



## 'PASSIVE, LIKE A HELPLESS ANIMAL': A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF EVELINE IN JAMES JOYCE'S "EVELINE"

Prokash Chandra Sarker

(Department of English, BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology (BUFT), Bangladesh.)

Email: [prokashsarker@buft.edu.bd](mailto:prokashsarker@buft.edu.bd)



### ABSTRACT

In James Joyce's intriguing short story "Eveline", the protagonist Eveline Hill and her life were vastly affected by her traumas of personal history, thus, making her passive, like a helpless animal. This particular paper tries to evaluate the character Eveline from the psychoanalytical point of view and find out why this character behaved in a certain way. She was driven by her Superego and failed to rationalize with her Id and Ego for which she felt guilty, passive and helpless. All her important actions and decisions were majorly influenced by the treatment that she obtained from her family especially from her father in the childhood which contributed to her inner conflicts and eventually made her psychologically paralyzed. This work might be helpful for those researchers who would like to grasp more knowledge on psychoanalytic study or analyzing any character from a psychoanalytic point of view.

**Keywords:** *Eveline, James Joyce, Psychoanalysis, Psychoanalytic Study.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalytic criticism came forth in the 1960s and was found by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. The focal idea of this theory deals with the existence of unconscious thoughts, dreams, memories and feeling which are owned by human minds. In this theory of personality, various thoughts, urges, memories, unresolved conflicts and feelings are reserved in the conscious mind and most of those are considered as unacceptable or unpleasant, such as anxiety, conflict, fear or pain. The unconscious comes into being when we are very young through repression. Everything inside the conscious mind is part of our awareness that does the mental processing which we can think and talk about in a rational direction.

The preconscious mind, otherwise known as the subconscious mind, consists of the things which we are not always pleasantly aware of but we can recollect those whenever needed.

Freud also talked about the structural model of personality. Here, he explained the three parts of a person's personality: Id, Ego and Superego. Psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic study talks about these three parts of someone's personality and which drives a person to behave in a certain way.

The Id is the only part of a personality which is present from birth; it is very impulsive (and unconscious) and driven by pleasure principle. It always seeks instant gratification (regardless of the consequences) and not affected by logic and reality. If we succumb to the Id, we gain pleasure. If we deny the Id, we gain unpleasant feeling or pain.

The Ego, on the other hand, is known as the reality principle. As the name suggests, it tries to deal with the reality and attempts to fulfil the needs of the Id in a socially acceptable way. Besides controlling the Id, it also tries to balance out a person's urges, ideals and reality.

Finally, the Superego can be considered as the opposite force of the Id. It is driven by moral principles, the judgment of right and wrong. It drives a person to do the right thing and forbids to do wrong. While thinking about the moral values, it excessively thinks about what others will think and the outcome or consequences of the task. It often acquires those values and beliefs from the parents

and society and infuses it into a person, and then instructs the person to behave according to these morals. It has the inclination to sway the Ego to favor moralistic values instead of realistic ones as it endeavors perfection. The Superego holds two components: The conscience and the ideal self. The conscience may operate by punishing the Ego through guilt if it succumbs to the demand of the Id. The ideal self on the other hand, tries to make an imaginary picture of how one person is supposed to be, and to behave with others as a part of the society. The Superego also makes us feel proud or happy through the ideal self when we behave properly. The predicament here is, if a person relies extremely on the ideal self of the Superego, s/he might never feel happy whatever s/he does as it will give a sense of failure all the time. The conscience and the ideal self are constructed in the childhood and dictated by the parents and society where a person was raised.

As we critically examine the character of Eveline Hill (which has been done on the latter part of the paper), we find out that there are numerous unpleasant memories and conflicting pain and fears in the mind of Eveline. The readers get to know about the parts that lie in the conscious part of Eveline which some how also gives the notion that there is more than that hidden in the unconscious part of hers. This is the part that influences her the way she thinks, acts and behaves. It also explains why she remains so fragile and passive throughout the story.

There has been some work on James Joyce but surprisingly not much on "Eveline". Few researchers worked on postcolonial, immigration, comparative study, symbolism, character analysis of Frank, gender identity, form and ambiguity and few other aspects of the story "Eveline" but nothing particularly on psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic study of Eveline Hill. But, surprisingly, almost all of those studies helped me acquire more information about the predicament of Eveline from different points of view which proved to be helpful to dig deeper to the psychoanalytical study of this wonderfully crafted character of James Joyce.

## METHOD AND MATERIALS

This work is a library based research work and it was intended to focus on the area of



psychoanalytic studies. The data was collected and analyzed from the primary source which is the textbook, as well as the secondary sources which include different books on literary theories, research articles and websites related to the field of the study, websites, blogs and so forth. It seemed to be the most appropriated option in fulfilling the objective of the study.

### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

“Psychoanalysis studies the often times skewed ways in which the mind expresses feeling. Those feelings range from anxiety and fear to hostility and sexual desire, and they can originate in a range of sources, from the trauma of personal history to the instincts of the body. Psychoanalysis is also concerned with the dynamics of interpersonal relations and with the way the self is formed through interactions with its familial and sociocultural environment.” [1]

As we proceed to the story, the readers experience that Eveline’s mind expresses different feelings throughout the story. As a matter of fact, most of the action (story) takes part in her mind and she remains passive, like a helpless animal most of the time. Her feelings express different things including anxiety, fear, hostility as well as desire. From a psychoanalytic point of view, those were directly influenced by her past experience which is not pleasant at all.

Eveline is seen very passive at the beginning of the story where she was leaning against the window curtains watching the evening invade the avenue while her nostrils couldn’t help devouring the dusty cretonne inactively. The readers immediately infer that she is psychologically exhausted and indifferently anxious. Her anxiousness revolves around her past mostly which in a way hinders her to take an appropriate decision for her future. “The experience of Eveline is passive, a fact instantiated in the circular logic of the story. She is seen sitting down, in the opening lines, leaning against a window, and dwelling on the past of her childhood, a memory process itself which is maimed, featuring images of violence and physical disability.” [3] As the story progresses, the readers get to know about the reasons behind her anxiousness which is her indecision whether to continue living her miserable

life or to embark on a whole new adventure to flee with her lover, Frank. She is constantly anxious about her life and the decisions to make. One time she is anxious about the treatment of her father towards her, another time she is wondering if Frank would drown her with him. She is anxious whether she really should support her father despite he treats her bad, or she really should be with Frank who might give her a new home and might (or might not) give her love. Her Superego makes her remember the promises she made to her dying mother and because of her conscience and ideal self she hesitates to fulfil the demand of her Id and Ego. This makes her feel psychologically paralyzed and unable to act properly.

Another prominent force that drives Eveline’s life is fear. This fear started captivating her after she lost her mother in her childhood. “Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations. When they were growing up he had never gone for her like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl but latterly he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother’s sake. And no, she had nobody to protect her.” [2]

In spite of being a grown up of over nineteen years of age, she could not overcome this fear of being harassed and humiliated by her father. “She is destitute by her father whom she is obviously afraid of. This is most likely the result of some psychological trauma she received in her childhood and she seems to have already suffered from act of violence from the part of her father in her childhood of which its consequences are still relevant when she has grown up.” [8] Even though she earns the money for the family and contributes her entire earning to her father, she is still dependent and inactive because of her fear. “Her relationship with her father, despite her best efforts in attenuating his levels of violence, is based on fear.” [3] She has become such accustomed to this fear that this miserable life of hers doesn’t seem completely undesirable to her sometimes which proves how passive she has become. She is in a hostile disposition where she longs to escape her home but at the same time like a passive animal, she is in a never-ending



battle of deciding whether to escape or not. When her father finds out the affair between Frank and her, he forbids her to see him again. Thus she is again in a hostile position whether to keep seeing Frank or not.

Psychoanalysis also talks about the repressed sexual desire of the self. "The struggle between the unconscious instincts and desires on the one hand and the force of repression exercised by the ego on the other results in the displacement and distortion of unconscious contents as they strive for expression." [1] The readers get the glimpse of this in few parts of the story, for example when she thinks about how she met Frank, she remembers "Frank was very kind, manly and open-hearted." [2] Here, the word 'manly' might bear a special connotation for the repressed desire of Eveline. In another instance, she recalls "He was standing at the gate, his peaked cap pushed back on his head and his hair tumbled forward over a face of bronze." [2] Again, the description here is very physical and seems sexual too. The readers also get to know that "she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theatre with him...she always felt pleasantly confused." [2] This 'unaccustomed part of the theatre' and 'pleasantly confused' might mean a lot of things including her repressed sexual desire for Frank. "Her desire is achieved in being the object of Frank's desire: he is active while she is passive..." [3]

As Psychoanalytic Studies emphasize that the mind expresses different feelings which might be originated from the trauma of personal history, if we look closely at the background of Eveline's life, we know that this is absolutely true in her case. Her personal history was so traumatic that she could never get past of it. Somehow, all her actions and decisions revolve around it, thus makes her passive like a helpless animal. She rather used to be happy once while she was a child and she used to play along with her brothers and other kids from her neighborhood. "Her father was not so bad then; and besides, her mother was alive. That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up, her mother was dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead too, and the Waters had gone back to England. Everything changes." [2] That part of her life was very difficult and traumatic for her as people she cared about either started dying or drifting away. Especially the

death of her favorite brother, Ernest and her dear mother came to her as a shock. "For Eveline, her relationship with her mother has been foreclosed by death, and the sense of loss may be the reason for her perceived passivity. This relationship has also been temporarily frozen. Eveline's memories of her mother are specifically related to illness and death. The final hours of her mother's life repeated in Eveline's mind, specifically as she sits pondering her own decision." [3] Later on, responsibilities came to her tiny shoulders more than she was capable of. But as she promised her dying mother that she would take care and keep the family together, she could not escape, rather survived somehow in the family like a helpless animal. It's acceptable by her father if Harry fails to contribute much only because he is a man, but it's unacceptable for Eveline to keep a little amount of money for herself because she is a girl. Her father always treated his sons and daughter in different ways. He never threatened his sons the way he consistently threatened his daughter, Eveline. From the sociocultural perspective, Eveline has to struggle too. She has to work both inside and outside of the house. "Of course she had to work hard, both in the house and business. What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say, she was a fool, perhaps; and her place would be filled up by advertisements. Miss Gavan would be glad. She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening." [2] This clearly indicates that Eveline has a tough time at her work too. People surrounding her are not supportive of a single girl working and managing everything all alone, rather they try to make things more difficult for her. And this causes her to become more passive. In another instance, the readers get to know that "She had to rush out as quickly as she could and do her marketing, holding her black leather purse tightly in her hand as she elbowed her way through the crowds and returning home late under her load of provisions. She had to work hard to keep the house together and to see that the two young children who had been left to her went to school regularly and got their meals regularly. It was hard work...a hard life..." [2] This again points out her struggle to survive in the society where she is expected to work too much to keep the



family together. Her sense of responsibility is strong but the weight of responsibilities on her shoulders is stronger than she is supposed to carry. She let her Superego control her way too much that she failed to rationalize with her Id and Ego.

Eveline's instinct of the body seems distorted in various occasions. For example, in the beginning of the story, she was supposed to leave home to meet Frank but she couldn't pull herself together. Rather she just kept sitting by the window and wondering about countless things in her mind. Even though she knew she was getting late but she felt passive and helpless to get up and go. Until the end of the story she remained there and her body denied to move. Here, she seems to be paralyzed psychologically. Finally, in frenzy she suddenly got up and went to see Frank with whom she was supposed to flee to another country. Frank was holding her hand but her body and mind were acting differently. She could not concentrate what he was telling her; rather her mind was wondering somewhere else. "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 her duty was." [2] This physical distortion went further when "Her distress awoke a nausea in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer. A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand." [2] "Eveline's prayer is a sign of weakness, of frustration, of failure." [7] Her instincts of the body remained distorted even until the end when Frank was calling her to get on board along with him but "She gripped with both hands at the iron railing." [2] Her hands kept holding the iron in a state of hysteria and she gave a cry of anguish. Frank was calling her repeatedly to follow but her body seemed to be paralyzed. "The voices of her mother and of Frank reach her as persistent, incomprehensible sounds." [4] "She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition." [2] In Psychoanalysis, body is regarded as the form of the soul. Throughout the story, Eveline's body instincts resemble the state of her soul in multiple occasions. "Eveline fears her own death: 'he would drown her,' she thinks of Frank, defying logic. Perhaps she unconsciously associates her lover with the other man in her life, her brutal father." [9]

Eveline's interpersonal relation with her surroundings is problematic as well. From her childhood she has been treated differently by her father only because she is a girl. He father "...had never gone for her like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl..." [2] Her brothers were always treated superior to her. Even now, despite giving her full wages to her father, she isn't given respect at all. On the other hand, Harry, her brother, contributes to the family as he pleases, and there is no pressure from her father's side. Eveline also suffers adversary at her work. Her coworker, Miss Gavan, seems to give her hard time in the Stores. "She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening." [2] Interestingly, Eveline's relationship with Frank is not entirely smooth too. "She always felt pleasantly confused" [2] with him. There was more fascination and less love towards Frank. If she had truly loved Frank, she would not have thought twice to go with him in Buenos Ayres, she would not have doubted to be loved by him. That is why she felt "All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her." [2] The exact nature of Frank remains unknown and confusing to the reader though. "Whether Frank is a dishonest seducer or an honest lover cannot be determined..." [6] "She is hunted by her father 'with his black thorn stick', but her escape route, represented by the 'black mass of the boat', is equally frightening. The threat that reduces her to a hunted animal, and which she is trying to escape, reappears at the moment of her escape in the form of means of rescue, namely the boat, before which she returns to the condition of a frightened animal." [4]

The story denotes that her interactions with familial and sociocultural environment are strictly limited. This is because her traumatic past caused by her father. Moreover, her mother and her favorite brother, Ernest died and that left her with the full responsibility of the family. At present, she is too busy to provide for the family, so she does not have time to live her life the way she wants. She is always intimidated and in dilemma about the decisions to make. "A sacrifice involves surrendering or destroying something for the sake of something else. What is Eveline sacrificing and for whom? At first



glance, she would appear to be sacrificing her personal freedom for the sake of her home.” [5] Her Superego always overpowers her in a way that she tortures herself through every decision she makes. Whether she stays or goes, she seems to be conflicted and wind up in guilt and fear. “The fear and guilt (about abandoning her father and her sibling) overwhelms her, and she stays rather than goes.” [9] She hardly gives in to the demands of the Id, which is a good thing but unfortunately she also fails to rationalize her needs through the Ego because her Superego always steps in and rules over. Because of this, her conscience and ideal self make her feel guilty and paralyzed. “It is yet another *Dubliners* tale about paralysis, as Eveline stands on the pier at story’s end, frozen in place by fear and guilt.” [9]

### CONCLUSION

Even though “Eveline” is a very short story that does not directly give a lot of information about the protagonist, through the psychological tension expressed via her inner conflicts and imagination, it critically represents so much about her. And this provides a wide scope for the readers to read the character from a psychoanalytic point of view. This might prove to be utile especially while reading literature and finding meanings in between the lines. This might also be helpful to analyze other characters from literature on the basis of psychoanalysis.

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