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Paralysis and Nostalgic Memory in "Eveline"

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I. Introduction

In “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages,” written in 1907 during the writing of *Dubliners*, Joyce diagnoses the psychological condition of his nation as “paralysis”: “the soul of the country [. . .] is paralysed by the influence and admonitions of the church, while its body is manacled by the police, the tax office, and the garrison” (*CW* 171). Since “the church,” “the police,” “the tax office,” and “the garrison” can be seen as “ideological state apparatuses,” to use Althusser’s term, the word “paralysis” has no doubt much to do with ideology. According to Filson Young, however, “the bleak vista” of a paralyzed Ireland results from post Famine poverty: “the people are physically and mentally exhausted, apathetic, resigned; the very soil of the country itself is starved and impoverished. So stands Ireland, weak and emaciated, at the crossroads” (15-6). Of course, it would seem reductive to find the cause of “paralysis” in a single phenomenon. As long as ideology works pervasively with its influence reaching every single aspect of society, it is necessary to interpret “paralysis” as a pervasive phenomenon: “there is paralysis: linguistic,

sexual, alcoholic, marital, financial; even history itself seems to have stopped" (Williams 96). In a word, paralysis becomes a useful term mapping post Famine Ireland socially, economically, politically, historically, physically, psychologically, and pathologically.

Here, nostalgic memories of the past become a crucial part in mapping the psychological paralysis of Dubliners in *Dubliners*. In this paper, I intend to examine how individual memories as mirror image of national history are detrimental to reaching an epiphany or a keen sense of political and historical consciousness. In the next section, I will summarize some relevant theories regarding the relationship between history and memory. In the last section, I will discuss how Eveline's rosy, nostalgic memory of her past impedes her moment of epiphany. All in all, I would like this paper to explain how *Dubliners* provides an alternative perspective to interpret not only the psychological history of the Irish at the turn of the century, but also history/memory as an ideological apparatus to reinforce state nationalism.

II. Memory and History

Memory has been considered by some historians not only as an anathema but also as an alternative to history in disrupting history's dominant ways of understanding the past. Since the 1980s, in fact, the relationship between memory and history has been much discussed as a historiographical problem. As Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin explain, "While History has become negatively associated with the 'public,' and with 'objectivity,' memory has become positively associated with the embedded, with the local, the personal and the subjective" (*Regimes* 10). In *History and Memory*, for example, Jacques Le Goff writes, "Memory is the raw material of history [. . .] it is the living source from which historians draw" (xi xii). For Le Goff, memory is equated with the past itself, whereas history is considered as a reconstructed, therefore impure and imperfect, version of the past. In "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,"

Pierre Nora also identifies memory as a primitive or sacred form opposed to modern historical consciousness: “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (8). Nora goes so far as to argue that “History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it” (9). For both Le Goff and Nora, thus, memory exists as an authentic entity of the past itself, and as a devastating critique of the totalizing, equivocating aspects of historical discourse, because history exists as an ideological reconstruction of the past.

However, many recent theorists acknowledge that much like history, memory cannot be outside systems of knowledge and power, either. Thus, the contemporary scholarly research puts more emphasis on “memory’s late modern associations with fantasy, subjectivity, invention, the present, representation and fabrication,” rather than on “its modern associations with history, community, tradition, the past, reflection and authenticity” (Radstone 9). Much like history, that is to say, memory is now also construed as constituted or (re)constructed. Therefore, memory also should be understood as a text to be interpreted within power dynamics, not as a lost, authentic reality waiting to be found.

In this sense, Giambattista Vico’s account of memory is quite influential: “Memory thus has three different aspects: memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitates them, and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship” (819). Notable here is that memory is not totally transparent or reliable in retrieving the past. As Vico explicates, memory has three different but interrelated functions: remembering, imagination, and invention. That is, memory does not remember the past as it is; rather, it rearranges and even transforms some of the moments of the past to make it into a coherent narrative in relation with the present.

A similar point can be found in Nora’s argument: “It[Memory] remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived” (8). That

is, even though memory might be considered as an authentic entity of the past, the way memory is retrieved cannot but be subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, and "manipulation and appropriation," according to the present's political desire. In this view, evoked memories cannot be seen as a direct record of events, identical with what happened. Instead, much like history, memory also should be seen as a reconstructed version of the past. For, as Susannah Radstone puts it, "memory work occupies the liminal space between forgetting and transformation" (Memory 12). Thus, the claim that memory is truer and more reliable than history cannot hold anymore. Memory is also political and it remains as a site of struggle over meaning.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to take memory into account as an alternative site to counterbalance official histories/historiographies, which do not count memory at all. At the same time, it is noteworthy that memory inevitably has two dimensions: social and individual. According to Maurice Halbwachs, more importantly, these two dimensions are interrelated:

> [T]o be sure, everyone has a capacity for memory that is unlike that of anyone else [. . .] but individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory [. . .] to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu (family, church, community organizations, political parties, neighborhoods, ethnic groups etc.). (53)

Collective and individual memories are deeply intertwined. Much of an individual's memory is socially/culturally/nationally constructed; much of social/cultural/national memory is mediated through an individual's memory. Put more simply, what we remember and forget is, to some extent, shaped by our larger social/cultural/national narratives.

However, as Patrick Hutton explains in "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," this social/cultural/national dimension of memory is highly vulnerable to appropriation and manipulation by state nationalism: "Commemoration is a calculated strategy for stabilizing collective memories that are otherwise protean

and provisional. [. . .] It anchors the past in the present, creating the illusion that time can be made to stand still" (Hutton 537). Commemoration of certain memories through museums, monuments, and retellings of stories can invent collective memory. And this collective memory is dangerous in that it can easily be exploited and manipulated, much like official historiographies. Through the evocation of *certain* memories, an individual/national identity can be invented and transmitted regardless of the flow of time. Just as national identities are constructed and propagated through commemoration of certain collective memories, individual identities also can be constructed and continued through evocation of certain personal memories, regardless of the stream of time.

In the following section, I will examine, through "Eveline," how personal memories crisscross social/collective memories, and how they underpin official histories. I hope this examination will be able to provide an alternative perspective by which to view and explain Irish history at the turn of the century, quite differently from official/normative historiographies.

III. The Paralyzing Power of Nostalgic Memory in "Eveline"

Although the title of the fourth story of *Dubliners* is named after its main character, as Wolfgang Wicht puts, "Eveline is arguably [and ironically] the most passive and most submissive major character in Dubliners" (122). Trevor L. Williams also mentions this point: "The subject of the story (whose title—the only title in *Dubliners* to use the central character's name—mocks the expectation of a 'story') is denied a voice and therefore subjectivity" ("Resistance" 441). Joyce's alternative historiography in "Eveline" records the passive, stagnant psychology of this voiceless female. The first few lines of the story reflect Eveline's lack of action/voice so clearly that it seems almost impossible to distinguish her from the dusty, brownish background:

> She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired. [. . .] One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it—not like their little brown houses but bright brick houses with shining roofs. (*D* 36)

Eveline appears in the story sitting, watching, leaning, and recalling old days – the verbs ascribed to her do not involve any active, lively efforts at all. While the evening brandishes its agency so as to "invade the avenue," Eveline has none. Even the verb "smelling" does not belong to her; "the odour of dusty cretonne" simply comes to "her nostrils." With minor movements, Eveline in the first scene seems as if she existed in a still picture. Here, the word "invade," in fact, seems to reveal the passivity of the Irish as a whole in history. Trevor Williams notes, "this first 'active' word encapsulates the gloomy tale of Irish history, as if the Irish people are helpless to prevent this repeated act of invasion" (442). If we recall the fact that colonialism can explain a good part of Irish history, such an interpretation can hardly be an exaggeration: "Ireland, perhaps more than any other European nation, had undergone a particularly violent and disruptive historical development over long centuries of never resolved conflict, and had [. . .] for most of its recorded history been subject to foreign control" (Leerssen 224). Eveline, as with the Irish in much of Irish history, is vulnerable and passive to any kind of invasion, whether it is the evening or a sailor's lie. Here, "dusty cretonne," along with "brown houses" in the neighborhood, dominates the overall tone and atmosphere of the story, just as the priest's "yellowing photograph hung on the wall" does Eveline's whole house (*D* 37). As Vincent Cheng notes, "The pervasive dust in the story becomes a correlative for the stagnation and decay of a living paralysis, in which everything settles" (101). Much like dust, Eveline settles, and gets stagnant at her brown house. Eveline is almost indistinguishable from such an atmosphere; perhaps, she herself seems to become a piece of furniture of her dusty house, "from which she had never dreamed of being divided" (*D* 37).

Here, it is important to recognize that Eveline's paralysis or the lack of action/voice has something to do with her brown house/home, an ideological apparatus. As a surrogate mother, Eveline has played the role of a housewife since her mother's death. And this role has made Eveline sacrifice her own life as a woman just as many mothers have done. Joyce writes in his letter to Nora on August 29, 1904, a few days before the publication of "Eveline:"

> My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity – home, the recognised virtues, classes of life and religious doctrines. How could I like the idea of home? [. . .] My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father's ill treatment [. . . .] When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin [. . .] I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim. (*L II* 48)

To Joyce, "home" is nothing but an ideological apparatus by which the victimization of women is performed "legally" and recycled through the husband wife and mother children relationships. Through the guise of love and maternity, women are made to sacrifice their own lives and are "slowly killed" as victims. Along with religion and social order, in a word, the values related to home and family contribute to paralyzing individual agency.

Within the system of this ideological apparatus, history exists as a circular movement in which Eveline cannot but take over or repeat her mother's role, although she hopes not to "be treated as her mother had been" (*D* 37). As her place in her job "would be filled up by advertisement" (*D* 37), her mother's place was easily and conveniently filled up by her. Eveline takes care of her family as her mother had done before she died; Eveline falls prey to her father's violence "only for her dead mother's sake" (*D* 38). And this circular vortex of history even threatens to repeat her mother's death: "As she mused the pitiful vision of her mother's life laid its spell on the very quick of her being—that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness. She trembled as she heard again her mother's voice saying constantly with foolish insistence: —Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!" (*D* 40). According to the "Notes to the Stories," "Derevaun Seraun!" may

be “delirious gibberish” signifying Mrs. Hill’s insanity. Since the word “quick” means “a living thing” or “a tender, sensitive, or vital part,” it becomes clear how the nightmarish memory of the dead has an influence on the living in the present, and how history threatens the living to repeat the life and death of the dead.

This auditory hallucination of her dead mother finally wakes Eveline from her life long paralysis and gives her a moment of epiphany: “She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape!” (*D* 40). Unlike her passive, sedentary movements in the first scene, Eveline, for the first time, takes a real action, “standing up,” and realizes that she should escape and break this circular movement of history so as not to repeat her mother’s craziness and death.

Ironically, however, this evocation of family history not only makes Eveline desire an escape, but also paralyzes her will to escape home. Eveline dreams of “run[ning] away with a fellow” (*D* 37) from her dusty home. Of course, this dream, for Eveline, means not a mere elopement; rather, it means a severing of the umbilical cord that connects her life with her womb like house where she has lived for a long time, thus dividing her from her family history. However, as long as nostalgic memory of the past repeatedly numbs her pains in the present, it would be not so easy to sever the umbilical cord that has bound Eveline to her family for her whole life, much as the Irish are yoked to Irish history. Much like Father Flynn in “The Sisters,” whose last wish was to “see the old house again where [he and his sisters] were all born in Irishtown” (*D* 17), Eveline, on the verge of escape, falls into memories consciously and unconsciously. Even in the very first scene, Eveline is already sunk in memories: “One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people’s children” (*D* 36). Compared to the dusty, brownish present, the past as recalled by Eveline seems quite rosy: “Still they seemed to have been rather happy then. Her father was not so bad then; and besides, her mother was alive” (*D* 36 7). In her memory, her family is “all gone for a picnic to the Hill of Howth” (*D* 39) and her father is “putting her mother’s bonnet to make the children laugh” (*D* 39). However, Eveline’s assertion that “[s]he would not be treated as her mother had been” (*D* 37)

makes it obvious that her real past was not so different from the present, which is dotted with abuse and violence: “he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother’s sake” (*D* 38). Thanks to the comfortable distance between her past and present, however, Eveline’s past is disguised by this rosy nostalgia.

For Eveline, thus, memory of the past exists as nostalgia for the lost, “safe” homeland or “some utopian space and time,” which could cure and numb the unremitting pain of her nightmarish, violent present (Huyssen 6). In *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, Andreas Huyssen, through Nietzsche, explains an intellectual trajectory,

> that articulated the classical modernist formulations of memory as alternative to the discourses of objectifying and legitimizing history, and as cure to the pathologies of modern life. Here, memory was always associated with some utopian space and time beyond what Benjamin called the homogeneous empty time of the capitalist present. (6)

In this trajectory, modernity’s menacingly wielding of an “objectifying and legitimizing history” is offset by the alternative utopian force of memory. When Eveline’s harsh present, which is dotted with her father’s abuse and violence, can be compared to modernity or its wielding of totalizing aspects of historical discourse, her memory of the dead mother can be seen as a utopian past or a lost paradise. In this sense, Hodgkin and Radstone note how memory can function as a surrogate for a lost homeland: “Images of the lost homeland—Ireland, Afghanistan—can be passed down generations, summoning up loyalties and nostalgia” (12). Within the suffocating power of history, Eveline has no other choice but to rely on her rosy, nostalgic memory of the past, when everything was warm and perfect. And this nostalgic memory evokes her “loyalties” and responsibilities toward her family so that she can “keep the home together” (*D* 40) and so that her family history can continue.

However, it is highly doubtful whether this nostalgic memory can bring

happiness to Eveline's present and future. Nostalgic memory just ends up disguising the past and paralyzing Eveline's agency and ability to change her oppressive present. Deceived by the rosy, nostalgic memory of her past, Eveline is finally trapped in her family history. All in all, as Williams argues, "More than most of the stories in *Dubliners*, 'Eveline' plays out the nightmare of history and the oppression of the present" (441). History in "Eveline" takes a form of a ghost memory of her dead mother, much like the ghosts of Michael Furey in "The Dead" and of Mrs. Dedalus in *Ulysse*s, and comes back to Eveline so as to keep her from escaping from her past and present: "Strange that it should come that very night to remind her of the promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together as long as she could" (*D* 40). The memory of this promise between Eveline and her mother becomes an invisible umbilical cord binding Eveline to her family, Ireland, and past, no matter how they might be oppressive. As Cheng notes, after all, "Eveline" in this way confirms the old truth in Joycean works that "the dead, the past, and history inevitably refuse to stay dead—and continue to be 'nets' (to use Stephen Dedalus's term) of entrapment one must try to fly by" (103).

As we see clearly in Eveline's case, the evocation of such nostalgic memory can be dangerous in that it paralyzes an individual's agency to create his or her own history, to not repeat the history given to him or her. In other words, memory can stop the stream of time/history itself, by registering history as a circular, repetitive movement: "It[Memory] anchors the past in the present, creating the illusion that time can be made to stand still" (Hutton 537). Memory, in this way, repeatedly evokes "the presence of the past" (538). Thus, it becomes clear that the paralysis of history results from evocations of nostalgic memories, which would keep haunting the present. In this view, memories cannot be seen simply as counter histories that could straightforwardly challenge the legitimizing force of history. Instead, we should note that memories are in complex complicity with history in paralyzing individuals. Much like history, nostalgic memory turns an individual into a "passive" and "helpless" being (*D* 41).

Locked in these nostalgic memories of her family history, after all, Eveline

fails to embark on a ship, which could open the door to her new history to be created, and instead falls into an irrevocably deeper paralysis: "He[Frank] rushed beyond the barrier and called to her[Eveline] to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (*D* 41). Raffaella Baccolini, echoing Joyce's earlier point of women as victims of "home, the recognised virtues, classes of life and religious doctrines" (*L II* 48), explains how Eveline's paralysis represents the situation in which most of the Irish women were confined at the turn of the century: "Since they remain locked into memory [. . .] unlike men, women in *Dubliners* do not seem to reach a recognition about themselves and an understanding of their identity" (147). And "Eveline" especially epitomizes such a female condition in Dubliners because "her identification with the past and her passivity foreclose any possibility of a future for her" (Baccolini 157). After all, as Williams puts it, Joyce through "Eveline" seems to emphasize the paralyzing, suffocating power of history and question the individual's vulnerable role in it: "She is unable to act in the present because the nightmare of history lies on her brain. She cannot construct her own history [. . .]" (443, emphasis: original). The past imposed on Eveline is so oppressive that she would not be able to weave her future on her own. In short, Eveline's oppressive history, disguised in nostalgic memories, keeps paralyzing her consciousness, which is indispensable for any redeeming epiphany to occur.

Even though Eveline might succeed in boarding the boat for "a distant unknown country" (*D* 37), it seems still doubtful whether she can create a wholly new, different history because her anticipation of a new life is highly contingent on Frank: "she would be married" (*D* 37); "She was to go away with him by the night boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres where he had a home waiting for her" (*D* 38); "Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. [. . .] Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms" (*D* 40). Whether she stays in Ireland or emigrates to Argentina with Frank, her fate does not seem to be far from that of her mother's, as long as she depends on male

agency to create history—rather than regarding herself as an active weaver of her own fate.

When we recall the earlier presupposition that an individual's memories are deeply intertwined with his/her national history, the story "Eveline" can be read as an alternative historiography mapping how much of Irish's psychological territory is colonized by the Janus faced past—rosy and nostalgic, but oppressive and paralyzing at the same time—just as Ireland's national territory is colonized by the foreign force. In this way, the psychological state of Eveline can be expanded to the Irish collectively, who are like "passive," "helpless animal[s]" (*D* 41), both under the grip of oppressive, dehumanizing history, and under the paralyzing hypnosis of nostalgic memories of their lost homeland.

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Abstract

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This paper examines how individual memories as mirror image of national history are detrimental to reaching an epiphany or a keen sense of political and historical consciousness. In "Eveline," nostalgic memory ends up disguising the past and paralyzing Eveline's agency and ability to change her oppressive present. As long as nostalgic memory of the past repeatedly numbs her pains in the present, it is not so easy for Eveline to sever the umbilical cord that has bound Eveline to her family for her whole life, much as the Irish are yoked to Irish history. In this view, memories cannot be seen simply as counter histories that could straightforwardly challenge the legitimizing force of history. Instead, we should note that memories are in complex complicity with history in paralyzing individuals. Much like history, nostalgic memory turns an individual into a "passive" and "helpless" being (*D* 41).

More importantly, since an individual's memories are deeply intertwined with his/her national history, the story "Eveline" can be read as an alternative historiography mapping how much of Irish's psychological territory is colonized by the Janus faced past—rosy and nostalgic, but oppressive and paralyzing at the same time—just as Ireland's national territory is colonized by the foreign force. In other words, the psychological state of Eveline can be expanded to the Irish collectively, who are like "passive," "helpless animal[s]" (*D* 41), both under the grip of oppressive, dehumanizing history, and under the paralyzing hypnosis of nostalgic memories of their lost homeland.

■ Key words: Joyce, Dubliners, Eveline, history, memory, postcolonialism