

Eveline

1. What is “Eveline” by James Joyce about?

It's about a 19-year-old Irish girl named Eveline who sits at her window, thinking about whether to leave home with her lover Frank to start a new life. She is torn between her miserable life—an abusive (虐待的) father, a boring job, and hard housework—and the scary unknown of leaving (离开所带来的令人恐惧的未知感). At the docks, she freezes and cannot get on the boat. It's one of the stories in *Dubliners* (《都柏林人》) and shows emotional paralysis (情感的麻痹).

2. What are the main themes of “Eveline”?

The main theme is paralysis (麻痹/无力)—being unable to act even when escape is possible. Other themes are duty vs. Desire (责任与欲望) (her promise to her dying mother vs. her wish for freedom), gender and entrapment (性别与困境) (women had few choices back then), and fear of the unknown (对未知的恐惧), which finally stops her from leaving.

3. Why doesn't Eveline leave with Frank at the end?

She is paralyzed by fear at the dock. Several things hold her back: her promise to her mother to keep the home together, Catholic guilt and duty, and terror of the unknown. She feels Frank will “drown” her. She grips the railing and cannot move. Her paralysis is not a choice—it's an automatic reaction from years of family duty, religion, and dependence.

4. What does “Derevaun Seraun” mean in “Eveline”?

It's a strange phrase spoken by Eveline's dying mother. Most scholars think it means “the end of pleasure is pain” or “the end of everything.” It works as a scary warning—the mother's hard life ended in madness. The phrase scares Eveline but also ties her more closely to her mother's memory and her promise to stay.

5. What does dust symbolize in “Eveline”?

Dust stands for stagnation and decay (停滞与衰败)—the boring, unchanging life Eveline leads. She dusts the same objects every week, wondering where the dust comes from. Dust also represents the familiar things she cannot let go of. The things that trap her are also the things that feel like home.

6. What literary devices does James Joyce use in “Eveline”?

Joyce uses free indirect discourse (自由间接引语) (mixing the narrator's voice with Eveline's thoughts), contrasting images (dusty home vs. the unknown sea), symbolism (dust, window, music), and a failed epiphany (顿悟) (a moment of realization that leads to paralysis, not action). The final simile compares her face to “a helpless animal.”

7. What role does Frank play in “Eveline”?

Frank is Eveline’s sailor lover who offers to take her away. He represents escape, freedom, and a new life. But Joyce leaves his honesty unclear—we only see him through Eveline’s romantic eyes. Whether he is honest or not, his role is to give Eveline a choice she cannot make.

8. What is the significance of the sea and water imagery in “Eveline”?

Water usually means new life, but James Joyce turns that around. For Eveline, the sea is not freedom—it is terror. She feels Frank will “drown” her. The boat’s whistle sounds sad, not exciting. The sea becomes a symbol of death and fear, not hope.