
Eveline by James Joyce: Literary Analysis

Literary Analysis of Eveline

Eveline is a short story by James Joyce that narrates the worldview of a young woman torn between embracing the life of adventure and fulfilling a promise made to the young woman's dying mother about taking care of the younger siblings upon her death. The story is centered on the theme of paralysis. Nostalgia is another theme that the story heavily relies upon. The author uses imagery to describe the landscape of the story's setting but however doesn't apply the same descriptiveness when it comes to people, even the protagonist. The plot of the story is relatively short as it consists of two scenes where the protagonist is at first engrossed in thought and another where she is frozen in inaction.

Eveline can be considered a whimsical woman. The claim can be exemplified by the fact that while at the beginning of the story the woman is willing to elope with a sailor, last minute decisions see the protagonist frozen and unable to carry out the deed (Joyce 77). The protagonist can also be rightfully considered hard-working as even at nineteen, Eveline fills the familial void that the deceased mother leaves. Eveline takes care of younger siblings while at the same time bearing the brunt of the brutal drunkard father. The protagonist is also dreamy by the virtue of using the imagery that the sailor suitor narrated about the wonders of the sailing life and the romance of Buenos Aires to escape the harsh conditions that dictates daily life.

The theme of paralysis in the short story is powerfully painted through the protagonist's inability to make peace with the past and changing current unfavorable conditions. The inability to accept change is portrayed by Eveline's nostalgic moment which reveals that the new houses that faced home were built upon grounds once occupied by a playing field that the protagonist played in as a child. Moreover, it's best exemplified by the protagonist's literal paralysis when the time to elope with the sailor came. Eveline was unable to accept Frank's hand so as to step into the boat. By doing so, the author paints a picture of a young woman who in paralysis and denial is frozen in an undesirable life.

The short story is also laden with symbolism meant to strengthen the prevalence of certain themes. For example, dust is used to symbolize how Eveline has stagnated in the house. Although the protagonist dusted the house on a weekly basis, the author claims that there is always dust in the Eveline's home. The author also states that as Eveline held the two letters addressed to brother and father, the evening made their whites indistinct. While the author may have been referring to the approaching darkness, there is a possibility that the finality of Eveline's premeditated decision to not go to Buenos Aires was also implied.

Escape is another theme portrayed in the short story. The protagonist yearns for escape from her undesirable life. The first for that escape takes in the mind of the protagonist is through the imagery that Eveline conjured up as a result of stories that the sailor had narrated to her. However, as the protagonist became more involved with the young sailor, it is evident that a more physical form of escape is needed to whisk her away from the claustrophobic dusty room that Eveline had lived since childhood. However, the escape does not happen as the protagonist is bound to the house from duty to family.

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