

Discussion Questions for "Eveline"

1. Brewster Chiselin, in his essay entitled "The Unity of Joyce's Dubliners," maintains that

"In light of this insight (that statues are symbols of spiritual stasis) other elements of the same pattern, such as the stillness of the girl frozen in fear at the end of the fourth story ("Eveline"), virtually declare themselves" (317).

Do you agree that statues (or in the case of the story "Eveline," the picture of Blessed Margaret Mary Alcoque, a Catholic nun who made a vow of chastity at age 4, and kept the vow during her lifetime) act as a symbol of spiritual stasis? Does Joyce hint that Eveline made a similar vow, and if so, does she break the vow? Is Eveline's rejection of Frank somehow related to a vow of chastity?

2. Once again referring to Brewster Chiselin's essay, he says that: "In Dubliners, the meaning of movement is further complicated by the thematic import of that symbolic paralysis which Joyce himself referred to, an arrest imposed from within, not by the 'nets' of external circumstance, but by a deficiency of impulse and power" (318). Can a symbol extend through a series of stories, and does it have to be explicit? In other words, can an idea, such as paralysis, act as a symbol? Do you agree that the "stasis" of Eveline – that is, her wanting to stay home, is self-imposed?
3. Chiselin goes on to remark that:

When in fear of drowning, the reluctant protagonist of the fourth story, "Eveline," hangs back refusing to embark on an ocean voyage, she may be understood to have withdrawn as at the brink of the baptismal font, for by her action she has renounced that new life which she had looked forward to attaining through moving eastward out of Dublin Bay on the night sea. The idea of her deprivation is reinforced by her final condition, of insensate terror, the reverse of spiritual refreshment and illumination. (326)

Does Chiselin's interpretation that Eveline's refusal to go on the voyage is a rejection of her spiritual life ring true to you? In fact, you may interpret Eveline's rejection of her suitor as a willingness to lead a life of "commonplace sacrifice," and a way of returning to her vow of chastity. Which interpretation (or neither) do you agree with?

4. How do the inhabitants of Eveline's neighborhood deal with strangers? Please give examples from the text.

5. Does Eveline's emotional reaction at the port seem appropriate to the situation? Chiselin seems to suggest that she fears drowning. Do you agree with this interpretation? Can a case be made that she fears leaving her accustomed home, friends, and family?
6. Is Frank entirely trustworthy? Does Eveline sense, at some level, that Frank is not all that he appears? Do you think that Frank is trustworthy? Why or why not?
7. Eveline seems to be ambivalent about leaving home throughout the story. Why is she ambivalent?
8. There are hints that Eveline's father has a temper; what is the source of his bad disposition?
9. There is a hint of madness in Eveline's family (her mother ended in a "final craziness."). Is Eveline subject to a similar form of madness?
10. Does Eveline love Frank? Cite instances from the text to support your view.