

Analysis of Clarissa's Personality in Mrs. Dalloway from the Perspective of Psychoanalysis

Yongmiao Wu^{1,*}

¹Department of Linguistics and Applied linguistics, Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

*Corresponding author: Yongmiao Wu (Email: 974230932@qq.com)

Abstract: Mrs. Dalloway is a stream-of-consciousness experimental novel by the famous British female writer Virginia Woolf. The story is based on the day when the heroine Clarissa decides to buy the flowers herself for a dinner party and encounters her old lover. It uses a large number of psychological monologues to showcase the struggles of the post-war life of the characters in the novel. The psychoanalytic theory was proposed by Freud. This article briefly analyzes the personality of Clarissa Dalloway based on the triple personality theory of Id, ego and super-ego, and reveals her repression and tragic life as a woman.

Keywords: Mrs. Dalloway; Virginia Woolf; psychological analysis; literary criticism.

1. Psychoanalytic criticism theories

Psychoanalytic criticism theories were developed by the Austrian, Sigmund Freud. All of Freud's work depends upon the notion of the unconscious, which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions. ^[1] Freud thinks that unconsciousness plays a decisive role in our lives and it is linked with the idea of repression, which is the forgetting or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious. Another similar process is called sublimation, whereby the repressed material is "promoted" into something grander or is disguised as something "noble". For instance, sexual urges may be given sublimated expression in the form of intense religious experiences or longings. As Freud famously once said: "There is always a return of the repressed."^[1] General psychoanalytic criticism mainly analyzes literary works from the following seven aspects: 1. The theory of unconscious psychology; 2. The theory of libido; 3. The three human personality structures-Id, Ego, and Super-ego; 4. The theory of dreams and the theory of dream interpretation; 5. The theory of "Oedipus complex"; 6. Literature and art and "Daydreaming"; 7. Artists and mental illness. This paper analyzes the personality characteristics of Clarissa, the protagonist of Mrs. Dalloway, from the perspective of three human personality structures, and reveals her tragic life as a woman. The three components of personality suggested by Freud in the 1920s are the Id, the ego, and the super-ego, which is a revision of the early theory "subconscious, preconscious and conscious" and these three "levels" of the personality roughly corresponding to, respectively, the unconscious, the conscious, and the conscience. The triple personality theory is used to explain the dynamic, individual and social nature of human psychology. There is an intersection between these three consciousnesses and the triple personality, but they cannot be regarded as mere corresponding relationships. It must be realized that the triple personality theory still takes "sexual instinct" as its core. In other words, Freud believes that the purpose of human behavior is to satisfy "sexual" needs. He also suggested that personality structure is a dynamic energy system. The three parts of the personality

structure are always in a state of conflict and integration throughout the entire mental activity process, and a specific personality dynamic relationship is formed between them. The close connection between the three enables people's basic needs to be satisfied. If the three are out of balance, people will be in an abnormal state.

2. The Id part of Clarissa

The Id is in the unconscious system and is the reservoir of instinct. The Id is an irrational force that pursues the pleasure principle and always seeks to vent its instincts on external objects. When the external world does not have it, the Id will vent its instinct to the illusion of external objects into the inner world. The Id dedicates part of its power to activate the rational potential in itself to form the ego. In Mrs. Dalloway, Peter Walsh and Sally could be seen as Clarissa's unfulfilled Id versions and her life may have stopped in the summer when she was 18 and lived in Bourton, and she could only release the repression of herself through memories and attachments.

On one hand, Peter Walsh can be seen as the appearance of her lust and the appearance of her ideal lover. He is funny and knows how to be romantic. They both enjoy the masterpieces by Shakespeare and have endless common topics to talk about. He can make Clarissa's life full of passion. Clarissa thought to herself: "He's enchanting! perfectly enchanting! If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!"^[2] However, he is regarded by everyone as a loser in life. He is expelled from Oxford and now he is over fifty years old, has no fixed job, has been to India but fortune is nowhere to be made, and he is even in love with a married woman who has a son and a daughter. His frivolity makes Clarissa feel no sense of security, and in a strictly hierarchical social system, women's status is inherently low. If she chooses Peter, her status will not be improved in any way, or maybe even worse. As the novel depicts: "His susceptibility to impressions had been his undoing, no doubt. Still at his age he had, like a boy or a girl even, these alternations of mood; good days, bad days, for no reason whatever, happiness from a pretty face, downright misery at the sight of a frump."^[2] Therefore, she has to suppress her passion, or say, the Id part inside of her. Even though the feeling for Peter is like when she sat back extraordinarily at her ease and light-hearted and she had a real

affection for him, for he was connected with her youth, yet happy times will always pass through her fingers, just like the youth that women cherish the most. Besides, what Peter Walsh pursues is a young face and a romantic encounter. He can even follow a beautiful woman home. However, these are things that Clarissa, as a woman, could not achieve under the highly hierarchical and restrictive social system at that time. Women are naturally taught to be like a lady, and it is a shame to express sexual desires. Thus, being sexually repressed prevents her from living the life she imagines and making the marital choices she wants. Just as they met and parted again, Clarissa thought to herself impulsively: "Take me with you, as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage; and then, next moment, it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over."^[2] Every drama will always come to an end, and so does human separation. Here, her separation from Peter is also a separation from her own Id. Nevertheless, as Peter appears in her party, her suppressed self is rekindled by a spark of fire and is coming all over her again, since the Id is the true self and makes all pretense hideous to witness, as the novel describes—"It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was Idiotic. Life was that—humiliation, renunciation."^[2]

On the other hand, Sally could be seen as the ideal woman that Clarissa wanted to be. Sally possesses the unique beauty that she admires the most, that is, an almost wild and unscrupulous character. As Sally is portrayed in the novel—"But all that evening she could not take her eyes off Sally. It was an extraordinary beauty of the kind she most admired, dark, large-eyed, with that quality which, since she hadn't got it herself, she always envied—a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything; a quality much commoner in foreigners than in Englishwomen"; "For in those days she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace: smoked cigars. Absurd, she was—very absurd. But the charm was overpowering, to her at least, so that she could remember standing in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud, 'She is beneath this roof... She is beneath this roof!'"^[2] Sally's unruly character is exactly Clarissa's repressed Id, or say, the opposite of women in that era. Women are taught to be ladies, to maintain a dignified posture at all times, not to speak wild words, and not to smoke and talk about politics like men. Then the cruelty of the war gave women new thoughts about whether they could gain the right to speak and whether they could achieve the same political status as men. Therefore, the summer staying with Sally made a special seed growing in Clarissa, that is, a pure love for Sally and is more like the awakening of her repressed Id. And it was the kiss that Sally gave her made her repressed Id awakened—"and they all went out on to the terrace and walked up and down. Peter Walsh and Joseph Breilkopf went on about Wagner. She and Sally fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down,

up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!"^[2] However, the relationship between Clarissa and Sally is beyond friendship or love, it is more like allies, fighting against the oppression of the patriarchal system in their own way, just like their attitude towards marriage—"Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's."^[2] They make a promise not to get married and to stay together forever in order to escape the shackles of men, at least in a love relationship, and this could be seen as the release of the Id.

3. The Ego Part of Clarissa

The ego adheres to the principle of reality and uses the power of reason to find an outlet for instinct in the outside world. Not only does it have to satisfy the super-ego, but it also has to satisfy the Id, it is a reconciliation of the two. Clarissa gives up marrying the romantically unpredictable Peter Walsh and ultimately chooses to marry the dull Mr. Richard Dalloway, showing her compromise with reality and letting the ego part of her live in society. All her bad ideas about marriage were realized in Mr. Dalloway, as she thought to herself—"For there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard."^[2] Besides, they don't share the same interests and have a very different artistic value, which is shown as how they view Shakespeare's works—"But how could she swallow all that stuff about poetry? How could she let him hold forth about Shakespeare? Seriously and solemnly Richard Dalloway got on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare's sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes (besides, the relationship was not one that he approved). No decent man ought to let his wife visit a deceased wife's sister. Incredible! The only thing to do was to pelt him with sugared almonds—it was at dinner. But Clarissa sucked it all in; thought it so honest of him; so independent of him; Heaven knows if she didn't think him the most original mind she'd ever met!"^[2] However, she chooses to compromise, compromise to marriage, compromise to a man she doesn't love and compromise to unacceptable artistic views, all of these are self-reconciliation for survival. Since Richard, a member of the British Parliament, represents the upper-class social life and enjoys a high social status. Even Peter Walsh may need to ask him to help arrange work when he comes back this time, which shows how important it is to have a socially recognized status in society at that time. Therefore, what Richard gives her is safety. The safety for her, as a woman, to have a rather respected status and the safety to reconcile the contradiction between the Id and the ego and maintain her inner balance. As the novel depicts—"to carry off Clarissa, to save her from the Hughs and the Dalloways and all the other 'perfect gentlemen' who would 'stifle her soul' (she wrote reams of poetry in those days), make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness. But she had often said to him that she had been right not to marry Peter Walsh; which, knowing Clarissa, was obviously

true; she wanted support. Not that she was weak; but she wanted support.”^[2] Even so, Clarissa, as the wife of a member of parliament, has to suppress her Id and let the ego take over as she has to socialize at parties in order to give her husband a better political future. All these made her married life even more unsatisfactory and often made her out of breath.

4. The super-ego part of Clarissa

Super-ego is guided by “moral principles” and aims at “perfection”. It controls the right and wrong of human actions and helps people integrate into the collective in a socially acceptable way. The superego adheres to the principle of rationality and is responsible for supervising the fulfillment of the ego’s requirements. The superego strictly prohibits the venting of instincts on external objects or inner illusions, and rewards and punishes the ego according to how well it implements this prohibition, making the self feel proud or guilty. When social-ethical norms are assimilated, a super-ego is formed. In the novel, the suppression of Clarissa’s own lust and ideal female figure, the boredom and torture of her marriage, ultimately leads to the collapse of her inner world. Just as she heard that a soldier named Septimus had chose to commit suicide, her heart was extremely shocked, but in the end Clarissa, instead of choosing death, she chose life. Here, the fictional character Clarissa can be regarded as the incarnation of the author Virginia Woolf. It is the fictional character Clarissa who completes Virginia’s own redemption, because in connection with Virginia Woolf’s life experience, she suffered from depression, she could not escape the gibbering in her head, she failed to complete her own redemption and in the end chose to commit suicide by drowning. Nevertheless, she still gave herself hope and placed this hope on the characters of her novel’s character to complete the realization of her super-ego. Just like the description of death in the novel is like another rebirth and redemption—“She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which,

mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death”; “Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it into one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading *The Times*, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself.”^[2] From the death of others, one can clearly see the value of one’s own life, and choose to continue to go on, cherishing every moment of life. Even if these moments are small, or insignificant, but they always make life nostalgic. Perhaps this is what the author Virginia Woolf wants to convey by the characters in her novel and in a way that transcends time and space.

5. Conclusion

Virginia Woolf recreates a woman’s life through a single day. Underneath the repression and compromise, there is a reverence for life. This article analyzes Clarissa’s personality through Freud’s triple personality theory and concludes that Peter Walsh is the embodiment of Clarissa’s Id for passion and lust; Sally is the ideal female figure that Clarissa wants to be; the marriage with Richard Dalloway is a representation of the ego and a compromise to reality, and the super-ego is realized by the author Virginia Woolf through the fictional character Clarissa who finally chooses to survive.

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