

An Analysis of Jane Eyre from Freud's Psychoanalysis

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Abstract: *Jane Eyre* is a famous literary work set in the 19th-century Victorian period by English writer Charlotte Brontë, who was a famous critical realist writer in the 19th century. During this period, Britain was one of the earliest countries to carry out the women's liberation movement, and *Jane Eyre* was written against this background. As a complicated and deep literary work, *Jane Eyre* creates a brilliant female image of strong self-respect, independence, resistance, and courage for readers through Jane's growth and social environment. This article attempts to interpret Jane's complicated and typical character and the connotation of the spirit of the whole novel based on the psychological structure of Freud's psychoanalysis theory to appreciate its unique artistic charm further.

Keywords: Jane Eyre; Growth; Character; Psychoanalytic theory; Charlotte bronte

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1. Introduction

This paper tries to explore the spiritual connotation of the novel from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis. The thesis falls into four chapters. Chapter One is a brief introduction to the life of the authoress and the relationship of the novel.

2. A brief introduction to Charlotte and Jane

Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855) was one of the most famous female writers in English literature. She was also one of the representatives of Realist Criticism in the 19th century and heralded a new era for women to hold the stage in literary history. Charlotte Brontë invested the then British literature with a fresh element owing to women's remarkable sensitiveness and discernment. Her works are marked by a new conception of woman as heroines of vital strength and passionate feelings. Besides, Charlotte is a master-hand in realism combined with marvelous romanticism. On the one hand, she exposes the cruelty and hypocrisy of the Victorian upper

class and the miseries of the poor, vividly depicting Victorian society with a focus on working middle-class women like governesses. On the other hand, her works are full of intense passion. With personal perspectives, emotional and distinctive characters, plus elements of horror, mystery and foreshadowing, she strikingly portrays life.

Charlotte Brontë endured a childhood full of hardships. When she was fifteen, she entered Miss Wooler's boarding school at Loehad, where Charlotte lived a short time and made progress. A few years later, Charlotte returned to Loehad as a teacher. After that, sponsored by her aunt, she traveled to Italy to learn French and German, hoping to open her own school. Though the plan failed, her Italian studies fueled her urge for self-expression and led her to pursue writing. It can be said that *Jane Eyre* is the autobiography of Charlotte Brontë, and its birth is closely related to the background of the times in which the author lived. As is put forward by Susan Waring: "The book of *Jane Eyre* was the first adequate expression of the feeling which wrestled within her, and the heart of Charlotte Brontë found in words only, uncontrolled by any rules of rhythm, the joy of expression, strictly judged, the right of recognition. It is therefore that Jane may not for it was an outburst, a great surging heart bursting its bounds and finding outlet for its accumulated passion" ^[1].

Jane Eyre has made a stir in literature worldwide and won wide popularity among readers. It creates an independent female figure who fights for freedom and equality. Born poor, Jane Eyre suffers a miserable childhood and a bumpy romantic journey, yet she controls her own fate to pursue true love. She stands for self-respect, perseverance, and rebellion, showing women's desire for freedom, equality, and independence. With wisdom and persistence, Jane finally gains happiness.

Therefore, it is helpful for us to better understand the value connotation of *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Freud's psychoanalysis theory and Jane Eyre, a female character, based on the author's rich life experience.

3. Freudian psychoanalytic theory

Freud is the founder of the school of psychoanalysis. He divided people's psychological processes into three levels: the upper level of consciousness, the middle level of pre-consciousness, and the lower level of the subconscious. And then Freud took it a step further in *The Ego and the Id*. Freud put forward the "structure view" of personality. It means that the complete personality structure consists of three major parts: id, ego, and superego ^[2].

The id is the most primitive part of the personality structure, the inborn basic structure, the most primitive, mysterious, and unreachable part of the personality. The mental process of the id provides the power, which is the foundation of the establishment of personality. The id process is subconscious, non-moral, the embodiment of instinct and desire. It follows the pleasure principle, namely seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.

The ego is located in the middle layer of the personality structure, which is derived from the differentiation of the id. Needs arising from the id are generally not immediately met in reality, but are the result of learning and adapting to the external environment. The ego follows the principle of reality, which not only satisfies the needs of the id, but also prohibits the behaviors that violate social norms, moral codes, and laws. Therefore, the ego is between the id and the superego, with the functions of buffering and regulating the id and superego.

The superego, also known as the ideal, is the highest part of the personality structure, which is gradually formed due to the individual's acceptance of social and cultural moral norms in life. The superego has two important parts: one is the ego ideal, that is, the requirement of their own behavior in accordance with their ideal standards; The second is conscience, which is the principle by which one's actions are protected from error. Thus, the superego is the moral part of the personality structure, and the principle that governs the superego is the principle of perfection.

According to Freud, the id, ego, and superego interact with each other and are related to each other. The purpose of the id is to satisfy desire and to seek happiness; the ego is to seek reality; the superego is to seek perfection. The ego is subject to the mandatory rules of the superego; it must not only seek what satisfies the id, but also consider that what is satisfied does not violate the values of the superego. Therefore, the id, ego, and superego should be in a state of harmony and balance to ensure the normal development of a healthy personality. If these three forces do not maintain a dynamic balance, it will lead to the production of mental disorders.

4. A character study of Jane Eyre

After Freud, a paradigm for studying the close connection between texts, writers, and works was widely used. The third part of this paper focuses on the text of the novel to explore the character of Jane Eyre.

4.1. Id in Jane

In the book *Jane Eyre*, the id of Jane Eyre is mainly manifested as her instinctive resistance to oppression and unlimited yearning for freedom.

Jane Eyre has a spontaneous resistance to unfair treatment since her childhood. However, Jane Eyre showed a submissive self most of the time because of the fear of punishment, but sometimes the id would break through the defense line of self and reality and burst out. When Jane Eyre was ten years old, the red house, as a symbol of "fear and confinement" in her childhood, became a permanent psychological pain for Jane Eyre throughout her life. Before formally going to Lowood Charity School, Jane Eyre's aversion to her aunt reached its peak. In the face of unacceptable slander and rejection, Jane Eyre's infinite disgust was aroused, and she said in an uncontrollable mood: "I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty" ^[3]. This natural and true expression of emotion also makes the heroine obtain unprecedented pleasure. Of course, Jane Eyre also tried to develop more simple, easy-going habits and lively and lovely manners, which is actually the role of the superego. On the whole, childhood is the embryonic stage of Jane's character. On the one hand, Jane Eyre is influenced by the superego to show obedience; on the other hand, Jane is controlled by the id to show resistance.

In Jane Eyre's youth, the id also plays an important role, but in the end the id cannot be content to hide for a lifetime. The id jumps out again in search of freedom, longing for the outside world:

"I was tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!" ^[3].

Finally, Jane Eyre decisively gave up the quiet life of teaching at Lowood and started a new life at Thornfield Manor. When she meets Rochester, Jane Eyre does not implicitly express her persistent and fanatical love for Rochester: “if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you”^[3], “I do love you,” I said, “more than ever: but I must not show or indulge the feeling: and this is the last time I must express it”^[3], it is an unconscious declaration from the deepest part of the heart.

This is the positive influence of the id on Jane Eyre, which creates a more three-dimensional, distinct, and independent woman for us.

4.2. Ego in Jane

From the “ego”, it is weak. The environment, the id, and the superego constantly influence the ego.

For example, the young Jane Eyre showed a more submissive self and basically spent the 8 years of school life peacefully in Lowood School, which was also the formation stage of Jane Eyre’s character. The rebellious will in Jane’s heart is hidden in her rational ‘ego’. Only after her classmates had dispersed did she feel sad alone: “I retired into a corner and sat down on the floor. The spell by which I had been so far supported began to dissolve; reaction took place, and soon, so overwhelming was the grief that seized me, I sank prostrate with my face to the ground. Now I wept”^[3]. The reason why “I” is sad is that my spirit is in the “ego” and “id” alternation; the “superego” has not yet formed. It is in such a mood that the hero is emaciated, helpless, and immersed in sadness.

Similarly, after eight years of Lowood’s cultivation, the Jane Eyre of the id had been kept under control on a very small scale, and a Jane Eyre shrouded in ego and superego had always appeared at Thornfield Park. Even the simple daily life also condensed Jane Eyre’s pursuit of equality and self-awareness.

4.3. Superego in Jane

In the novel Jane Eyre, as a limitation of the ego, “superego” plays a vital role in promoting Jane’s self-development and the formation of social morality.

In the formation of Jane Eyre’s character, Helen and Miss Temple are Jane’s moral teachers. They make Jane experience justice, status, identity, respect and friendship for the first time. Helen was Jane Eyre’s first moral teacher. Jane said: “And if I were in your place I should dislike her; I should resist her. If she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose”^[3] when the teacher beat Helen. But despite her severe injuries, Helen said, “It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil”^[3], It is better to be patient and endure than to inflict violence on those around you, and the Bible encourages people to do good for evil. It can be seen that getting along with Helen changed Jane a lot, and she became tolerant and patient; these two qualities are the basic norms that the ego uses to limit the id. When Aunt Reed was dying, Jane said that she had forgiven her aunt and told her that she could go to seek God’s forgiveness. At the same time, the transformation of Jane’s character can also be seen from the contrast between the preceding and the latter.

In the face of love, Jane Eyre also makes a good coordination and balance between reason and morality. When she knows that Rochester has a wife, she has to choose between two prospects: follow the rules of emotion, be Rochester’s mistress, or abandon him in accordance with the law of conscience and morality?

Between emotion and reason, impulse and conscience, the ego Jane Eyre is struggling painfully in the contest between id and superego. Eventually the superego prevailed: “a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart— ‘My daughter, flee temptation’”^[3]. From Jane Eyre’s “leaving”, we can see that Jane Eyre is both opposed to the patriarchal rule of ideology, but can not break free of its shackles. Charlotte Brontë has created a character who is not only rooted in reality, but also has a beautiful ideal. The ego withstood the test and gained the redemption of the superego. Finally, with Thornfield Manor turned to ashes, the death of Bertha Mason and Rochester’s serious injury, the legal barriers and wealth differences between Jane Eyre and Rochester’s love were completely removed; Jane got a perfect unity between her love and her complete personality. The hint from nature also guides Jane: “Suddenly my heart stopped beating, and I heard a distant voice cry, ‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’-nothing more. Where did it come from? It was the voice of Edward Rochester, and it spoke in sadness and in pain”^[3]. It is a guide for Jane to choose marriage wisely. When John asks Jane to marry him, the voices arouse Jane and encourage her to find her true love and happiness. Finally, Jane Eyre gained equal love. In front of Rochester, Jane says the famous phrase “just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal, —as we are!”^[3].

5. The unity of id, ego and superego in Jane

Although Freud’s psychoanalytic theory divides personality into id, ego and superego, the boundaries between them are not completely separated. The human is the unity of the three “I”, and the interaction of these three levels also forms their final personality. Similarly, the germination, development and formation of Jane’s character are closely related to the interaction and restriction between her id, ego and superego.

5.1. The unity

In childhood, there is a relatively large proportion of id to ego; the emergence of id and ego is mostly unconscious, immature, and little influenced by the superego in this period. With the growth of age, the superego develops in Jane Eyre, and the ego begins to consciously balance the relationship between the id and the superego and the real social environment. When the superego finally forms and obtains the decisive position of the three, the ego also matures, and Jane’s character characteristics are finally established. In the novel, Jane leaves boldly and decisively, and refuses St. John’s request to respect her heart again and returns to Rochester, which reflects the process of Jane breaking through the id, leaping over the ego, and constantly criticizing herself to reach the superego.

5.2. The contradiction

The id, ego, and superego are not static, but are always in conflict -- coordinated contradictory movements. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane faces many battles between the inner id and the superego, which is essentially a struggle between the two consciences for domination of the ego, and we can see that the power contrast between them lies in the behavioral tendency of the ego.

When the marriage between Rochester and Bertha happens, Jane Eyre is struggling painfully in the contest between refusal and surrender, id and superego under the begging of Rochester “One idea only still

throbbed life-like within me—a remembrance of God”^[3], So “I did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity— looked for aid to one higher than man: the words ‘God help me!’”^[3]. When faced with the question of whether or not to leave Thornfield, she and her inner struggle with: “I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me; and Conscience, turned tyrant, held Passion by the throat, told her tauntingly, she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough”^[3], from this we can realize Jane conflict in the heart of the id and the superego.

In the struggle between love and morality, the “superego” finally compromises with the “id”; on a stormy night, Jane Eyre leaves Rochester alone.

6. Conclusion

The paper analyzes the relationship between the author, the era background, and the works first. Then, the paper discusses the inner relationship between them and the heroine Jane from the three levels of the theory of the id, ego, and superego, based on the theory of mental structure of Freudian psychoanalysis. At last, the acquired conclusion is that the three “I” are unified in Jane; Jane achieves complete independence in economy and personality through her rational resistance and struggle, as well as gains her love with Rochester.

In Jane Eyre’s character structure, the id is a small but magical force, which constitutes her strong, rebellious and independent character; that is exactly what the charm of Jane Eyre’s character is. The superego is the embodiment of morality and conscience, which endows Jane Eyre with the brilliance of universal love and makes her become a kind woman. The ego grows and matures in the id, superego and reality. Under the interaction of the three “I”, Jane’s unique character of resisting the secular world, independence and enterprising spirit is formed. As a result, it is concluded that Jane Eyre’s life is influenced by the society in the Victorian era, and her image is shaped by the society and living environment as well as the protagonist. Jane’s character image also perfectly conveys the independent female consciousness that the author advocates in her heart.

All in all, taking the perspective of psychoanalysis theory as an entry point to experience the work, we can obtain new enlightenment from its individual value and social significance contained in it.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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