

The Conflicts between Ego, Id and Superego—— Jake's Love Tragedy in *The Sun Also Rises* from the Perspective of Psychoanalysis

Wenqian Gao

Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, China

Abstract: Based on Freud's theory of personality structure, this paper discussed the causes of Jake Barnes' love tragedy in *The Sun Also Rises* from the three perspectives, namely, id, ego and superego as well as the conflicts and imbalances in the three perspectives. The behaviors and psychological changes of the protagonist Jake in different periods from the above perspectives were analyzed in detail, showing that Jake had experienced a psychological process of indulging himself in the primitive desires, trying to redeem himself and in vain. A conclusion was drawn that Jake's disillusionment of superego projection and excessive repression of ego jointly led to the tragedy of his love.

Keywords: Freud; Theory of personality structure; *The Sun Also Rises*

1. Introduction

The Sun Also Rises was published in 1926. At that time, the United States had just experienced a great loss, and the new international order had not yet been born, with conflicts and racial violence here and there all around the society. In addition, the rise of popular culture and consumerism has led to a society obsessed with material comfort^[1]. All these confused young people. At the same time, the collapse of Puritanism and trauma brought by the made them rush toward Carpe Diem and indulge themselves in mundane joys.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes fell in love with Brett after his bitter experience, but a wound got from it rendered him impotent and unable to consummate his love for the lady. After suffering from an anxiety, he wanted to redeem himself. He got close to nature and participated in the bullfighting festival in an attempt to look for inner passion to satisfy his primitive desire. He even introduced others as lovers to Brett, whom he could not really be united as a couple. However all his effort was in vain, and his love ended up in tragedy.

As we all know, the research on Ernest Hemingway and his works has lasted for decades and has gained a broad attention in domestic and foreign researches^[2]. "Many studies have been carried out around Hemingway and his life on various methodologies in several aspects: feminism, Marxism, etc. However, the researches from a psychological perspective are comparatively limited^[3]." Therefore, some researchers become to explore the psychological views to illustrate the character's abnormal self-repression and indulgence.

Freud's theory of personality has been widely applied in the psychological analysis of literature works. Freudian theory is well-known for its concepts of id, ego, and superego. Based on Freud's personality theory, this paper analyzed the three aspects---id, ego and superego on the part of the protagonist, and the imbalance of these aspects so as to shed some lights upon the personality of the Jake, and then explore the causes of his love tragedy.

2. Jake's Powerful Id

First of all, this part discussed Jake's id. To put it in a simple way, id is the desire in itself. It pursues pleasure. It is controlled by the ego and superego indeed, but it is the most powerful one.

2.1 The Eros for Brett

The pleasure of intercourse is an intense pleasure human beings can experience. It has something to

do with the sudden disappearance of a stimulus that had gradually reached climax. The restraint of desire impulse may be a preparatory function. It prepares the stimulus for eventual elimination (death). And people can feel a burst of released pleasure in this process. But Jake was not able to feel that way.

The key event that shaped Jake's character was his service as a soldier. Then he was injured and sent to the hospital, where he met Brett. Brett was a nurse of Voluntary Aid Detachment at the time. They fell in love, but Jake later discovered that he was impotent due to spinal injury, which caused their separation. Afterwards Jake was sent to England for convalescence, and there he saw Brett again; they discovered that they were still in love. "In fact that detail does not appear in the novel (Hemingway cut it from the manuscripts) Jake then went to work for a newspaper in 1916 and decided to forget Bret^[4]." But in the end, his efforts were found to be futile.

Jake, the impotent male protagonist, was in a passive position in the relationship with Brett. Although they loved each other, Jake's physical defects are always like a cloud hanging over the general two people. The pain of not being able to satiate biological demands (demand of id) stung both sides deeply. So throughout the novel, Jake's mood deteriorated every time he met Brett, driving him to the brink of irrationality. When he saw Brett dancing in a bar with a group of young men, his anger boiled over. "I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry...I want to wave a man, anyone, anything to break that superior, cool composure^[5]." Id was controlling his mind, and his libido could not be satisfied inasmuch as libido is a measuring unit for the desire concerning love that mainly refers to love for the purpose of achieving coitus, that is sex, in the general sense.

You can feel how much Jake loves Brett. That desire lurked between the lines. Jake once watched her get into the cab and drive away until she was out of sight. He was upset about her sexual excesses with many men, and was so upset that he went to bed without taking off his clothes. But because of the iceberg principle, the detailed description is limited, you won't be told the struggle and entanglement between them directly. All the male characters in the novel regarded Brett attractive, but Jake always saw her wrinkles. The implication is that Jake knew her faults, acolasia and caprice, but still loved her. And he was the only one who really cared about her. After that, Jake suppressed the id part, introduced Brett, his lover, to Romero, and tried to suppress the sorrow of knowing that all his friends might have had sex with her. But as Freud said, the primal nature of sex, such as his self-sacrifice and desire for closeness, remained and was easily identified, even if the goal of achieving intercourse was outwardly avoided or ultimately failed to be achieved.

And in the process of loving her, he constantly idealized Brett. Libido was gushing toward his target. And Brett was the embodiment of his unrealized ideal ego. He also craved sex, and the right to love as he chose. But because of his impotence, he could only rely on others to achieve narcissistic satisfaction to balance the id.

2.2 The desire for alcohol and parties

Drinking and feasting were also choices made by the id in pursuit of pleasure because his sexual desire could not be vented. In addition, Jake was deeply affected by the group consciousness, and became lost and indulged the catharsis of the id, which also implied his great mental suffering.

Jake Barnes' life in Paris was a life of sheer luxury. He and his companions, like Cohn's pursuit of Carpe Diem, held the view: "I can't bear to think that my life is going so fast and I'm not really living it^[5]." Without exception, they used alcohol to numb themselves and escaped from reality. This kind of dissolute life, of course, could not be his life-saving straw, let alone solve his spiritual crisis^[7], but temporarily satisfied his identity.

Alcohol was frequently seen in the novel. Alcohol had become an indispensable necessity of life for them. They went to bars and drank when they had nothing to do. They drank for happiness and also drank for sorrow. "The uncontrollable state of life is usually regarded as the classic standard of the lost^[6]", was a true reflection of the lost generation. But was Jake entirely to blame for his drinking to deflect the pain of his own impotence? Apparently not.

He did produce real depression. This could forcibly withdraw dangerous memories or conceptual perceptions from instinctive consciousness, thereby forming self-protection. The prohibition of id to vent in any way is mainly to deny or distort the threat factors caused by the ego to a certain extent, which will become a resistance to all kinds of anxiety. In order to resist internal and external threats, and to eliminate his anxiety, mainly about the fear of castration, Jake was immersed in wine^[7].

Although Jake, Bill and others had different habits, occupations, and personalities, they also formed

a group because of their love for Brett and their unhappy lives, which made them have a group consciousness. "Under its influence, they will feel, think and act in a completely different way than being alone^[8]." But the group consciousness has a devastating effect on the individual superstructure of the individual's psychological structure, and it exposes the foundation common of subconscious to the outside world. For example, everyone's life there was unsatisfactory, and everyone was longing to numb themselves by drinking. But how did this particular group overcome the object possession of the id? Through McDougall we can clearly understand. First of all, the bond of this group was stable, they stay together for a long time. Secondly, they showed their aversion to Brett's new lovers. "The root of the collective spirit is jealousy^[8]." For example, when Cohen and Brett went to San Sebastian and had a relationship, not only did everyone hate him, but even Jake turned from like to hate. Another example was the appearance of Romero. Michael not only insulted him during the party, but Jake didn't care about Romero's future anymore. Finally, there was an implicit division of labor between them. Michael and Bill provided Brett with money and glory, while Jake provided her with tenderness and tolerance, etc. Therefore, due to the contagiousness of group consciousness, Jake's id was more indulged in drinking and pleasure, and it became harder to suppress his id.

3. Jake's Struggling Ego

The ego constrains the id on the one hand and satisfies the id on the other. Ego satiated Jake's primitive desire for Brett, though it was not in a direct and obvious way.

3.1 Self-loathing

The thing that first belongs to the preconscious, starting from the feeling system, is called the "ego". Brett had always been in a dominant position in Jake's relationship with her, and Jake could only passively accept her decisions and arrangements, even begging Brett for love several times. However, Brett was wanton, and Jake could only be thrown into passivity waiting for her visit, and she would bother Jake to pander to her whims, completely ignoring Jake's feelings. Because of the inability to satisfy the release of the id, he developed neurotic anxiety and self-defense mechanism. These three components of personality will form a certain anxiety during the energy release process. Therefore, it can be inferred that it is difficult to integrate resistance factors generated by counter-energy with human consciousness, and it is easy to generate self-defense mechanisms. And Jake's anxiety had two factors: being severely discriminated against in a patriarchal society, and having no sexual capacity. The former could be derived from the abundance of language that satirized Jake. Bill once said, "There are people who insist that some girls are feeding you, or you are impotent." The latter could mention that at the beginning of the novel, Georgette Hobin deliberately cuddled next to Jake, who was very indifferent. When Jorge teased him even more excessively, Jake pushed her away. In order to avoid a certain degree of anxiety, Jake sealed part of the 'id' through primitive repression, and used the unconsciousness to cover up everything^[7]. Jake had been limiting his urge to love. Once the instinct of love enters Consciousness, his heart would be extremely tormented and painful. So the ego had been over-repressing the id's dominance, causing Jake looked like a groveling man.

It is the castration complex that Jake was anxious about in his ego perspective. Because his ego was too tough, he was extremely concerned about gender issues, such as being sensitive to gay men. Eliot pointed out that Jake's sexual trauma led to his "broken sense of male identity^[9]", which had a profound impact on his ego. The huge change castrated Jake's phallus as a male status symbol, causing him to suffer from the spiritual exile of patriarchal society. It can be concluded that the absence of his ideal ego will inevitably lead to an excessively strict ego. Freud's theory also supports this view: "When there is something in the ego that coincides with the ideal ego, people will feel happy^[8]."

3.2 The disposal of "object possession"

Logically speaking, the object possession of id is inexorable. This determines a person's possessiveness towards the object or people he desires, which can be the same as territorial consciousness. When others show inappropriate appropriation intentions, the ego will protect the conscious subject and relieve conscious tension. "The id and superego conflicts because each of them desires to take advantage of the ego for its own purposes. It's called an inner or ego psychic conflicts." So Freud mentioned that, in the case when the pleasure principle blocked, it will be alternative by the reality principle of the ego. But this does not mean giving up the acquisition of happiness completely. It insists on postponing satisfaction, i.e., temporarily tolerating some unpleasant things on the way of pursuing happiness. In the

case of id's sexual desires, they borrow their libidos and associate them with self-transformation through identification. When these libidos are transformed into self-libidos, they give up their sexual goals, i.e. achieve de-eroticization. Jake mingled with other Brett's lovers, ignoring Brett's eroticism in order to be able to stay by her side for solace. The ego's desire for id is also limited. The "secondary process" is used to replace the dominant "primary process", which transforms the free energy of possessiveness into approximately stable static energy. In other words, ego moderation on id in Jake's subconscious was preparatory work for introducing and determining the pleasure principle. Abandoning object possession was, on the one hand, a delayed gratification of erotic desire for Brett, and on the other hand, the transfer of libido to Brett. In the process, Jake's ego became more humble and ascetic while Brett became more attractive to him. Ultimately, Brett took over all his self-love of the ego, which led directly to the ego's sacrifice. That is to say, Brett's existence completely swallowed Jake's ego. So it made the situation that Jake was self-contemptuous, but the love and tolerance he gave to Brett was enormous. But what could be assumed was that if Jake could not limit his object possession to Brett, then he might be able to get rid of this pain very soon, or completely defeated and tortured like Cohn and would not be so reluctantly lost. It was due to those sexual impulses that were restrained in purpose that a lasting bond arose between them. Since such impulses were not fully satisfied, it had spared uncontrolled sexual impulses from being amply weakened each time after achieving the pursuit of sexual intercourse. "The love of the flesh is destined to weaken when satisfied. In order to endure, it must be mixed with gentleness at the beginning. This is the restrained sexual desire of id, or it is completely transformed into the latter^[8]." Therefore, when Brett continued to be tired of her lovers, Jake could always be with her. In addition, also stemming from the group consciousness, Jake and the others were jealous of each other. For example, after hearing Brett and Cohen were going to San Sebastian, Bill muttered to himself: "Why not be with Jake? (Ended vaguely)" "Or why not with me?" The last sentence was what Bill wanted to say. But since all of them can not really conquer the lewd woman, they simply gave up their original idea and acted as a united group to show Brett their concern. Group consciousness requires fairness, and no one can be exceptional. To be exceptional is "breaking the rules of fairness", so Jake ignored the desire of object possession to Brett.

4. Jake's Lost Superego

The superego is the moral conscience and ego ideal part of the personality structure, and it is the highest stage of self-development. It is supposed to direct the ego to control the id.

4.1 Lost in the obsession with Romero

Bullfighting is significant in this novel. It symbolizes not only passion, masculinity, and vitality, but also the ability to play with death without control. And the bullfighter Romero was the psychological projection of Jake's superego.

First, Jake Barnes was passionate about bullfighting, and he felt compelled to regain his masculinity in bullfighting. "No one can live a good life except a bullfighter^[5]." As an excellent bullfighter, Romero was the psychological projection of Jake's superego. Romero was the most ideal and perfect embodiment for Jake. Romero conquered Jake with his strength, unparalleled courage, masculine stance and extraordinary intelligence. The power and courage of life was on full display in Romero's performance. It was not just the power of vitality that moved Jake, but also the courage of facing with death. Jake liked bullfighting very much, for the second reason was "bullfighting is the only scene that understands life and death^[6]". Jake believed that the bullfighter's mastery of death by conquering fear will free him from both death and fear. It was also his personal hope—to overcome fear and to overcome the trauma caused by the international event.

Bullfighting was Jake's most powerful exploration when he was confused, and the bullfighter was also what the superego wanted Jake to be. Thus in order not to the disillusion of the superego, Jake prevented Montoya from passing on the American ambassador's invitation to Romero for dinner. He worried that the corruption of modern society would destroy a hero. But it also confirmed his inner fear of disillusionment with the superego.

Jake's obsession with superego symbols in turn destroyed his superego itself. Jake was obsessed with him to the extent of disregarding ethics, friendship with Montoya, object occupation to Brett, prompted Romero and Brett to date, and even let them elope. It was because Jake had partially projected himself to Romero to some extent, so that it could also satisfy the demands of the id. But also because of the bad ending between Romero and Brett—Brett drove Romero away, the symbol of the superego also began

to succumb to the sexual desires, which signed that Jake's superego will eventually be disillusioned.

4.2 The desert of spiritual world

Jake had been wounded in the bitter experience and became impotent, and he was unable to bond with the beloved Brett, unable to satisfy each other. In order to find joy in life to satisfy his id, he indulged in nihilism, living in a world without universal morals and values. He claimed himself as a Catholic, but not religious at all. "I was a little shamed, and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic...but anyway it was a grand religion, and I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time^[5]." And when the second time he stood in front of a church in Spain, the first thing he noticed was a pub, suggesting that his spiritual world was also gradually being eroded by alcohol. Hemingway used the frustration of sexual life to subtly express the ideological and spiritual predicament of Westerners represented by Jake^[10].

The barrenness of Jake's spiritual world can still be explained by group consciousness. "Furthermore, once one joins an organized group, one's level of civilization is greatly regressed^[8]." When alone, Jake may be a well-educated man when he is alone. But in groups, he was also a lust-driven person who acted out of control, involuntarily wanting to drink alcohol and date prostitutes. In most cases, a person's character not only affects his own destiny, but also has a subtle relationship with those around him. When discussing about Hoffenheimer with Bill, he also bluntly stated that he could not read it.

During Jake's second self-redemption journey, Brett contacted him to bring her back to Paris. He dawned on that "his attempts at San Sebastian had gone to hell". With the disillusionment of the superego, came the collapse of the spiritual world. He violated ethics and betrayed his own feelings in order to meet Brett's sexual demands. In the end, after she changed her mind, the choices he had made seemed worthless. No matter if it was getting drunk in Paris, fishing quietly in the Pyrenees or celebrating the Basque Bullfighting Festival, nothing could change Jake's morbidly deformed life. He satirized himself, "That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love. It's OK^[5]." Last but not least, he lost touch with his native land. One of the root causes of Jake's struggle was that he has left America that gave him life and nourished him, and departed from the American culture and traditions with which he was familiar. The loss of his spiritual home had left him unable to find his place in Paris or Spain. The crisis of faith caused by his spiritual conversion increased his inner pain, which made him look for external sustenance, and finally evolved into the disillusionment of the superego.

4.3 Contradictory among Id, Ego and Superego

For pleasure, the id tries to release sexual desires to satisfy instincts. We all know that the sexual instinct is the most important instinct. "Freud claimed that sex is the core of human beings, that is, our life^[11]." Thus, the id drives ego to satisfy its desire for sex. On the contrary, the superego is always supervising the ego, judging whether its behaviors are morally proper. As Freud said, "The ego plays a difficult role, which is not only suppressed by the id, but also strictly supervised by the superego." During Jake's quest for sexual gratification, his id, ego and superego conflicted violently. Jake's love tragedy could be divided into three stages: The first stage was the conflicts between the id and the ego. The second stage was repression to id. The third stage was the opposition between the superego and the ego.

First of all, in the first stage, as a young man, Jake needed more comfort physically and psychologically after the long sufferance. He met Brett when his life was threatened so he became dependent on her. He later found himself impotent and left Brett. But Jake met her again in Paris. The id kept tempting him. At this point, he felt involuntary but intentional, unconscious but also liked from a deeper heart. The id's desire was more intense because of the reunion after a long absence. They were always kissing and showing affection to each other. When Jake wanted to be the spouse of Brett, he was turned down. It was because of his impotence. Not being able to win Brett's heart made Jake melancholy and anxious. Jake's anxiety was a signal from his ego's inability to cope with the situation created by the id wanting to intercourse with Brett. The id was repressed, so that the ego intervened and defense mechanism of the ego was aroused. This allowed him to escape from anxiety and reality, and to comfort himself. But negative use of this mechanism could exacerbate personality imbalance and worsen anxiety states. For example, dating the prostitute Georgette and introducing her as his fiancée didn't make him feel any better. Instead, being intimate with her was a constant reminder of Jake's impotence.

In the second stage, Jake himself actively sought self-salvation, which was a real suppression of the unsatisfied id. The ego is derived from the connection of the id with the real world. It aims to maintain

the balance of the three personalities. The ego acts as an intermediary between the id and the outside world. To enhance the id's positive energy, Jake's ego offered to go fishing and enjoying a bullfighting festival in Spain. There he saw the beautiful natural scenery, experienced the hospitable customs, and felt the passion and vitality of bullfighting. By ignoring and denying the id, the pain caused by the conflicts between the id and reality was temporarily relieved.

In the third stage, the love and recognition of Brett was the pursuit of the id, but Jake's behaviors were not allowed by the superego. The superego is the moral part of the personality structure, as opposed to the id. Jake's superego was so fragile that it could not compete with the psychological projections generated by the ego. Jake overly compensated for his sexuality needs, causing him to acquiesce the eloping for Brett and Romero against his own feelings, his relation with Montoya, and his ethics. At the end, when he was accused of being a pimp and knocked to the ground, he realized there was something wrong with what he had done. But because of the absence of his superego, he was unable to repair the status quo. And the reality principle of the ego could no longer work. In the end, Jake's superego was defeated by the id, and the imbalance of Jake's character could not be changed.

It can be seen that the formation of Jake's personality is the result of joint action of the id, ego and superego. During this time, the conflicts between the id and the ego continued. For all the times, the id was trying to satisfy its own instincts and desires. Obviously, when Jake was controlled by id, id forced himself to pursue Brett and demand self-sacrifice. At first, id was in a compromise position, trying to mediate the desire of id and satisfy id through close relationship with Brett. The ego could also be over-repressed at times, causing Jake to become self-tired and anxious, denying his own worth. But in the end, because of the ego's "retreat to the background", that was, the carnival at the bullfighting festival, the id was enlarged and insatiable, while the superego had lost its function, unable to supervise the id, and unable to give commands to the ego. And above all showed the contradictory among id, ego and superego of Jake, which drove to a tragic end of Jake's love.

5. Conclusion

The great suffrance made Jake Barnes, the protagonist who had lived a peaceful life, experienced huge life changes. Without the painful experience, Jake could have been united with his beloved Brett. Jake could have avoided suffering from anxiety and depression. His personality could have developed smoothly in a healthy way. And he could have lived a normal life, instead of abusing alcohol to escape from the reality.

Based on Freud's theory of personality structure, this paper described the different personality perspectives of the protagonist, and discussed the impact of their conflicts on Jake. And it was finally divided into three different stages. The first stage was the heightened conflicts between the ego and the id. At this stage, Jake had shown great pain. The second stage was the ego's repression to the id. Unbearable to the torture of anxiety, Jake chose to get close to nature and eliminate anxiety through real repression. The third stage was the opposition between the superego and the ego. The contemporary values system and corrupt European values drove Jake into nihilism, leaving his spiritual world desolate. With the push of the id, Jake finally destroyed his superego. The bitter experience brought sadness and darkness to the people, setting a tragic tone for the development of the protagonist. Precisely because the sun also rises, it seemed to have a glimmer of hope. But it also indicated that the struggle of the protagonist Jake would not bring substantial changes. And the youths represented by Jake can only passively accept the confusion brought by the ages.

This thesis hoped to bring a new perspective to the analysis of literary characters, especially Hemingway's novels. According to the current domestic and foreign research status, there is still a gap in the research on the analysis of characters of Hemingway's novels from the perspective of psychology or psychoanalysis. At the same time, this paper also urged to remind people of how important it is to develop a healthy spiritual world and personality. When the id, ego and superego are out of balance, it is prone to make bad decisions and make things ever worse. Well-educated and kind people like Jake in the novel are not immune.

Although the author had tried best to complete the research of this paper, there were still some limitations. This paper analyzes the cause of the hero's love tragedy, but due to the limitation of the academic scope of the researches and the complexity of individual characters, the analysis will, by no means, be comprehensive.

References

- [1] Tianhao Qiu(2020). *Analysis of Hemingway's Masculinity Thought. Hundreds of Essays(Theory)*, (05): 44-45.
- [2] Lu Chen(2016). *An Interpretation of Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises from the Perspective of Trauma Theory. University of South China*, 1-69.
- [3] Ying Gu(2012). *Repression and Reconstruction. Shanghai International Studies University*, 1-71.
- [4] Donaldson, Scott(2000). *The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press*, 16-18.
- [5] Hemingway, E.M(2012). *The Sun Also Rises. Nanjing: Yilin Press*, 16,8.
- [6] Gao(2017). *The Lost Light: On the Hope Hidden in the lost Generation in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises. Appreciation of Masterpieces*, (18): 100-101.
- [7] Hui Zhu(2015). *A Psychoanalysis of Jack Barnes in The Sun Also Rise. View on Publishing*, (12): 114-115,117.
- [8] Sigmund Freud(2020). *The Ego and the Id, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House*, 4: 67,117,129.
- [9] Elliott, Ira(2022). *Performance Art: Jake Barnes and "Masculine" Signification in The Sun Also Rises[C]//Linda Wagner-Martin. Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises: A Casebook. New York: Oxford UP*,63-80.
- [10] Kaiwei Cheng(2017). *Hemingway's "Spiritual Wasteland" in The Sun Also Rises. Journal of China Three Gorges University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 39(S1): 150-151.
- [11] Lear J(2015). *Freud[M]. Routledge*, 59-64.