

Eveline



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES JOYCE

James Joyce grew up in Rathgar, a suburb of Dublin, and studied at University College, where he began to publish literary reviews, poems, and plays. After college, he moved to Paris where he briefly studied medicine. In 1903, just one year later, Joyce's mother got sick and he moved back to Dublin to take care of her. After meeting his wife, the couple left Dublin and lived in a variety of countries including Yugoslavia and Italy, and later fled to Zurich during World War I. He only returned to Dublin four times, but many of his works remain heavily focused on the city, and on Ireland more generally. Joyce received guidance from the poet Ezra Pound, who helped him publish his first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in 1916. This was two years after the publication of *Dubliners*, Joyce's first book, which was a collection of fifteen short stories, including "Eveline." These two books brought Joyce some fame as a Modernist writer, a fame that only increased after the publication of *Ulysses* (1922), which upon publication was hailed as both a masterpiece and banned in numerous countries for indecency. Joyce continued writing after *Ulysses*, producing the even more avant-garde *Finnegans Wake* in 1939. Joyce was always a heavy drinker, and he died in 1941 from complications after having surgery on a perforated ulcer.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Eveline," and all of the stories in *Dubliners*, take place during the rise of Irish Nationalism. At the time Ireland was under the control of Great Britain, and the Nationalist movement, also known as Irish Republicanism in its more radical form, rejected British control in favor of Irish independence. The majority of Irish nationalists were Catholic, however the movement was not supported by the Catholic Church, as many nationalists believed in the use of force and violent methods. The strong presence of Catholicism is important as it explains Eveline's deep religious sentiments and continuous praying. Along with nationalism and the desire for independence from Great Britain came a resurgence of national pride that also inspired a cultural, linguistic, and political revival. Eveline also revolves heavily around the position of women in 20th Century Dublin. Eveline, like her female peers, does not have the power or independence to advance in society on her own, which is why she seeks help from male figures, in this case, God and Frank.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"Eveline" is part of *Dubliners*, Joyce's first published collection of

short stories that portrays the middle-class in early 20th Century Dublin. There are fifteen stories total, and "Eveline" is included as the fourth story in the collection. The characters in Joyce's *Dubliners* stories all experience some kind of an epiphany, or a sudden and powerful realization about life or themselves (and this is not always a good thing). Many of the characters from *Dubliners* are also featured in Joyce's later work, *Ulysses*. "Eveline" is also the first work by Joyce that is written from a female perspective. Some critics hypothesize that Joyce named the protagonist after Thomas Moore's poem, "Eveline's Bower." The opera "The Bohemian Girl" also plays a significant role in both "Eveline" and another short story from *Dubliners*, "Clay." There also seem to be many parallels with Virginia Woolf's "The Voyage Out," both in the plot, in which a young female protagonist also runs away to Buenos Ayres, and in Woolf's style.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Eveline
- **When Written:** Summer of 1904
- **Where Written:** Unknown, but not Dublin. Somewhere in Croatia or Italy – Joyce moved around a lot during this period.
- **When Published:** Originally published in the *Irish Homestead* on September 10th, 1904, later revised and published in *Dubliners* in 1914.
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short Fiction
- **Setting:** 20th Century Dublin
- **Climax:** Eveline contemplates running away to Argentina with her lover, Frank, but at the last minute she is paralyzed by fear and watches Frank board the ship without her
- **Point of View:** Told in third-person limited (the narrator is separate from the protagonist but knows her thoughts), and Joyce employs the technique of "free indirect discourse"

EXTRA CREDIT

Inspiration for "Eveline." This is Joyce's first story written from a female perspective, and so there is much speculation about who, if anyone, the character of Eveline is based. The story seems to parallel some of the events that happened with James' sister, Margaret Joyce. In "Eveline," Eveline makes promises to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, so Joyce's use of the name "Margaret" could be a subtle link to his sister, Margaret. Like Eveline, Margaret Joyce also promised her dying mother that she would stay and take care of her younger siblings, and so sacrificed her plans to join a convent and stayed behind with

her abusive father and siblings. Another connection to Margaret Joyce is that she went by the nickname “Poppie,” which is quite similar to Frank’s nickname for Eveline, “Poppens.” “Eveline” is also thought to be inspired by one of James Joyce’s neighbors from 17 North Richmond Street in Dublin, Eveline Thornton. Eveline Thornton fell in love with a sailor, but instead of running away, they ended up getting married and living together in Dublin.

Controversial Namesake. Some critics think Joyce got the name of his story from Thomas Moore’s poem “Eveleen’s Bower,” but it is also possible that Joyce got the name from a Victorian pornographic novel, “Eveline,” where the protagonist has sexual relations with her father. George Russell, who advised Joyce, apparently warned him of “shocking his readership,” so perhaps Joyce chose the name “Eveline” as a more subtle way of implying sexual abuse, rather than stating it outright. Additionally the fact that Eveline is going to Buenos Ayres could be a subtle reference to the popular expression “going to Buenos Ayres,” as a euphemism for a woman becoming a prostitute. So Joyce has perhaps hidden some implications that Eveline may not have the most pious past (whether that “impiousness” was the product of her own choice or forced upon her), regardless of her apparent religious devotion.



PLOT SUMMARY

Eveline, a young Dublin woman, is sitting at the window watching dusk fall. She notices that few people are out, except the man who lives in the last house on her street. She listens to his footsteps as he approaches the part of her street filled with newer, **red** houses. Her mind flashes back to her childhood, when the area with the red houses used to be a field where the neighborhood children played. At the time her favorite brother, Ernest, was too old to play with them, but the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns and little Keogh the cripple were all there. Eveline’s father used to go looking for them with a blackthorn stick. Her father is abusive, but Eveline remembers him being less violent during her childhood. She was happier then. Now her mother is dead and all of her siblings and the neighborhood families have either moved away, or died. Eveline is also planning to move away.

Eveline is overcome with nostalgia as she looks around the room at the familiar objects covered in **dust**. She notices the photograph of her father’s friend, the priest, who is now in Melbourne, and the print of the promises made to Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French nun and saint. Now Eveline begins to question whether or not it is “wise” to leave her home, where she has food, shelter, and familiarity. She imagines the gossip about her at the Stores when they find out she has run away from Dublin with a man. She decides she will not miss the

Stores, since her boss, Miss Gavan, is often particularly critical of her.

Eveline imagines her new life in a foreign country, and imagines her marriage will help her earn the respect she is denied in Dublin. Lately her father has been threatening her more and more. When she was a child he used to spare her since she was a girl, but now that she’s almost nineteen and Ernest is dead and her brother Harry is often away for work, she has become a target. Money is also an issue of conflict for her and her father, who accuses her of being wasteful. Eveline works hard to feed her father and take care of two children who have been left in her care. Life is hard, but now that she is planning to leave, she realizes it’s not “a wholly undesirable life.”

Eveline is planning to take the night-boat to Buenos Ayres with Frank, an Irish sailor who lives in Buenos Ayres but was visiting Dublin when they met. She reflects on their relationship as she considers this decision. At first Eveline just liked the attention from Frank, but eventually she grew fond of him for his stories about foreign travels. Eveline’s father forbids her from seeing him, but she continues to see him in secret and eventually makes secret plans to move to Buenos Ayres with him.

She looks down at the letters she has been holding in her lap: one for Harry, and one for her father. She starts to think about all of the good memories she has had with her father, of him caring for her when she was sick, and going on family picnics together.

Eveline is running out of time before her departure. She hears an organ playing and is reminded of her mother’s last night before she died, when there was also organ music out on the street. She remembers her promise to her mother that she would keep the home together, but she also remembers the sacrifices her mother made and how they ended in her loss of sanity. Eveline begins to panic, desperately seeking an escape from a fate that looks very similar to her mother’s. She hopes Frank can “save” her, and reasons that she deserves to be happy.

Eveline resolves to go to the station to meet Frank. She is terribly distressed and she keeps praying to God for direction. At the last minute as Frank seizes her hand to lead her onto the boat, Eveline freezes. As she clutches the railing, and cries out in the direction of the **sea**, she realizes that she is too afraid of the unknown and that Frank will “drown her.” She watches Frank board the boat without her, feeling empty inside as he calls for her to join him.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Eveline Hill – The protagonist of the story, Eveline is a hard-working Irish woman around age nineteen living with her father in her childhood home in Dublin. She lives a hard life caring for

her abusive father and two children who have been left in her care, while also working in the Stores, the popular name for a local shop. She gives all of her earnings to her father, who still scolds her and accuses her of spending her money irresponsibly. He also has increasingly begun to threaten her, since she is no longer a child and neither of her brothers, Harry and Ernest, nor her mother, are around to protect her anymore. As a result of this stress, Eveline has begun to suffer from heart palpitations. Despite this, she still appreciates the familiarity and comfort of home, so it is particularly hard for her to make a decision when she finds herself contemplating whether or not to run away to Buenos Ayres with her lover, Frank. Much like in "Araby," the conflict of the story happens entirely in the protagonist's mind. Eveline feels obligated to stay in Dublin and fulfill her responsibilities and keep her promise to keep the house together, but she also feels that she should have the right to pursue her own happiness, rather than always attending to the needs of others. Eveline is deeply religious and continually prays to God, asking for guidance with her difficult decision. She feels perpetually powerless over her situation, and looks to either God or Frank to save her. Afraid of ending up like her mother, who continually sacrificed herself for her family and eventually went insane, Eveline decides to go meet Frank at the station and continue with her plan to run away. However, at the last minute she can only stare at the sea, overcome by anxiety and emotion, and watch Frank board the ship alone. Eveline is driven by fear, but also by her sense of helplessness. She knows that she does not love Frank, and could easily end up in another abusive situation, just like her mother.

Frank – Originally from Dublin, but currently a sailor with a home in Buenos Ayres, Frank meets Eveline on a visit to Dublin. Eveline describes him as "kind, manly, open-hearted" and likes hearing his stories about his travels. Frank begins walking Eveline home after she is finished working at the Stores and eventually starts courting her. He likes music and singing. Eveline's father disapproves of Frank and one day after they quarrel, he and Eveline have to start seeing each other in secret. Frank invites Eveline to become his wife in Buenos Ayres. Joyce implies that Frank may be of a higher social or financial status than Eveline since he takes her to the theater and they sit in a section that Eveline is "unaccustomed" to. Aside from that, not much is known about Frank's thoughts or intentions. Eveline is not in love with Frank, or at least not yet, but it is unknown whether or not Frank loves her. They have only been seeing each other for what seems to Eveline like a few weeks.

Eveline's Father – Eveline's father was abusive to her siblings and mother, but spared Eveline when she was young since she was a girl. He used to go searching in the field for her and her siblings with a blackthorn stick to call them inside, and appears to be a figure feared by all of the neighborhood kids. He also

seems to take pride in showing off the photo of his old friend, a priest who moved to Melbourne. He has recently begun to threaten Eveline, now that she is older and there is no one else around to protect her. He squabbles about money with Eveline on Saturdays, worried that she will waste it. He also forbids Eveline from seeing Frank, assuming that he is unfaithful because he is a sailor.

Eveline's Mother – Eveline's mother made a lot of sacrifices for her husband and family, and according to Eveline, didn't receive respect from her peers and perhaps had a reputation for having a violent husband. She died of an unspecified illness, and was driven mad by her "life of commonplace sacrifices," although it is unclear if her mental state is related to her death.

The Children – The relationship between Eveline and the children she cares for is never stated, but she is their caretaker and she is in charge of feeding them and making sure they go to school. They seem to have been part of the family since before her mother died and went along on the family picnic, although it is difficult to differentiate if and when the narrator is talking about the children she cares for, and when she is talking about her siblings when they were young.

The Waters, the Dunns, and the Devines – Three families that used to live on Eveline's street. She mentions playing with children from these families during her childhood, but now the Waters have gone back to England and Tizzie Dunn has died. Though Eveline does not specify, it is implied that the other families have also either moved away or died.

Little Keogh the Cripple – Another one of Eveline's neighbors who used to play in the field. He used to keep watch for Eveline's father in the field and warn the other children when he was coming. The fact that he is crippled is quite possibly a conscious decision on Joyce's part to foreshadow Eveline's later paralysis, and also perhaps reflects the fact that many Dubliners remain "crippled" or paralyzed – immobile and trapped in monotonous Dublin life, unable to find an escape.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ernest – Eveline's older brother who is now dead and was too "grown up" to play in the field with her and the other neighbor children when she was little. She mentions that Ernest "had been her favorite."

Harry – The only other sibling that Eveline names. He currently works in "the church decorating business" and is usually away from Dublin, in other parts of Ireland. He sends up money to Eveline's father.

The Priest – An old friend of Eveline's father. His picture is currently on their wall. Her father routinely shows the photo to visitors, explaining that the priest is in Melbourne now.

Miss Gavan – The owner of the Stores where Eveline works. She seems to single out Eveline and scrutinize her more heavily

in front of customers, which implies that Eveline has a reputation of some kind.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



PARALYSIS AND INACTION

Joyce's use of perspective and his characteristic stream-of-consciousness style allow the reader to see Eveline's thought progression clearly as she contemplates running away to Argentina with her lover, Frank. Eveline's inability to make a decision, a sort of mental paralysis, results in actual physical paralysis at the end of the story as she stands outside watching Frank board the ship but cannot bring herself to join him. Through her inability to make a decision, she inadvertently decides to stay behind in Dublin.

Eveline has a logical thought process as she considers her options. She observed her father's violence toward her mother and brothers growing up, and resolves to leave so she will not end up in the same situation. At the same time she knows that both her father and the children she takes care of are relying on her, but also reasons that she deserves to pursue her own happiness. Despite this logic, her emotions kick in and she begins to feel guilty for leaving them. She is also influenced by her fear of the unknown. She admits that her current life is "a hard life," but now that she is making plans to leave, Eveline starts to think about all of the good things and the certainty that her current life provides, finding it not "a wholly undesirable life." Nostalgia plays a large role in Eveline's decision to stay as well. She is attached to the past, and even though the people from her past are long gone, she cannot bring herself to leave the city that she associates with them. Rather than focusing on her present relationship with her father, she uses their past experiences together to justify her bond with him, remembering when he read her ghost stories and made her toast while she was sick and another time when the family went for a picnic while her mother was still alive. Joyce is perhaps using "Eveline" as an opportunity to critique this type of glorification of the past, since here it prevents Eveline from escaping an abusive relationship and pursuing her own happiness. Her nostalgia causes her to sacrifice her future, and despite her logical thought process, her final decision is ultimately caused by a gut feeling.

Eveline's paralysis is also caused by her sense of powerlessness. She continually looks to two things to save her from her situation: Frank, or men in general, and religion/God. She is

constantly either praying to God or thinking about how Frank will help her become more respectable or change her situation: "He would save her." Because Eveline is a woman in 20th Century Dublin, it is logical that she looks to Frank to save her. Marriage was the primary way for women to gain social or economic status during the time period, and part of the reason Eveline is looking for someone or something to save her is because in 20th Century Dublin she is mostly powerless. Eveline also looks to God, or her religion, to save her. She prays to God for the power to make a decision, and even at the station as she watches Frank board the boat she is "moving her lips in silent fervent prayer." Eveline's religion also further perpetuates the idea that someone else, another male figure, can save her, and that she perhaps does not need to make an active decision. But this feeling of helplessness, however rooted in women's roles and society, is also part of the reason Eveline is unable to take control of her fate and make a decision. She has grown up in a society where she is powerless and needs someone to save her, and so she is unable to claim ownership of her own fate. Her sense of powerless, along with her emotions and nostalgia, prevent her from making a decision based on logic and perspective.



ESCAPISM AND THE EXOTIC

As in many of the other stories in *Dubliners*, the protagonist of "Eveline" has a desire to escape from the drab, **brown** Dublin life. But unlike the narrator in "Araby," for example, Eveline has an actual plan to escape to Argentina. She also has an opportunity to gain respect through marriage and also by distancing herself from the bad reputation her family seems to have, escaping the limitations of her current social status. Eveline fantasizes about her escape and seems to think it will solve all of her problems: her financial disputes with her father, the lack of respect her coworkers show her, and her general discontentment with Dublin life. However, when it comes time for Eveline to actually board the boat with Frank, she decides against her escape. This implies that perhaps the idea of an escape was satisfying in itself, but the actual act of escaping is too scary. Eveline liked having the opportunity for an escape, and it temporarily soothed her anxiety about the lack of respect she receives from her boss and her fear of being treated like her mother. It is possible that all she really desired was some kind of reassurance in the form of another potential path.

Eveline takes interest in Frank not only because he is offering her an escape, but also because she finds him exotic. He tells her stories about faraway places and people and exposes her to music and culture that she has never before experienced. Frank takes her to see the play "The Bohemian Girl," which although the music is written by an Irish composer, deals with "gypsies" in Austria and other Eastern European countries. For Eveline, anything outside of Dublin most likely seems exotic, since she

seems to have lived on the same quiet street, surrounded by the same people, her whole life. Even the fact that Frank is a sailor is a bit exotic, at least to the extent that because of this Eveline's father forbids her from seeing him. She is also thrilled to sit in an "unaccustomed" part of the theater, which suggests that Frank is of a higher status than Eveline and was able to buy more expensive seats. At one point Eveline reflects on the lack of respect she receives in Dublin and imagines that in Argentina, "a distant unknown country," it will not "be like that." Eveline reveals her ignorance with this somewhat contradictory thought. She is assuming it will not "be like that" but she also admits that she is going to make a new home in an unknown country, and does not seem to have any basis for the assertion that she will have more respect in Argentina.

Similar to Joyce's other protagonists in *Dubliners*, Eveline is searching for an escape. However, at the end of the story it becomes clear that Eveline was not as serious about finding a physical escape as she initially appeared. Additionally, she seems to realize that an escape does not necessarily promise a happy ending and she could easily end up with a violent husband, just like her mother did. Joyce seems to see all *Dubliners* as trapped by society. The opportunities for escape are scarce, so instead many of his characters choose to fantasize about the exotic and satisfy themselves with more of a mental escape.



WOMEN AND SOCIETY

Eveline is the first female protagonist that Joyce introduces in *Dubliners*, and many of her thoughts and desires are influenced by her role as a woman

in 20th Century Dublin. Whether or not she is aware of it, her decisions are greatly affected by outside social forces.

Eveline's indecisiveness and resulting inaction is largely a result of women's roles in society at the time. Society has told her she is powerless, and so she feels powerless. This sense of powerlessness is partially why Eveline is unable to make a decision and she feels she needs a male figure, either God or Frank, to "save" her from her present situation. Eveline sees marrying Frank as a way to gain respect, so she is aware that she is somewhat helpless without a husband. As a woman, she does not have a lot of mobility when it comes to her status. As she is trying to decide whether or not to leave, she reasons through her rights, saying "Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness." This need to justify her own desire to be happy is also a result of social oppression. Eveline is the caretaker of her father and two children, and she feels guilty leaving for the sake of her own happiness, knowing that they are relying on her. This is because society has told her that she is a caretaker and should be driven by others' needs, not by her own desires or pursuit of happiness.

Eveline's role as a woman also affects her views and experiences with violence. As Eveline's father begins to

threaten her more, he also justifies it by threatening her "for her dead mother's sake." Eveline feels like she is becoming her mother and thus the new outlet for her father's violence. However, since she grew up in this environment, she has been exposed to violence and is somewhat used to it. There seems to be a great deal of blame placed on Eveline's mother. Eveline herself even says "She would not be treated as her mother had been," implying that this is some sort of conscious decision her mother made that Eveline can choose not to make. When Eveline *does* in fact end up staying, it becomes clear that the decision to stay in an abusive relationship is complicated and much less of a decision than it seems, or perhaps not even a decision at all. Eveline has seen her mother sacrifice her well-being, and eventually sanity, and it is only natural that she does not question that she should do the same. When Eveline begins to have heart palpitations because of her father's threats, this does not prevent her from staying behind. She has seen her mother put her health at risk for a man and it doesn't seem unnatural for her to do the same.

Eveline is motivated by what marrying Frank could give her – respect, more freedom, an escape – but at the final moment she comes to the realization that she does not really love Frank, and regardless of what changes would result from marriage, she will always be trapped in her role as a caretaker and rendered powerless by society.



THE MANY FORMS OF DEATH

"Eveline" addresses the subject of death both literally, as when Eveline lists off the people in her life who have died, and figuratively, in several other

life events that become metaphors for death. She seems to be very aware of death, and the fact that she has been left behind, either by people dying or leaving.

While Eveline experiences many emotions related to her decision to leave Dublin, she never expresses any strong feelings about death. She refers to her mother's death, saying life was better before she died, but never really expresses any grief or heartbreak in the text. This lack of emotion takes the drama out of the literal death. Eveline's deceased neighbors and family members are essentially equal to those who moved away. This parallel between leaving Dublin and death implies that leaving Dublin is a metaphorical death. If Eveline leaves, she knows she will essentially become "dead" to everyone she leaves behind.

Marriage is also a metaphor for death since it signifies the end of an individual life and the beginning of a shared life. This is especially true for women in 20th-century Dublin, who essentially adopt their husband's status and identity. It is a beginning but it is also an end, and this scares Eveline. The association of death and marriage is most obvious at the end of the story, when Eveline realizes that Frank will "drown her." Frank is dragging her into the unknown "**seas**" and thus, in a

way, ending her life, even if it's only her life in Dublin.

Joyce communicates this idea of being dead while alive in the description of Eveline's everyday life. She is thinking, yes, but not making active decisions. She is trapped in the monotony of caring for the children and her father, and as she admits, it is a hard life. There is a separation between those who stay in Dublin and those who leave, such as her father's friend, the priest who moved to Melbourne, and whose photo is hanging on their wall. Her father takes great pride in casually announcing that he is in Melbourne now, because it signifies his success and implies that not many escape from Dublin. When Eveline makes her decision not to leave Dublin, she essentially gives up all possibility of change. She will not likely find another way to leave, and will be confined to her monotonous life, which Joyce equates with death. Joyce's biggest critique of Dublin life seems to be this idea that Dubliners are trapped, forced to repeat their monotonous day-to-day tasks without ever really actively "living." Life in Dublin, according to Joyce, is death.



CATHOLIC VALUES AND CONFINEMENT

Joyce clearly illustrates Eveline's desire for freedom, but in the end she stays behind—partly because of her Catholic background and its religious teachings involving guilt, sacrifice, and promises. Eveline's appreciation of the Catholic value of sacrifice becomes clear in her duties caring for her family. She seems to sacrifice a great deal of time and effort tending to their needs, and she is living "a hard life." Eveline sees the sacrifices her mother made for her family, as well as the toll it took on her as her mother eventually became insane and died: "that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness." It is this memory that causes Eveline to frantically call for an escape, and vow never to be in the same position as her mother. Yet eventually Eveline sacrifices her wish to leave Dublin for the sake of her family. As she acknowledges, this decision is only going to lead to further sacrifices, as in her mother's case.

Eveline also feels strongly obligated to fulfill her promises, both those she made to her mother on her deathbed and her religious promises to God. She hears the street organ playing as she is contemplating her options, and immediately sees it as a sign—perhaps from God or just a coincidence—because it reminds her of the eve of her mother's death, when there was also street organ music outside, and when she promised her mother that she would "keep the home together as long as she could." Eveline also begins to question her decision to leave when she remembers the promises to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French nun and saint who introduced the idea of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These written promises are hanging on the wall, and as she notices them she starts to question whether or not leaving is the right thing to do.

Catholicism plays an important role in Eveline's life, and generally speaking was the dominant religion in 20th-century

Ireland. Eveline's Catholic values play a large role in her inability to leave, and she ends up sacrificing herself for these values emphasized by her religion. Joyce is critiquing Catholicism and its emphasis on guilt, since ultimately Eveline's guilt causes her to stay in Dublin with her abusive father.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



DUST

Dust represents monotony. The dust in the house keeps collecting no matter how frequently Eveline cleans it, paralleling the monotony of Eveline's life in Dublin: she is constantly taking care of people or cleaning, only to wake up and do the same thing the next day. The children will always grow hungry again just as the dust will always collect again.

In the opening lines, Eveline breathes in the scent of "dusty cretonne" and notices that she is tired. The dust is a reminder of her endless daily tasks, which seem empty of meaning. Dust also represents death, or the cyclicity of life. It calls to mind the Biblical phrase "from dust to dust," which implies that dust is simply the absence of existence, either pre- or post- life. At one point Eveline wonders "where on earth all the dust came from," not because she is genuinely curious but because she is fed up with the senseless repetition of her housework.



WATER

Water, specifically the sea, represents the unknown, and Joyce uses it to illustrate Eveline's fear of the unknown. At the end of the story, when Eveline is filled with anguish and rendered immobile by the difficulty of her decision, she feels "all the seas of the world tumble[d] about her heart." The fact that her heart comes back into the story is significant since she reveals that she has a health issue of palpitations. This image implies that the very thought of leaving Dublin and entering the unknown "seas" is causing her emotional distress, and perhaps heart palpitations as well. She feels that Frank is "drawing her into" the seas and that eventually "he would drown her." She is not ready for the unknown, and she feels like Frank is pressuring her. The sea also represents freedom, which is one and the same as the unknown to Eveline. She is afraid of both freedom and the unknown.



BROWN AND RED

Just as in the story "Araby," Joyce uses the color brown to signify the dreariness of Dublin. However

in this particular story, he also contrasts it with the new red houses that are being built on Eveline's street. So here, brown represents Eveline's childhood image of Dublin, and red represents the changes that have happened in Dublin since Eveline has become an adult. This contrast from brown to red is a change, but it is a very small one. Eveline knows that Dublin is changing, but the changes are tiny in comparison to the changes that moving to an entirely different country would present.





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Dubliners* published in 1993.

Eveline Quotes

☞ Still they seemed to have been rather happy then... 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. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home.

Related Characters: The Waters, the Duns, and the Devines, Ernest, Harry, Eveline's Father, Eveline's Mother, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Eveline is very familiar with death. As she lists the friends and family members who have died, along with those who have moved away, it becomes clear that these are essentially equivalent in Eveline's mind. To Eveline, leaving Dublin is a form of death, and the way she discusses both death and moving away without emotion, and as though they are the same, highlights the idea of being dead while alive. She has felt "dead" her whole life since she has been trapped in uninspiring Dublin and a constricting family situation, and so the idea of actual physical death does not provoke a lot of emotions from her. She sums death up coolly, reducing it to "Everything changes." Her emotionless attitude about death serves to highlight the idea that she is, in a sense, already dead.

The fact that other families and individuals have moved away also emphasizes that Eveline's desire to escape is not


unique; others have also felt compelled to leave Dublin. Further, it is no coincidence that Eveline's neighbors are named the Waters. This deliberate name choice echoes the symbolism of the sea. The fact that the Waters family has gone back to England symbolizes that they are different, they are not from Dublin, and now they are back in an unknown country. Now that the Waters family has left for England, they are just as unknown and distant to Eveline as the sea.

It's also worth noting that though a third-person narrator is speaking here, they often inhabit Eveline's thoughts and perspective. This is emblematic of Joyce's style of "free indirect discourse."

☞ Home! 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. Perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided.

Related Characters: Eveline Hill

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 29 – 30



Explanation and Analysis

As Eveline is contemplating whether or not she should leave Dublin, she is struck with a wave of nostalgia as she looks at the objects around her house. Of course, she is not actually emotionally attached to any of these objects, but she finds herself attached to the familiarity and comfort that they represent. This nostalgia, along with her fear of the unknown, end up triggering her paralysis at the end of the story.

Eveline spends a lot of time focusing on the dust coating the objects. In the text dust primarily symbolizes death, as well as monotony, since Eveline is tasked with dusting these objects every day. This is related to her role as a woman in 20th-century Dublin, as women were typically charged with the cleaning and keeping of the house. She wonders where the dust comes from, almost as though questioning the point of her meaningless, monotonous task. Her skepticism about the importance of dusting and how the dust even gets there in the first place indicates that she is somewhat aware of how empty and meaningless her life is.

☛ And yet during all those years she had never found out the name of the priest whose yellowing photograph hung on the wall above the broken harmonium beside the colored print of the promises made to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Related Characters: The Priest, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Eveline's attention to these two religious objects not only serve to show the reader the importance of Catholicism in Eveline's life, they also represent the two options she is choosing between. The priest represents a form of death, as Eveline later mentions he has moved to Melbourne, rendering him essentially "dead" in that he is no longer present in Dublin or her father's life. The priest has successfully escaped from Dublin, just as Eveline plans to do. In contrast Eveline notices the promises to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque (a French nun and saint), which represents her alternative option to stay in Dublin. This print shows the importance of both Eveline's promise to her mother as well as her Catholic duty to stay behind and care for her family—and these religious values and promises eventually lead to her paralysis and inability to leave Dublin. Eveline's devotion to keeping her promises, both to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque and her mother, represent Catholic values. It isn't until Eveline mentions the print of the promises to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque that she really begins to question her decision to leave.

☛ Miss Gavan would be glad. She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening...But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married – she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been.

Related Characters: Eveline's Mother, Miss Gavan, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis


Here Eveline implies that her mother was not respected while she was alive, and as a result, Eveline is not respected

either. While never directly stated, it is implied that perhaps this is because Eveline's mother is a known victim of her husband's violence. The other neighborhood kids seem to fear Eveline's father, so perhaps the other Dublin residents are aware of his violent tendencies as well. This relates to Eveline's role as a woman in society, because she is unable to escape her father's reputation without the help of another man and also by leaving the country. If she stays in Dublin, she knows that she is doomed to have her mother's reputation and lack of respect follow her, at least while she is unmarried.

Additionally, Eveline naively assumes that she will have more respect in Argentina. She never says why she believes this, but she asserts it like a fact, thus supporting her glorification of escape and the exotic. She believes that all of her problems will disappear once she has left Dublin.

☛ 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.

Related Characters: Eveline's Mother, Eveline's Father, Ernest, Harry, Eveline Hill

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Eveline's normalization of her father's violence comes from her internalized belief that it is her role as a daughter and woman to sacrifice herself for the men in her life. She knows that the heart palpitations she is experiencing are caused by her father, and that staying in Dublin with him has physically harmed her, and yet she is still so driven by her sense of duty that she is not even prioritizing her own health. All of her siblings, the only two mentioned being her brothers, have left and do not seem to be concerned about caring for her father and the house. This is because society has told them to pursue their own interests and careers, and to let the women stay behind to care for their father.

●● He took her to see *The Bohemian Girl* and she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theatre with him...People knew that they were courting and, when he sang about the lass that loves a sailor, she always felt pleasantly confused...First of all it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him. He had tales of distant countries.

Related Characters: Frank, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 31 – 32


Explanation and Analysis

As Eveline reflects on her relationship with Frank she reveals the lack of depth in their attraction. She likes Frank because he has stories about “distant countries” and he took her to sit in an “unaccustomed part” of the theater, meaning the seats were probably more expensive than Eveline was used to. So she likes his exotic stories, his financial gestures, and the fact that he is offering her an escape from Dublin. He sings the song “The Lass that Loves a Sailor,” which leaves Eveline “pleasantly confused” as she does not understand that it is about how unfaithful sailors can be. This interaction highlights Eveline’s naivety as well as the fact that her escape depends on her trusting someone she does not know that well and probably should not trust. Joyce is using these details to make the point that escapism for its own sake can be dangerous: Eveline has glorified her escape from Dublin so much that she is overlooking many risk factors, such as the fact that she does not know Frank that well and he might not be a faithful partner. Unfortunately her role as a woman means she probably has little power in finding a husband, as generally (in this society) it is the man who is expected to pursue the woman. Eveline even says that at first she just liked the attention, and it is not until later that she actually begins to like Frank, but even then it is mostly just for his exotic stories.

●● Her time was running out but she continued to sit by the window, leaning her head against the window curtain, inhaling the odour of dusty cretonne. Down far in the avenue she could hear a street organ playing. She knew the air. Strange that it should come that very night to remind her of the promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together as long as she could.

Related Characters: Eveline’s Mother, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 


Page Number: 32 – 33

Explanation and Analysis

Eveline is still trying to make a decision, but she seems to be comforted by the familiarity of both the scent of dusty cretonne (heavy fabric used for upholstery) and the sound of the street organ. She likes the familiarity of both of these things, even though they are both associated with death. Dust represents death, but since Eveline is familiar with death both in its literal and figurative forms, she finds it comforting. Similarly, the street organ reminds Eveline of the night her mother died (as she heard one playing then), but she also knows the tune, and she potentially sees this coincidence as a sign that she should stay and keep her promise to her mother. Eveline’s sense of duty to keep her promise to her mother is a reflection of her Catholic values and upbringing. The idea of breaking a promise is so blasphemous that she would sacrifice her own freedom and happiness in order to keep her promise.

●● As she mused the pitiful vision of her mother’s life laid its spell on the very quick of her being – that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness. She trembled as she heard again her mother’s voice saying constantly with foolish insistence: –Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!

Related Characters: Eveline’s Mother, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Eveline’s memory of her mother’s sacrifices and resulting demise causes her to think more about her decision to run away with Frank. She knows she does not want to end up like her mother, who seems to have been driven to madness by her life of endless sacrifice. Her repetition of the phrase “Derevaun Seraun,” which is either nonsense or bears some meaning along the lines of “the end of song is raving madness,” implies that her mother is somewhat aware of her own insanity. Eveline sees death in both her mother’s life of “commonplace sacrifices” and in her actual death. Her mother’s sacrifices result from the role of women in society and the expectation that they do whatever it takes to care

for their spouses and families.

☛ 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. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness.

Related Characters: Frank, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis


This “sudden impulse of terror” is triggered by Eveline’s memory of her mother, and the life of sacrifice that eventually leads to her loss of sanity and death. Eveline’s desperation in her call for an escape highlights the fact that her life in Dublin is not really a life. She even says Frank will “give her life,” and asserts that she wants to live, acknowledging that her current life is more or less equal to death.

Yet since Eveline thinks Frank can “give” her life, it is possible that this state of being dead while alive, meaning not actively having control over one’s life or decisions, is partly a result of Eveline’s gender—she needs a male figure to grant her agency. And in one sense, in giving her an escape, Frank is giving her life. Eveline sees Frank as the only possible means of escape from her current situation, and this image of her mother triggers her desperation for an escape and also causes her to ignore potential warning signs about Frank.

☛ Could she still draw back after all he had done for her? 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: –Come! All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her.

Related Characters: Frank, Eveline Hill

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 33 – 34

Explanation and Analysis

Eveline’s heart plays a very important role in this passage. The only other time she refers to her heart in the text is when she mentions her palpitations. The motion of a bell clanging on her heart parallels this phenomenon of an irregular or rapid heartbeat. This is again reiterated in Joyce’s description of “all the seas of the world” tumbling around her heart. These two descriptions of Eveline’s heart could be metaphors that signify she is once again experiencing palpitations as a result of her stressful decision. The stress of leaving Dublin is causing a similar reaction as the stress of her father’s threats, and in a way this equates the two risks Eveline is choosing between. She is either going to experience the stress of a totally unfamiliar environment, or the stress of her father’s violent behavior. This is part of the reason why Eveline’s escape becomes suddenly less appealing—she begins to see it as a risk that is just as stressful as staying in Dublin.

Eveline contemplates whether or not she can still change her mind after all that Frank has done for her. Once again, because she is a woman in 20th-century Dublin, she is considering her duty to those around her, rather than her own desires. But soon after the sea, which symbolizes the unknown, comes back into the text and Eveline realizes that Frank will “drown” her. Essentially Eveline realizes that if she leaves with Frank, she will “die” in many ways. She will get married, which means the end of her life as an individual, and she will also be leaving Dublin, which means she will essentially be dead to everyone who lives there, just as those who left became “dead” to her. Note also that Eveline turns to “silent prayer” in her moment of distress, reverting to her traditional Catholic values that advise her to stay.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

EVELINE

Eveline, a nineteen-year-old woman in Dublin, is sitting with her head against the curtains, watching dusk fall on her street. She notices that it smells like “**dusty** cretonne” (heavy fabric used for upholstery) and that she is tired. There is hardly anyone outside, but she notices a man who lives in the last house walking home. She hears his footsteps change from the concrete to the cinder path as he enters the newer part of the street that is filled with **red** houses, instead of **brown** ones like hers. She remembers that there used to be a field here where she would play with the neighborhood children and her siblings, except for Ernest, because he was already too old. Keogh the cripple used to warn them when Eveline’s father—who was carrying a blackthorn stick, most likely as a threat—came out to call them inside.

Eveline reflects back on her childhood, realizing that she was happier back then when her father was less violent and her mother was still alive. But now she and her siblings are all grown up, and her mother is dead along with her neighbor Tizzie Dunn. The Waters have moved back to England. Eveline sums it up by saying simply “Everything changes” and now it is finally Eveline’s turn to leave home.

Eveline is suddenly overcome with nostalgia as she looks around at the objects that she has **dusted** over the years. She wonders where the dust comes from, and then realizes she may never see these objects again. She realizes she still does not even know the name of the priest whose photo is hanging on the wall, along with a broken harmonium and a colored print of promises made to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque (a French Catholic saint). The priest is an old friend of her Eveline’s father, and he used to tell visitors that the priest is in Melbourne now.

Joyce begins by bringing in the symbol of dust almost immediately. The odor of “dusty cretonne” is familiar to Eveline, and she finds it somewhat comforting, but it also represents death, and reflects the fact that Eveline is not really living fully. As she watches her neighbor enter the newer part of the neighborhood, she becomes nostalgic and remembers her childhood, when there used to be a field instead of new red houses. This overwhelming feeling of nostalgia and glorification of the past eventually contributes to her paralysis and inability to make a decision at the story’s end.



Eveline continues to think nostalgically back on her past, and now she brings up literal death, as she lists off those who have died. Her lack of emotion when talking about death emphasizes the fact that Eveline herself is not really living, and so death is not only familiar, but signifies less of a loss.



The symbol of dust comes back and continues to inspire nostalgia in Eveline, since she has spent much of her life dusting. The photo of her father’s friend, the priest, as well as the print of promises to Margaret Mary Alacoque serve to illustrate the importance of religion in Eveline’s life. The priest represents Eveline’s option to leave Dublin and essentially become “dead” to everyone from her childhood, while the promises to Margaret Mary Alacoque represent her option to stay in Dublin and keep her promise to her mother.



Eveline is starting to question her decision to leave more and more. In Dublin she has shelter and food, and she is surrounded by the same familiar people she has known her whole life. She imagines that her coworkers at the Stores, the shop where she works, will say she is a fool when they learn she has run away with a man. Eveline imagines Miss Gavan, the owner, will be glad that she is gone, since she always seemed to be especially critical of Eveline. She decides she is not sad to leave work, and that once she is married and living in her new home in an unknown land she will have the respect of her peers.

Now that Eveline is over nineteen and none of her siblings are there to protect her, her father has begun to threaten her more. As a result, she has begun to suffer from heart palpitations. Ernest is dead and Harry (another brother) is usually away for business. Eveline is beginning to grow tired of fighting about money with her father as well. She gives him all of her wages, but he never gives her any money to spend because he thinks she will waste it. In addition to keeping the house together, she also cares for two children who have been left in her charge. The life she lives is hard, but now that she is about to leave, she realizes that it is not “a wholly undesirable life.”

Eveline reflects on her relationship with her lover, Frank. She is planning to take the night boat with him to Buenos Ayres, Argentina, where he lives. Eveline feels like she only met him a few weeks ago, when he was visiting Dublin on a break from his job as a sailor. At first walked her home from the Stores, and then he took her to see “The Bohemian Girl” at the theatre, where they sat in a section Eveline was “unaccustomed to.” At first Eveline likes the attention, and she begins to grow fond of Frank and his stories about “distant countries.” However, after Eveline’s father finds out about their relationship and quarrels with Frank, they can only see each other in secret.

Eveline looks down at the two letters she has been holding in her lap: one for Harry, and one for her father. Eveline remembers the good memories with her father, like when he made her toast when she was sick, and entertained the children on a family picnic. Eveline notices the smell of **dusty** cretonne again and hears a street organ playing outside. She knows the tune, and it reminds her of the street organ that was playing on her mother’s last night before she died (of an unspecified illness). Eveline also remembers the promise she made to her mother, that she would keep the home together “as long as she could.”

Eveline’s sudden doubt of her choice to escape Dublin is inspired by her previous nostalgia. She is concerned about leaving these familiar people, but it seems all of the important people in Eveline’s life, such as her mother and brothers, have died or left. Eveline allows her nostalgia to distract her from the harsh reality of her present life in Dublin, and her escape suddenly loses its appeal. Since she is a woman, however, she knows she must find a husband if she wants to gain respect or have any real agency in society.



The role of women in her society has greatly influenced Eveline, and led her to justify risking her health in order to fulfill her duties. Eveline knows that the children and her father are relying on her to care for them, and she sees her duty to them as possibly more important than her own safety and happiness. It seems that everyone has left her behind to care for the house and family, and since she is a woman, this is expected to be her role, even if it means she is sacrificing herself. This flawed logic and normalization of her father’s violence contributes to her paralysis and her inability to actively live.



Eveline is enamored with Frank largely because he represents the “exotic,” and introduces her to these foreign lands he has visited, and also because Frank makes her feel like she has a choice in her life. Even though she ends up staying in Dublin, up until that point Eveline feels a bit freer knowing she has the choice to leave with Frank. In the end, it is this feeling of power, however temporary, that is more satisfying than the actual escape.



As much as Eveline fears following in her mother’s footsteps and sacrificing herself for her father, she also places a great importance on keeping promises, perhaps a result of her Catholic values. The fact that she is a woman also means she feels it is her social duty to sacrifice herself. She again reflects nostalgically on the past, remembering the nice things her father has done. However Eveline seems to be preventing herself from seeing the full picture as she only remembers her father’s (small and infrequent) acts of kindness.



Eveline feels pity for her mother, who seems to have spent her life making sacrifices for Eveline's father and family, only to be driven to insanity. Eveline is suddenly struck with terror and is desperate to escape. She reasons that she has a right to happiness. She hopes Frank will save her and resolves to go meet him.

Eveline's desperate call for an escape is triggered by her fear of becoming her mother, just as her later paralysis is caused by a different kind of fear. Eveline knows her only way to escape is through Frank, or God. As a woman she feels she must rely on male figures for an escape.



Eveline meets Frank at the station, but cannot seem to focus on what he is saying as they head toward the boat, holding hands. Eveline prays to God for direction "out of a maze of distress." She wonders if it is wrong to change her mind after all that Frank has done for her. She is becoming nauseated from her distress, and continues silently praying.

In the final moments before her decision, Eveline is relying on God and Frank to help with her distress. She is worrying about whether she will be letting Frank down, and not about whether she will be making the right decision for herself. She has already become inactive, seeking an escape from the "maze of distress" through God, and not through herself.



At last Eveline feels "a bell clang upon her heart" and Frank grabs her hand to board the ship. She feels the pressure from Frank, as if he is leading her into the **sea**, and she suddenly feels he will "drown her." She clutches the iron railing, and cries out toward the sea in distress, unable to move. She watches Frank being pushed onto the boat as he calls out to her, but she looks at him expressionlessly, with "no sign of love or farewell or recognition."

Eveline finally realizes that leaving Dublin does not necessarily ensure that she will finally be able to actively live. In fact, her fear of the unknown, which is represented by the sea, could be just as harmful as her fear of staying. Eveline is paralyzed by her emotions of fear and nostalgia, and she realizes that she will remain in her state of lifeless living whether or not she stays or goes.





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