

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS IN JAMES JOYCE'S EVELINE

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ABSTRACT

James Joyce's short story *Eveline*, from his collection *Dubliners* (1914), explores the internal conflict of a young woman trapped between the past and the uncertain future. Through a detailed psychological and socio-cultural lens, this article examines how *Eveline* reflects the struggles of women in early 20th-century Ireland. *Eveline*'s paralysis, resulting from familial obligations, religious guilt, and fear of the unknown, embodies Joyce's broader theme of existential stagnation. The paper also contextualizes *Eveline*'s situation within contemporary feminist theory and historical Irish cultural norms. By drawing on psychological and literary analysis, this study demonstrates how Joyce's use of epiphany and narrative structure underscores the protagonist's tragic immobility.

Keywords: James Joyce, *Eveline*, paralysis, feminism, Irish literature, existentialism, modernism, psychological realism.

James Joyce's *Eveline* is a deeply evocative short story that captures the internal struggle of a young woman facing a life-altering decision. Written as part of *Dubliners* (1914), the story provides an introspective look at the psychological and cultural constraints faced by women in early 20th-century Ireland. *Eveline*, the protagonist, contemplates leaving her oppressive home life for an uncertain future abroad with her lover, Frank. However, as she stands at the threshold of change, she is overcome by fear and ultimately paralyzed by her conflicting emotions. This article analyzes how *Eveline* exemplifies Joyce's recurring themes of paralysis, duty, and existential angst. By employing psychological realism, Joyce delves into the protagonist's subconscious fears, showcasing how personal and societal pressures stifle her ability to act. Furthermore, *Eveline*'s struggle is analyzed through a feminist and socio-historical lens to illustrate the broader implications of her plight within early 20th-century Irish society.

The Role of Women in Early 20th-Century Ireland

Eveline's story is set against the backdrop of Ireland's rigid social structures, particularly concerning women's roles. At the time, women were expected to be subservient to their families, with their primary responsibilities revolving around domestic duties and caregiving [5]. *Eveline*, like many women of her era, is burdened with familial obligations that inhibit her independence. Additionally, the Catholic Church played a significant role in shaping gender norms, enforcing the ideals of sacrifice and duty, especially among women [4]. *Eveline*'s fear of breaking her mother's dying promise to keep the family together exemplifies this religious influence. Her inability to leave is not merely a personal hesitation but a reflection of societal expectations that dictate her role as a daughter and caregiver. A central theme in *Eveline* is the concept of paralysis, a recurring motif in *Dubliners*. Joyce meticulously constructs a psychological portrait of a character frozen by fear and duty. *Eveline*'s mental turmoil is evident as she contemplates whether to leave her abusive home for an uncertain future. The story's

climax—where she physically grips the railing at the dock and is unable to move—symbolizes her psychological and existential stagnation [1]. From a psychological perspective, Eveline's paralysis can be understood through the lens of trauma and learned helplessness. Having grown up under an abusive father, she has internalized a sense of powerlessness, which manifests in her inability to act decisively (Cixous, 1976). This aligns with modern psychological theories on abuse victims, who often struggle with leaving toxic environments due to emotional conditioning and fear of the unknown [3]. Joyce's use of memory in Eveline plays a crucial role in her indecision. She nostalgically recalls moments of happiness from her childhood, yet these are tainted by her father's increasing violence and the weight of her mother's sacrifice. The invocation of her mother's voice—"Derevaun Seraun!"—in the story's final moments symbolizes the internalization of generational suffering. This phrase, roughly translating to "the end of pleasure is pain," reinforces Eveline's belief that suffering is inevitable, further preventing her from seeking happiness [6].

Feminist and Existentialist Interpretations

From a feminist perspective, Eveline's predicament highlights the lack of autonomy afforded to women in her time. She is denied agency over her own life, trapped between patriarchal oppression at home and the fear of potential subjugation in marriage (Showalter, 1991). While Frank appears to offer freedom, his role as a sailor—a figure often associated with transient relationships—suggests an uncertain future [2]. Eveline's hesitation reflects a larger feminist critique of the limited choices available to women in patriarchal societies. Eveline's paralysis can also be analyzed through an existentialist lens. Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*) is particularly relevant in understanding her self-deception. Sartre (1943) argues that individuals often deceive themselves into believing they have no choice, even when they do. Eveline convinces herself that she is bound by duty, using this as an excuse to avoid confronting her fear of freedom. Existentialist theorists, such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), also emphasize the difficulty women face in asserting their freedom within oppressive structures. Eveline's ultimate submission to her circumstances represents the existential dilemma of choosing familiarity over the uncertainty of self-definition. Water imagery is prevalent in Eveline, symbolizing both opportunity and fear. The sea represents escape, adventure, and the unknown, yet it also invokes a sense of instability and danger. Eveline's refusal to board the ship suggests her fear of losing control, highlighting her internal struggle between safety and self-fulfillment. Joyce's narrative style plays a crucial role in depicting Eveline's internal conflict. The story employs third-person limited narration, immersing the reader in Eveline's consciousness. The use of stream-of-consciousness allows Joyce to portray the fragmented nature of Eveline's thoughts, emphasizing her indecision and psychological turmoil.

James Joyce's Eveline remains a powerful exploration of psychological paralysis, gender constraints, and existential fear. Eveline's tragic inaction is not merely a personal failing but a reflection of broader socio-cultural forces that limit women's autonomy. Through a combination of psychological realism, feminist critique, and existential analysis, this paper has demonstrated how Eveline encapsulates the struggles of many women trapped in oppressive circumstances. Joyce's masterful use of narrative and symbolism ensures that Eveline's silent

suffering continues to resonate with readers, serving as a poignant reminder of the cost of inaction.

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