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**The Protagonist’s Motherhood Complex in James Joyce’s “Eveline”**

The influence that family bonds impart sways even the most rigid of people. When combined with the unfelt pressure of psychological trauma, those bonds can turn out to be the supreme authority for an individual’s actions when under the right circumstances. Eveline clearly falls into both categories – a victim of an irreversible trauma brought on by an unfortunate passing and an innocent practitioner of Industrial-Era Irish-Catholic working-class family values. Throughout the story, the reader is given many subtle hints and blunt examples of this influence enacting its rule over Eveline’s decision, beginning chronologically from flashbacks to her gleeful childhood and ending alongside the story with her final decision to choose Ireland and her abusive life over her newfound love and comfort.

Where in the story is the evidence for Eveline’s motherhood complex? As with any complex, there needs to be some basis for this psychological disposition. In practice, this usually turns out to be abuse, which is true of this story. This abuse was inflicted not upon Eveline herself, but upon her brothers which is made clear in paragraph nine, where the narrator states that “he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest.” However, this trauma is compounded by the death of Eveline’s mother before. A complex also requires some entity to be attached to. In the most basic cases of a motherhood complex, those entities would be something to represent a mother’s children. In this story, Eveline’s “children” are her little sisters which she has vowed to protect after her mother’s passing. A stronger complex would involve other attachments. The most likely areas of attachment for a motherhood complex would be a husband or father figure, as well as a threat. Eveline’s father fits both roles. One may question the conjecture that Eveline sees her father as a threat to her sisters, considering that he has never harmed them, but it is easy to see how the father’s threats toward Eveline can cause her to believe her sisters are destined to receive the same verbal abuse eventually, if they are not already. It is also possible that her mother’s parting words, “Derevaun Seraun!” are a warning to Eveline that both she and her sisters will eventually lose their normal to the pain of their father’s abuse. These things establish that there exist the criteria for a motherhood complex, but it can not really be considered seriously unless the complex is acted by.

Eveline probably considers her mother to be the missing link between her happy life before her mother’s death and the somewhat undesirable one that came after. In order to best give her sisters the lives they once had, her intention may be to emulate her mother to the extent of her ability. This is the culmination of Eveline’s motherhood complex and is also a compelling reason to consider when asking why she did not leave with Frank. Such a disposition would cause her to want to protect her “daughters” from the “threat” before herself, give them the most enjoyable childhood that she can, all while also trying to satisfy the “husband.” The story makes it clear that Eveline takes caring for her sisters very seriously. A neglectful “mother” would ask her children to share the responsibility of homemaking, regardless of their ages. Eveline does not explicitly ask such of her sisters, bearing all responsibilities including cleaning the house, making her own income, and managing essential resources for the family. Another facet of the story to consider is the final line, “Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.” Even if Eveline did not truly love Frank, surely would the loss of the opportunity to escape to Argentina warrant a distressed facial expression. She does not give one, and the reader must consider the possibility that this is due to a potential mother complex preventing her from being able to consider options other than directly caring for her child figures.