

Eveline's Lack of Love:

An Analysis of "Eveline"

In James Joyce's short story "Eveline", Eveline, a young teenage girl sits in her house considering her options for her future. On the one hand, she has a somewhat simple life at home. Since she is living with her widowed father and siblings she has to work hard to make money for the family. Eveline "had hard work to keep the house together and to see that the two young children who had been left to her charge went to school regularly and got their meals regularly." Eveline is living the normal domestic life that all women of that time were set to live. Not only is she dealing with taking care of her family but she is also worrying about her problems with her dad. Eveline feels "in danger of her father's violence". She is in need of someone to protect her.

That's when the other side of the dilemma comes in. Eveline "consented to go away, to leave her home" to be with her potential husband, Frank. He is an interesting man who seems to be the perfect escape for Eveline to take. It would be a totally new life for her. She would be married to Frank, living in Buenos Aires, and would not have to worry about making ends meet for her family. Eveline just wants to be happy. Since she is running out of time she has to make a decision as to whether she should stay home and be a good daughter, or pursue love with Frank. At the end of the story when she is about to get on the boat to head off to Buenos Aires with Frank she panics and ends up staying behind letting Frank get on the boat without her. Eveline's true intentions with Frank then become obvious. It seems that Eveline struggles with the fact that she is less interested in Frank for love but for a way out of her domestic life at home.

One critic, Epifanio San Juan Jr., argues that Eveline's current situation, not as much her love for him, is what made her want to leave with Frank. Her depressing house life, the people she has known her whole life, and her struggle for money, "all set her mind craving for a change in mood and atmosphere...hinted at by the frank, exuberance of her lover." (10) Eveline is clearly looking for an escape from her daily struggles instead of love from Frank. The first time evidence is shown that Eveline is looking for an escape from her current conflicts is seen in the following passage:

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.

In the first part of this passage, we see that Eveline is really looking for respect.

Throughout her life, she never received the respect she deserved from the people in her community and her family. Eveline is ready for a change of pace from her day-to-day lifestyle of disrespect and boredom. Frank happens to be her perfect escape.

The last line of the passage reveals another way that Frank is an escape for her. An escape from her mother's depressing domestic life at home that Eveline was destined to live. That same critic, Epifanio San Juan Jr., states that "Eveline is a persona of the mother's self, resurrected and given another chance" (11). Growing up Eveline became the maternal figure in her household after their mother passed away. Being in this position from a young age has made her life unexciting and knows it will always be like that. In the story we literally see Eveline think, "Escape! She must escape!" Therefore, when Frank comes into the picture with all of his exciting stories and grand promises for their future together Eveline sees it as the perfect escape from the boring home life she

anticipated. It's easy to see that in her mind she's more in love with Frank's promises to her rather than him as a person.

Another critic Margot Norris, argues that to Eveline, Frank is not only an escape but protection for her. She states that "the vow that seems to count most in Eveline's deliberations is that Frank had promised to take care of her." (60) The first time we see evidence of Eveline looking to Frank for protection rather than love is towards the end of the story in the following passage:

He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her.

Eveline sees these tropes as a way to safety from the danger in her life. Frank also would bring her freedom from the abuse and low self-esteem that she has in her current life. She sees that as more important than romantic or sexual contentment that one would normally seek. Eveline is more worried about Frank taking her away from all these problems rather than the prospect of being in love.

Margot Norris brought out another interesting point as well. "Nowhere does the story tell us that Eveline is in love with Frank, or loves Frank, or that he has told her he loves her." (60) We see Eveline's uncertainty about her romantic feelings for Frank come into her mind in the above passage when Joyce says, "He would give her life, perhaps love, too." It's directly said here that Eveline is not even thinking about romance with Frank at the moment. The draw is to the new and exciting life that she will be able to experience. Frank and Buenos Aires don't represent love and romance it represents freedom and a new life to Eveline.

Critic P.J. Matthews also argues about the missing love and romance between Frank and Eveline. He states that:

The sincerity of Frank's attachment to Eveline is never conclusively proven in the course of the story. In fact, the relationship remains tantalizingly ambivalent to the reader because of the focus in the text on Eveline's confused desires rather than on the realities of their alliance. (100)

While the fact that the story is more focused on Eveline's dilemma of choosing between her father or Frank is true, there still is a very large focus on her lack of a relationship with Frank. For example the very last line of the story, "Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.", leaves the reader with the notion that Eveline was never really in love at all. Not even though the prospects of her new life abroad could get her on the boat. The thing that held her back the most was that she was not in love with him the whole time.

Throughout her time sitting and considering all her potential life options she comes to realize that her future with Frank isn't what she really wants because she is just not in love with him. Her realization of this saves her from an unknown life with someone she doesn't have a connection with. In the end, she remains stuck in her domestic home life in Dublin.

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