

# An Appreciation of James Joyce's Writing Methods in "Eveline"\*

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James Joyce (1882-1941) is an Irish novelist, a major figure of modern world literature. He revolted against the traditional techniques in novel writing and experimented extensively in language and style to create a new kind of novel. His name is associated with the stream-of-consciousness technique, and his influence is still profoundly felt today. His first important work, *Dubliners* (1999), is regarded as one of his best short stories, with a collection of 15 short stories in it, and "Eveline" is one of the 15 stories. It tells a story of a 19-year-old girl, Eveline, who suffers the inner struggle to escape the dull and hard life in Dublin with her boyfriend, but it is doomed to end in failure. Short as it is, it is really worth careful analysis and appreciation. This paper, first of all, gives a brief introduction of the story. Then it mainly explores James Joyce's writing methods used in the story in three brief aspects: his method in the flow of experience, his method of "epiphanies", and his symbolic method, and all of them have laid a solid foundation for the method of "stream of consciousness" in his later works.

*Keywords:* "Eveline", "the flow of experience", "epiphanies", symbolic method

## Introduction

James Joyce (1882-1941) is one of the most original novelists of the 20th century, and considered to be one of the most influential writers in the modernist avant-garde of the early 20th century, whose work shows a unique synthesis of realism, the "stream of consciousness" and symbolism. Some critics say that he is second only to Shakespeare in his command of English (ZHANG, 1994, p. 202). His first important work, *Dubliners* (1999), is regarded as one of the best short stories written in English (LI, 1999, p. 18). It is a collection of 15 short stories, all realistic and impressionistic studies of the life, thoughts, dreams, aspirations, and frustrations of diverse inhabitants in the Irish capital (LIU, 2001, p. 492). He chose Dublin for the scene, because that city seemed to him the center of paralysis, which is the moral hemiplegia or spiritual poverty. In this paralysed city, everything stands under the sway of priests. The young may dream of escaping away from the narrow confines, but since even their dreams of getting away are shaped in the existing surroundings, their efforts often end in bitter resignation of fruitless discontent. *Dubliners* consists of four parts: Part I: Childhood, Part II: Adolescence, Part III: Adult, and Part IV: Social Life. "Eveline" is the first story in Part II, and it is also the most important story in the novel, because some of the later stories are created on the base of "Eveline", or to

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be exact, the later stories are the expansion of "Eveline" (ZHANG, 1988, p. 22). In this story, a 19-year-old-Dublin-girl Eveline, weary of her tedious life, has the chance to escape to Buenos Ayres with a sailor who wants to marry her. But this signifies a break with all her past life, which is full of bitterness and also some happy memories. She suffers a lot in weighing each side of the question. In pursuing a better life, she follows her boyfriend to the station. But at the last moment, she clings to the iron railing at the docks, incapable of following her suitor.

Short and simple as the story is, the writing methods of James Joyce are worth our appreciation.

### **Joyce's Meethod in the Flow of Experience**

James Joyce is known as one of the pioneers of "stream of consciousness", however, when he was composing *Dubliners*, he did not actually use the technique of "stream of consciousness", not even the following "epiphanies", but the simple flow of experience, which describes the character's mental flow of recalling, feeling, and memorizing of something (LI, 1996, p. 48).

The story started with Eveline's inner flow of experience. Sitting at the window, she was watching the evening invade in the avenue, and in great dilemma: to leave or to stay! In her home, she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life, though she has to work very hard. And furthermore, she had promised her mother to keep the house together and take care of her family. But in a distant unknown country and new home, what would happen? Watching a man going back home to his house, she saw the red house. Looking at a red house, she remembered that one time there used to be a field, "The children of the avenue used to play together... Still they seemed to have been rather happy then. Her father was not so bad then; and besides, her mother was alive" (ZHANG, 1987, p. 22). Her childhood memory came back to her mind—her sisters, brothers, and little friends used to play there, but now they have grown up and some of them have gone to other places. Thinking her home and reviewing all its familiar objects, she thought of her father who was violent to her most of the time, but now when she wanted to escape the danger of her father, she found that her father sometimes could be nice and even read her out a ghost story. Hearing the melancholy air of organ-player, she thought of her pity mother, whose life closed in final craziness. She also recalled how she met her boyfriend, and she was wondering what would the future life be.

In the flow of experience, Joyce also added internal monologue to describe Eveline's dilemma. "Was it wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question" (ZHANG, 1987, p. 23). She was asking herself whether she should leave her home. The internal monologue seemed that two persons were in her mind, quarreling. One says you should leave so that you will not work hard to surport your family and escape the violence of your father; the other says you should not leave, who can garrantee that Frank would love you forever? What would happen in the distant unknown country and place? At the end of the story, among the swaying crowd in the station, she asked herself: "Could she still draw back after all he had done for her?" (ZHANG, 1987, p. 27). At this moment, she is a little regretful in escaping with her boyfriend. So it is no surprising that she changed her mind at the last moment.

In the first part of the story, Joyce just used the method of the flow of experience to describe, in fact, the whole life of Eveline, from childhood till now, because she has to make a life-and-death dicision. The flow of experience has made a very good preparation for his following method of "epiphanies".

### Joyce's Method of "Epiphanies"

Joyce's theory of "epiphanies" refers to a deep insights that might be gained through incidents and circumstances which seem outwardly insignificant (LIU, 2001, p. 493). The method has the following two features.

First, his "epiphanies" does not only refer to a sudden very strong emotion when you understand something suddenly, instead it needs a mental preparation, and it must have close connection with the inner struggle of the character. What is more, it must be in accordance with the plot of the story.

Second, "epiphanies" must occur at the critical moment of the characters mental activities, and it needs incidents and circumstances to help or to urges the character to understand or make a decision at last. This is usually the climax of the story.

To be exact, Part I, the flow of experience, describes the character's inner struggle and it is the thorough preparation for Eveline's "epiphanies" in this part. If we say that Eveline could not make the final decision when she thought her father, but when she mused the pitful vision of her mother's life, she decided to leave. "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" (ZHANG, 1987, p. 26). Her mother's miserable life helps her to understand suddenly that she could not live like her mother anymore. She has a right to happiness, so she decides to leave and to begin her new life.

Eveline stood among the swaying crowd in the station with her boyfriend Frank. She was in a maze of distress and doubted the truth of the unknown world, doubted whether Frank would keep his love. The tumbling sea seemed suddenly to draw her back to reality. When she was really about to leave, she did not find the life a wholly undesirable. She could not leave, she was afraid to leave, so she gripped the iron railing with both hands as if they were the last straw of life. Like a helpless bird in the cage, she gave Frank no sign of love or farewell. Her escape ended in failure.

Joyce's method of "epiphanies" in "Eveline" occurs at two most critical moment of the story. One is when she decided to leave, another happens at the end of the story when she changed her mind. The method succeeds in depicting Eveline's inner struggle, and failure of escaping away from the dull life of Dublin. This method is also the foundation for his later method of "stream of consciousness".

### Joyce's Symbolic Method

Joyce is very skillful in using symbolism to express his ideas or theme.

The story starts in the evening of a day, which symbolizes the hopeless and lifeless way of living in Dublin. In order to describe the paralysis of the city, Joyce used "dust", at the beginning of the story, "She looked round 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" (ZHANG, 1987, p. 23). "Dust" here symbolizes the dry, sterile, and dull life of Dublin.

The most excellent place of using this method is at the end of the story. "All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing" (ZHANG, 1987, p. 27). The "tumbling seas" is an insurmountable barrier to her unknown new life, and her heart was just like the tumbling seas that were not in peace. Anyhow the "tumbling seas" are going to

draw her into it. At this moment, she is afraid, she worries her future, and she is not as determined as before. The "iron railing" were just like the bars of prison or the bars of a bird cage, and she, who is behind the bar, was like a helpless bird in the cage. Could she get out of the cage? Where could she fly to? What would happen to her if she were in a new place?

Eveline herself is also a symbol of the young people at that time in Dublin. They want to escape from the paralyzed city, but they are not determined enough. Dublin is the epitome of the whole society. Young people, like Eveline, are shaped in the existing surroundings, their efforts often end in bitter resignation or fruitless discontent like Eveline.

### Conclusions

"Eveline" is a very short story, only about five pages in length, with very simple plot. A girl named Eveline was in a dilemma whether she should leave with her boyfriend or stay with her family, yet from the above analysis, we can see that James Joyce used various methods to make the story gripping and his heroine attractive. He is skillful in using the flow of experience, especially the method of "epiphanies" to describe Eveline's mental struggle, her inner cry to get rid of the dull life in the paralyzed city of Dublin. Though the method of "epiphanies" is not as famous as his method of "stream of consciousness", and it is not so jumping as "stream of consciousness" in describing a character's mental activities, it is proved to have the same effect as the "stream of consciousness". Even though in writing "Eveline" Joyce did not exactly use the method of "stream of consciousness", the method of "epiphanies" has laid solid foundation for his later works. From the above analysis, we can also see that James Joyce is also the master of using symbolism, especially in subtleties. Eveline's failure in escaping her dull life in the end echoes James Joyce's usual theme: The young people's efforts often end in bitter resignation of fruitless discontent.

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