unconsciously experiences the oceanic feeling (Ryckman 34-35). Since this defence mechanism leads to the ego being unable to cope with this undesired situation maturely, and re-enters into an earlier stage of development (Ryckman 35), her excessive use of the defence mechanism causes her to lose her reality, and enter into her childlike state of mind. In this sense, Eveline sees Frank as a rescuer, whom she believes could save her both from Dublin's paralysis, and her psychological hemiplegia, as well as provide her with a new world, a sense of the limitless watery bliss of the womb, where Eveline believes she would be happy

and feel secure: “But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it wouldn’t be like that. Then she would be married—she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then.” (Joyce, 38), “Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too...She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms...” (42). It can be stated that just like the fetus feels unified with the mother in the womb (Lear 174-176), the relationship between Eveline and Frank is shaped by a similar sense of attachment. Indeed, Eveline, without a sense of awareness of her distinct identity, bluntly depends on Frank: to nurture, comfort, and provide her with security. Lastly, from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, Eveline, as a psychologically paralysed Dubliner, experiences the oceanic feeling, which would, as we shall see, either trap her in her childhood illusion or connect her to a grown-up-reality.

The probable outcomes of Eveline’s experience of the oceanic feeling, in the end, lead her to remain in Ireland, the Motherland, where she, as an Irish fetus has the possibility of metaphorical rebirth as an alternative to death. On the basis of Henke’s study, and taking into consideration the final depiction of Eveline at the harbour: “All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her...No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy...” (Joyce 42), I am in agreement with Henke’s emphasis that “in a moment of Freudian terror, she imagines replicating her mother’s story and drowning in the ‘seas of the world’, an oceanic symbol that provokes sudden hysteria at the thought of physical defloration”, and “conflating Frank with the father ‘who would drown her’...Eveline dimly begins to perceive that elopement with Frank would mean, in realistic terms, a commitment to an intimate physical union that has never come within the purview of her disembodied dreams. The wound of sexual penetration evinces the kind of psychic violation she associates with marriage, servitude, and

relentless domestic battering...sex threatens to impinge on a tightly sealed world of romantic illusion” (63).

Nevertheless, my emphasis goes beyond the analysis of the general critical consensus, which is in line with Henke’s emphasis, that Eveline’s final depiction in the story, her “catatonic silence” upon letting Frank leave Dublin without her (Henke 63): “She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce 43) implies her final metaphorical demise, and instead, I claim that Eveline’s options remain open. Indeed, I go on to argue against Henke’s emphasis of the outcome of Eveline’s oceanic feeling as leading to her metaphorical death: “...her desire for embryonic security and connection to the body of the mother forces her back into the arms of Mother Church and into lifelong servitude to an unsollicitous male parent...”, and causing her to “repeat the sadomasochistic patterns of her mother’s life” (63). Instead, I state that Eveline still has the possibility of rebirth through breaking free from her infantile oceanic fantasy, and realizing her capability to set free from the nightmare of repeating her mother’s past life of servitude. In this respect, from the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, regarding Eveline’s final realisation that Frank “would drown her”, and cause her to repeat her mother’s unpleasant past life of “marriage, servitude, and relentless domestic battering”, I assert that Eveline begins to awaken from her oceanic fantasy. In other words, Eveline begins to end her “infantile fantasy of pre-Oedipal bliss”, since she realizes that eloping with Frank would mean that “sex threatens to impinge on a tightly sealed world of romantic illusion” (Henke 63).

Upon the realisation of her self-created world of fantasy, Eveline’s behaviour is no longer primarily governed by her unconscious mind; hence her conscious mind begins to take the control, which leads the ego, with its reality principle, to triumph over the id and the superego by forcing her to remain in Dublin. Consequently, the conflict between her “exotic

fantasy of personal happiness”, governed by the influence of the pleasure principle of the id, and “a childhood pledge of filial duty”, governed by the influence of superego, begins to come to an end (Henke 62). Thus, through the reality principle of the evolving ego, Eveline begins to develop her self-awareness, and form her detached identity, which is in unity with the psychoanalytic theory that ego and self-awareness collaborate. As emphasized, this collaboration, which enables the self to distinguish right from wrong, as well as to make free choices for the future (Ryckman 86), implies Eveline’s capability for future self improvement.

To be put in another way, upon Eveline’s final awareness that eloping with Frank would, in reality, cause her to replicate her mother’s past life of servitude (Henke 63), she breaks free from her oceanic fantasy of a blissful world in a far-off country. As a result, this self-awareness provides her with the opportunity for rebirth with full capability to face with the realities of her life, which also implies that Eveline is conscious enough to no longer be the victim of Dublin’s patriarchal discourse, or at least have an awareness of her victimhood.

As my essay has shown, the theme of paralysis that permeates Joyce’s *Dubliners* is strong in “Eveline”. My examination of this paralysis has focused on the story’s namesake Eveline, a psychologically paralysed young Irish woman, torn between her two decisions, whether to stay in Dublin forever or leave it indefinitely. I have demonstrated a cause and effect relationship between Eveline’s psychological hemiplegia, and Dublin’s paralysis, which is manifested by the patriarchal nature of the city. Furthermore, I have examined this hemiplegia from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, in particular, the Freudian concept of the oceanic feeling. In this regard, and to explain it in general terms, I have stated that in an attempt to run away from undesirable forces of Dublin, Eveline instinctively experiences the oceanic feeling, which is entangled with her belief that Frank would be her salvation. Ultimately, given the open-ended conclusion of the story, I have

examined the consequences of Eveline's experience of the oceanic feeling, resulting with her staying in Dublin. Unlike Henke's assertion of Eveline's final metaphorical demise through her ultimate stagnation at the harbour, I have stated that Eveline staying in Dublin was a conscious decision, which is connected to her realisation that eloping with Frank would not provide the world she has been dreaming of, but instead it will entrap her in domestic burdens. Accordingly, upon her self-awareness, Eveline breaks free from her oceanic feeling, which implies her future capability to set free from becoming another victim of patriarchal abuse in her Motherland, Ireland.

WORKS CITED

- French, Marilyn. 1978. "Missing Pieces in Joyce's *Dubliners*." *JSTOR*, 24(7): 443-472.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1961. *The Future of an Illusion: Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works*. London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-analysis. Print.
- Friedrich, Gerhard. 1965. "The Perspective of Joyce's *Dubliners*." *College English* 26(6): 421-426.
- Gibbons, Luke. 2006. "Have You No Homes to Go to?: James Joyce and the Politics of Paralysis." In *Dubliners. James Joyce*, edited by Andrew Thacker, 61-64. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Print.
- Henke, Suzette A. 2006. "Through a Cracked Looking-Glass: Desire and Frustration in *Dubliners*." In *Dubliners. James Joyce*, edited by Andrew Thacker. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Print
- Joyce, James. 1956. *Dubliners*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. Print.
- Lear, Jonathan. 2005. *Freud*. New York: Routledge. Print.
- Peel, Robin. 2005. *Apart From Modernism: Edith Wharton, Politics, and Fiction before World War I*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

- Rowell, Maria Helena. 2012. "The Freud Page/Id, Ego, Superego, Conscious, Unconscious." *The Freud Page*. 1998-2011. Web. 26 Feb. 2012. <http://www.freudpage.info/freudpsychotheory.html>
- Ruthmann, Davina. 2005. "Modes of Entrapment in James Joyce's 'Eveline'." *Grin: Publish and Find Knowledge*: 1-12.
- Ryckman, Richard M. 1989. *Theories of Personality*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. Print
- Walzl, Florence L. 1965. "The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce." *JSTOR* 80(4): 436-450.
- Walzl, Florence L. 1961. "Pattern of Paralysis in Joyce's Dubliners: A Study of the Original Framework." *College English* 22.4: 221-228.
- Werner, Craig. 1988. *Dubliners. A Pluralistic World*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.