

Choices and their consequences in "eveline"



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The choices manufactured on a day-to-day basis effect every choice and action in the future. Unfortunately, these choices can be based off different constrictions and outside forces. Throughout the years ones gender could play a extensive part in stagnation and the lack of ability for one to make choices for themselves. Many live in despair about what might happen in the future based on decision they make in that moment. It is the apprehension of unknown that leads one to believe the right choice is oppressive and possibly inaccessible. In James Joyce's short story, "Eveline," the narrator uses a sense of guilt, along with images of dust and decay, to expose Eveline's sense of paralysis deriving from restricted options as a woman in the twentieth century.

The dust found throughout Eveline's home directly correlates with how she feels. James Joyce instantaneously mentions a sense of inertia in this short story. It starts off with Eveline "leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the order of dusty cretonne" (Joyce 3). Dust is typically found in places that are often abandoned, forgotten about, and no longer given any attention. In other words, exactly how Eveline feels through her life. Her favorite sibling and her mother have both passed away, leaving her with an abusive and demanding father. She has been left with a never ending cycle of working to support the family, caring for her younger siblings, and keeping the house in tact. On top of caring for her siblings, she is also having to care for and watch out for her abusive father. However, after reading the very beginning of the story it is easy to see she is juggling so many different things that she can not take suitable care of the curtains, since she receives no help from anyone else.

James Joyce is emphasizing the word dust because it shows the struggles Eveline has faced since her mother passed away. As Eveline is looking around she is remembering all of the different items she has continuously dusted, "wondering where on earth all of the dust came from" (3). Even after cleaning everything week after week dust continued to show up all over her home. It was a never ending cycle, just like Eveline's life. Eveline is stuck in a cycle of tyranny. She lives in fear of her father's abuse, constantly working hard, and having to secretly meet with her lover. Just like she wonders where all the dust continues to come from, she also may wonder where all of this negativity in her life comes from. As Eveline was examining all of the familiar objects she also points out the photo of the priest. She never learned the name of the priest after all these years and the photo was now broken and decaying. Her father also shrugs of the priest every time he is asked about him. This shows the lack of sincerity her father has for people he should care about. The final occurrence of dust in this short story occurs towards the end. Eveline is sitting in the same spot as the the beginning of the story, "inhaling the odor of dust cretonne" (5). This could be foreshadowing the fact that she is stuck where she is and will not be able to leave on the boat with her lover Frank. She is still being encircled by the dust just like she has been continuously encircled by her duties and responsibilities. As Eveline is sitting at the window she begins to be hit with the guilt of abandoning the promise she made to her mother, which was to keep their home together for as long as possible. She starts to realize that even if she left with Frank, the dust at her home would always remain. There would always be a job that did not get done without her or her mother at the

home. She comes to the conclusion that she was destined to live the same life as her mother, surrounded with the same suffocating dust.

The guilt and doubt that Eveline begins to explore plays a part in her decision and sense of paralysis. She worries that she will be breaking the promise she made to her dying mother if she decides to leave with Frank. She becomes concerned with her younger siblings and who is going to care for them, since she is currently the one bringing in the money and doing the household chores. Beyond the guilt, she begins to doubt her decisions to be with Frank. She mentions that he is "very kind, manly, open-hearted" (4). However, she never confirms his love for her or that she loves him. Shortly before Eveline is suppose to board the boat with Frank, "she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty" (6). However, she is wondering what her duty is, assuming that it would also be a responsibility to be with Frank. In this moment she doubts that leaving with Frank would be any different than her current life. She quickly believes that going to Buenos Aires would cause her to live the same life that her mother lived with her father, doubting all that her and Frank had.

The degrading roles of women in the twentieth century play an abundant role in Eveline's stagnation. Women were seen as the worker around the house and were suppose to take care of the children, make dinner, and do all of the cleaning. After Eveline's mother died, she became the woman, or the worker, of the house. Even beyond being just the worker of the home, women were suppose to submit to the man of the home no matter how they are treated. Not only does Eveline do all of the work around the house, but she also works outside of the home and gives her earnings to her father.

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However, when she would ask her abusive father for money he would say “ she used to squander the money, that she had no head, that he wasn’t going to give her his hard-earned money to throw about the streets” (4). Although Eveline’s father is unwilling to help her for all she does, she is still forced to comply to all of his wishes. In the twentieth century women were also not given the same quality of education, which causes it to be more difficult to attain a professional job. The jobs that women were able to get would also pay them less money than it would pay a man. This leaves the options for women very limited and makes it nearly impossible for them to progress or become successful in life. Also due to the lack of opportunities it also makes it difficult for them to move and start a new life. In the beginning of the story Eveline looks at moving to Argentina as possibly a new world of equality. She thought she would have the opportunity to move out of the role she has been thrown into since her mother passed away. However, she concludes that there is the possibility of it being worse than the life she is currently living.

People are constantly facing choices that lead to unknown results and have to balance all the possible outcomes. In order to make a change one has to leave other things behind. Eveline is forced to make the choice of starting a new life that could possibly be better or be stuck in her old life being suffocated by the dust. Eveline ultimately decides to live the life her mother did, but was it the life she lived that caused her to have an early death? James Joyce is challenging his readers to understand that the majority of choices made are going to have ups and downs, but sometimes it is better to start over. However, it is the guilt caused by these choices that make it

difficult to do the right thing. The limitations in the twentieth century restricted many people of that time from going out and following their dreams, or in this case a new and better life. The reality is that one is always going to be stuck in their old ways until enough courage is gathered up to do something for themselves.

Work Cited

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