

Body as a Signifier: Eveline's Nausea

Hee-Whan Yun

If we roughly define “initiation” as an internalization of a value system a society sets up as its superstructure, it necessarily causes a conflict with individual belief, thought and behavioral pattern. The first three stories of *Dubliners*, as we have seen, dramatize the painful trajectory of self-discovery of a boy-narrator as well as his gradual recognition of his repressive environment. The protagonists in the trilogy feel certain possibilities of escape from the situation in which adults are supposedly trapped, even if their efforts to find out another mode of life turn out to be failures in the end. Even though the early confrontation with the stark realities of Dublin leaves them frustrated and disillusioned, the narratives of the three stories reverberate with the shrill voices and lively movements of the children.

In the stories of adolescence, however, we encounter gloomy youths in Dublin whose lives have already been seriously damaged and oppressed by various forces, either individual or environmental, which they cannot avoid. Even if “Eveline” is the most positive narrative among the collection in that the heroine is offered an

opportunity to leave, the narrative surface is even gloomier because it is a story that tries to explicate how and why she cannot leave. The topic is simple: whether or not to accompany Frank in order to escape from Dublin. The process of Eveline's decision-making, however, proves to be exhausting rather than challenging to her. What makes readers frustrated is not that she continually changes her mind, envisioning and revising her plan to elope with Frank, but that she lacks intellectual precision in describing what is happening in her mind: what are her motivations and what hinders her. She doesn't know exactly what she wants. She simply wavers between temporary determination and recurrent indecision. Another thing to be mentioned is Joyce's method of narration. The third-person narrator, putting himself inside Eveline's consciousness, reports what is happening in her mind in a language approximated to that of Eveline. In this manner, he guarantees the "illusion of intimacy," although it also increases the undecidability of the text. What we hear as a final version of the narrative has already been filtered through her limited intelligence and vocabulary, and again filtered through the past tense. Such different levels of narration make "Eveline" a seemingly transparent but actually disturbing narrative which the reader must decipher.

What makes it so difficult for her to make a decision? That is the pivotal if puzzling question of the story. We can make two suggestions: her inherent indecision is one thing, and the nature of her relationship with Frank is another. The former naturally makes us look at her family background during her formative years. The latter leads us to explicate how her affair with Frank inevitably compels her to change her relationships with those around her. These are the same topics Eveline takes into consideration when she makes a final decision on the evening of departure. She remembers, among other things, those happy days of her childhood which are symbolized by the "open field" where she used to be playing with other children. As the narrators of the other childhood stories do, she refers to the spontaneous playfulness of the children. It is not, however, a current affair. They are only recalled by Eveline now. The voices that used to fill the narrative surface with joy and vivacity are all gone:

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, the Dunns, little Keogh the cripple, she and her brothers and sisters. (D 29)

The freedom and happiness of the past makes a stark contrast with weary present and uncertain future. Both present and future have been displaced by the past now. Mystifying her past with the help of its irretrievable pastness, Eveline compares her lively past with her dreary present. Her description of the past is not specific, either: "Still they *seemed* to have been *rather* happy then"(D 29, italics mine). She includes in her items of happiness the fact that her mother was alive and her father was not yet so bad. Even if she cannot tell exactly what has caused such a drastic change in her family life, she imputes the loss of her childhood to the economic "invasion" by an Englishman which resulted in a striking change not only in the topography but in the communal spirit of the neighborhood.

Her concept of "home" has also been changed. Apparently, the Hills are a dysfunctional family. Her father, who had occasionally showed the symptoms of domestic violence from her childhood on, has become a dictator after his wife's death. If Eveline, a girl of nineteen, is intimidated and sometimes terrified by his brutality, home is no longer a shelter for her, emotionally as well as economically: "And now she had nobody to protect her"(D 30-31). The continual traumatization of Eveline by Mr. Hill, with her self-assigned role of "pleaser," eventually causes her "palpitations," an incipient but sure sign of her mental and physical breakdown. It is hard to tell if Mr. Hill's incapacity as a husband drove his wife into insanity, or his despair at her death inflamed his cruel nature. One thing, however, is clear: he would like to find in Eveline a wife-substitute, which, in turn, threatens his daughter in a totally different situation (Henke 23): "... but latterly he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother's sake"(D 30). Together with "implied" sexual harassment, Eveline is manipulated and even exploited by Mr. Hill who takes away the weekly wages she earns, seven shillings

to be exact, and who asserts that it is “his hard-earned money” in a manner that transforms her into the undeserving recipient of his largess. He truly shows every symptom of pathological alcoholism. Such a devastating rape of Eveline’s subjectivity makes her become more and more passive and inactive. What is terribly frustrating is that she has to manage her household without the money needed (Scholes 110-111). Both the insecure situation of her finances and the unpredictable nature of Mr. Hill’s behavior makes Eveline feel “unspeakably” weary (*D* 31). We hear that “[s]he was tired” (*D* 29) from the beginning of the narrative.

The continual victimization by her father leaves Eveline a totally dependent person without free will or the ability to think clearly, which is betrayed again in her grocery shopping:

In the end he would give her the money and ask her had she any intention of buying Sunday dinner. Then she had to rush out as quickly as she could and do her marketing, holding her black leather purse tightly in her hand as she elbowed her way through the crowds and returning home late under her load of provisions.

(*D* 31)

The “black leather purse” she holds tightly unmistakably reminds us the market-scene in “Araby” in which the boy-narrator imagines himself as a “chalice-bearer” through a “throng of foes” (*D* 23). Eveline also passes through crowds, although she clutches, instead of a “chalice,” a “black leather purse.” (Ingersoll 504) Her obsession with domestic details, which is no less than a displacement of her subjectivity by inhuman objects, shows how devastatingly her life has been trampled down at home. Despite her agile movement out of the house, we find that she returns “late under her load of provisions,” which reveals that she is not an efficient housekeeper, either: “It was hard work—a hard life” (*D* 31).

Living as she does as an absent signifier in the male discourse, Eveline gradually develops emotional passivity and volitional inertia, as is clear from the first passage of the story. It foreshadows what is supposed to be happening in the

course of the narrative.

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.

(*D* 29, italics mine)

At first, instead of a name, just an indefinite female character is introduced as surrendering herself quietly to the oncoming darkness. The main character is sitting inactive while the inhuman agent, i.e. the evening, is active in its militant approaching, "invade." Eveline, totally exhausted by her life of quiet desperation, cannot bear even the routine vicissitude of a single day. She feels so frail that she needs something to fall back on, i.e. the window curtains, whose dusty smell of death she inhales. (Why doesn't Joyce say more conventionally, instead, that "she leaned her head" and "she smelled the odour of cretonne?" These verbal formations also emphasize Eveline's passivity.) Dust in the story is a significant metaphor for her entrapment, because there is no fresh air in the temporal present. Fresh air is an item available either in the "open field" of the past or in Buenos Aires in the future. In addition, she wonders "where on earth all the dust came from" (*D* 29-30) in spite of her weekly cleaning. Related thus to Eveline's tiring housework, the unsurmountable amount of dust becomes a powerful symbol of the inscrutable forces of life, whether in the form of environment or of character, in which all human beings are unavoidably caught. Sick and tired of the ubiquitous presence of dust, Eveline finally gives up her unceasing fight against dust, and passively inhales the odour of dusty cretonne (*D* 32). Although made of tiny invisible particles, dust is formidable enough to paralyze Eveline's weary mind. She abandons, therefore, the will-to-escape and chooses instead the stagnant life of vegetation because it is not, she finds, a "wholly undesirable life" (*D* 31). Such a state of spiritual lethargy would hardly be expected of a person who is called upon to make a significant decision.

One of the causes of Eveline's indecision is her infatuation with those "familiar

objects" (*D* 29), at which she takes a last look in the "close dark room" (*D* 33): "an old photograph of a priest and a print of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque." She does not know the name of the priest in the "yellowing" print who has left for Melbourne. He is another of Joyce's gnomonic characters of "missing priests." The priest who has abandoned his flock by moving out of Dublin still manipulates, as an absent authority, the vulnerable minds of his sheep. Such a subtle indictment on the treacherous function of the Irish Catholic Church is best expressed when we find the photo placed right above the "harmonium," which is broken. (*D* 30) The print of the French nun also betrays the dubious nature of corrupt religion. Because it underhandedly reproduces Victorian ideology of patriarchy by promising domestic security and blessing to those who willfully commit themselves to it. The dysfunctional nature of Eveline's household is the most striking evidence of the incapacity of Catholic Church. The promises Eveline made to the obsolete print are connected with those made at mother's death-bed in destroying her future. Her unconscious indoctrination by them is betrayed when she confesses that "she had never dreamed of being divided from those "familiar objects" (*D* 30).

Her indecision finds its pathetic justification when she recalls the promises she had made to mother at her death-bed, the promises to "keep the home together as long as she could" (*D* 33).

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* 33)

Eveline's attitude to her mother is quite ambivalent. She never wants to repeat the tragic pattern of her mother's life which culminates in insanity and untimely death: "She would not be treated as her mother had been" (*D* 30). Eveline senses that, if she stays with her father, she will become another victim of Mr. Hill. The death-bed promise, by reminding Eveline of her filial obligation, however, controls

her will and emotion. In this sense, Mrs. Hill, another gnomonic character in the story, absent but ever-present throughout the narrative, again takes advantage of the vulnerability of Eveline. And the method of mother's hypnotising of Eveline is repetition, which puts a spell on her confused mind. She thus hallucinates her dead mother and hears her insane cries, which so mesmerizes her that she starts trembling. Even if Eveline cannot decipher semantically Mrs. Hill's incantatory murmuring, she accepts it as an urgent warning not to leave home. However hard she tries to leave her home, it is undeniable that there lurks another voice at the back of her mind, one which continually weakens her determination. In this sense, we can say that the immediate source of paralysis lies in the family, or "each subsequent generation re-creates its own victimization." (Werner 38)

Now it is time to examine the relationship Eveline supposedly enjoys with Frank. Eveline is so fascinated by Frank's tough masculinity that she even likens him to a Greek statue with "a face of bronze" (D 31). In response to the positive invitation of Frank, which touches Eveline to the quick, "they had come to know each other" (D 31). Making the affair an amorous routine, Frank takes her out to the opera occasionally.

He took her to see *The Bohemian Girl* and she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theatre with him.

(D 31, italics mine)

Going out with Frank is, it seems, an exciting experience for Eveline, leading her into new emotional territories previously forbidden to her. Even if she feels "pleasantly confused," she cannot simply stop seeing him because it is an "excitement for her to have a fellow" (D 32). The "unaccustomed part" of the theatre probably means, on a realistic level, an expensive seat unavailable to members of Eveline's class, while it can also be, on a metaphorical level, a dark corner in which people usually do not sit. Going deeper, it can be a metonymic displacement for a part of her body, obliquely suggesting what Frank attempts to

do in the dark. In this context, her confession that “she always felt pleasantly confused” (*D* 32) at Frank’s sailor-song implies that she was sexually aroused. We can deduce such an implication from the violent signifier “unaccustomed” (Hart 52-53), and her ambivalent feelings expressed by “pleasantly confused.” Granting that an amorous involvement is hard to be elucidated in language, it is plausible that while Eveline feels sensational pleasure, there still remain some uncertain points that make her emotionally disoriented. If we take Mr. Hill’s threat as a sexual advance on his daughter, if we take seriously Eveline’s terror at home with “nobody to protect her,” and if we notice that she has just reached physical maturity, it is not improbable to suggest that she, feeling satisfied at the awakening of her heterosexuality, may well feel “confused” by her bodily response.

That Eveline’s affair with Frank is a prelude to a move away from Dublin continues the escape-motif in the narrative as expressed in the form of exotic splendour such as “tales of distant countries,” “the Allan Line,” “the Straits of Magellan,” “the terrible Patagonians,” and finally “Buenos Ayres” where Frank would like to settle with her. Eveline seems to be fascinated with all these exotic places to which her elopement with Frank will eventually bring her, rather than with marriage and its significance in her future. So, it is highly probable that Eveline mystifies Frank as a desirable lover after the manner of contemporary “pulp” fiction. We suspect Frank’s true character when she describes him as “kind, manly, open-hearted” (*D* 31). Eveline’s enumeration of Frank’s charm might well become more desperate, the more harsh becomes her situation. Attridge points out the illusory nature of Eveline’s perspective: it is not “a discovery but a moment of self-assurance, belonging to the blend of pride, excitement, and anxiety that comprises Eveline’s complicated mental state.” (Attridge 7)

The unreality of her projected flight with Frank is suspected, ironically, by her drunken father.

—I know these sailor chaps, he said. (*D* 32)

His self-assured comment is short but telling enough to subvert the validity of

Frank's discourse. Mr. Hill criticizes Eveline's romantic approach to Frank, casting doubt on Frank's lack of serious intention. Circumstantial evidence also contradicts Eveline's idealization of Frank. First, he came to Dublin "just for a holiday" (*D* 32), not to seek a wife. Second, Eveline is not the sort of a girl suitable for Frank who, as a sailor, must have met enchanting girls everywhere he went. Eveline is unattractive, passive and extremely improbable temptress: she is an object of bullying both at home and at store; "Look lively, Miss Hill, please" (*D* 30). Third, the unreliability of Frank's "frankness" is betrayed by his dubious behaviour at the final scene of departure. Granting that Eveline's response at the waterfront is surprising, could he not force Eveline to follow him with the "manliness" Eveline so admired? From this perspective, it is quite clear that Frank regards his relationship with Eveline as just a holiday affair. Frank might have another intention: to seduce and sell her somewhere in London. (Hodgart 46) In any case, that Eveline was wrong about Frank is the most poignant irony in the whole narrative.

Together with Eveline's illusion about Frank's identity, her dismal prospects of marriage also prevent her from having a clear perspective on her future. She again visualizes her matrimonial prospects with her smooth-talking Frank:

But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married-she, *Eveline*. *People would treat her with respect then.*

(*D* 30, italics mine)

Eveline's vague concept of marriage comes from her identification of marriage with escape. (It is an odd mistake, given her experience of her parents' marriage.) In other words, she seeks shelter rather than a place of happiness. She is so preoccupied with the idea of escaping from her entrapment that she recognizes neither the unreality of the project nor Frank's unreliability. Hence her distorted image of marriage as something "distant and unknown." Even if she wants to get respect through marriage, the equalizing process from an indefinite "she" to the

independent “Eveline” cannot be achieved from the outside. It should be sought after all within herself, which is of course too much for Eveline, a passive and self-abandoned girl. Her boast that she is “about to explore another life with Frank” therefore rings hollow (*D* 31).

Granted that Eveline faces a difficult decision, she is ironically entrapped again by those repressive forces from which she wishes to be emancipated. Lingering feelings about the bullying father, promises to her dead mother, and guaranteed food and shelter, disarm her determination. Of course, her emotional attachment to those acquaintances and familiar objects is quite understandable, but she should not be hindered by them from carrying out her project. At this point, therefore, we cannot help asking if she really wants to get out of her circumstances, if she really loves Frank, and if she seriously desires new life. Probably not. Accordingly, her repetitive imperative “Escape! ... escape!” sounds more like a reinforcement of her wavering determination. Rejecting resolutely the voice of her dead mother, Eveline finally makes up her mind to leave for freedom.

She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her. (*D* 33)

Yet, her logic of self-persuasion sounds vague. She just conceptually repeats what she heard people say about the necessity to leave. Eveline has a good reason to leave and has already accepted an offer. She should not be left behind: “Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home” (*D* 29). She eventually identifies her elopement with salvation by Frank. What she assumes as her salvation, however, is simply to be taken and folded in his arm, an amorous salvation at best, which she chooses to embrace at last.

Between the darkeningroom and the harbor scene, there is an inserted gap, “an extended ellipsis” which is part of Joyce’s narrative strategy (Ingersoll 505). Of course, the space in between is an effective design that substitutes for Eveline’s

actual movement. Eveline may never actually even show up for her rendezvous with Frank, which is highly probable if we take into account the consistently static style and tone of the narrative. Even when we hear those loud cries such as "Come!", "Come!", "Eveline! Evvy!" (D 34) they sound like her own siblings calling for her at home rather than Frank's desperate voice at the harbor. If she did not take a step out of her room, the final scene, we assume, is nothing more than a scenario for what is supposed to happen.

At the North Wall quay where they are supposed to take a boat, we find Eveline on the verge of psychic frenzy as the moment of her departure approaches. From the first scene onwards, the vicissitudes of time were acutely felt by Eveline moment by moment, evoking in the reader a sense of impending urgency: "Her time was running out" (D 32). The felt urgency gets even stronger by the "mournful whistle" and the "black mass of the boat." Dumb-struck, she keeps silent: "She answered nothing" (D 33). Her state of extreme anguish is expressed by her body which becomes "pale and cold." Pushed one step further, her internal organs revolt violently against the distressing confusion. It truly is a state of emotional entrophy when the equilibrium of her closed system is just about to explode from within. Unable to cope with the situation or to decipher the full significance of Frank's discourse, Eveline's anxiety reaches its climax and it explodes.

Her distress *awoke a nausea* in her body ... (D 34, italics mine)

She feels a palpitation again, as when she was threatend by her father's advances toward her: "All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart" (D 34). It is her body that feels the approaching disaster: "A bell clanged upon her heart" (D 34). In the state of extreme tension when her mind cannot work properly, her body becomes an expressive signifier that conveys her agony. This seems to be a natural result because, throughout the narrative, it is her bodily sensations that are keenly awakened by the tryst with Frank. Her body should tell her something, when her mind is overwhelmed. Hence the "nausea in her body." Resisting Frank's effort

to seize her, she adamantly clutches the iron railing: "No! No! No!" (*D* 34) Instead of being a Savior, Frank suddenly becomes a monster who can, she fears, drown her in "[a]ll the seas of the world."

Eveline's extreme distress, both mental and physical, is starkly captured by the image of a caged animal behind bars.

She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition. (*D* 34)

As the whole narrative has been carefully preparing the final image of Eveline as a helpless creature, readers are not taken aback that much. Actually the stagnant and vegetative way of life, a life of quiet deterioration, has been suggested from the first sentence. Hence the inhuman blankness of her face. Eveline's stony, unreadable look resembles that of an animal. She is not conscious of why she has come to the station and who is talking to her. We can say that she is possessed, albeit temporarily, by the unknown power. Leonard explores the other referents of Eveline's experience:

"Eveline" is a remarkable story because it presents a woman who, although profoundly powerless in both her household and her culture, nonetheless glimpses, and silently signifies, a supplementary world beyond the represented reality that excludes her. The poignancy of Joyce's characterization of her lies in the fact that he forces the reader to appreciate that her inability to represent her desire does not in any way exempt her from experiencing it. (37)

Eveline experiences a visionary world of her own which cannot be interpreted either by Frank or by readers. This temporary, trancelike state, however, can hardly be a substitute for her escape, nor can it be a moment of epiphany for her. If we understand epiphany as a moment of revelation that shines through the trivial gestures or speech of a character, Eveline's inscrutable look proves to be an illuminating moment for readers but not for herself. She recognizes nothing, which

is an optimal state of trance. Accordingly, we cannot expect what changes it will bring, either epistemologically or behaviorally, after she awakens from the state of hypnosis (Ingersoll 506). Ironically, Eveline's last action, either conscious or unconscious, turns out to be a highly effective form of resistance against Frank's discourse. For she blocks him both from reading in her "white" look any sign of communication and from taking her on board the steamer.

The narrative of "Eveline" is a straightforward expression of paralysis, and probably one of the most touching one in *Dubliners*. We can conclude our case study of Eveline by saying that hers is a case of momentary insanity: "Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition (*D* 34). If she cannot return to sanity, Eveline will become another victim of her environment, following Mrs. Hill. Strange to say, what I hear in Eveline's fervent prayer at the last moment—a prayer too late to do her any good—is her mother's crazy death-bed ejaculation (Tindall 25).

—Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun! (*D* 33)

(Kangnam University)

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Abstract**Body as a Signifier: Eveline's Nausea**

Hee-Whan Yun

Despite the positive message that Eveline at least tries to escape from Dublin, "Eveline" reads as one of the gloomiest stories among the Dubliners. The tedious visioning and revisioning process of the heroine takes up most of the narrative. Harrowed by continual victimization by her father, Eveline becomes a girl of emotional passivity and spiritual inertia. And an elopement with Frank to Buenos Aires suggests to her a will-to-escape and a new mode of life, totally different from that of the stagnation in Dublin. She cannot, however, simply make up her mind. Defining life in Dublin as not wholly undesirable, Eveline would not leave her home and bullying father. Infatuation with familiar objects at home and promises with her dying mother also prevents her from taking that step toward freedom. A girl of post-adolescence, however, Eveline's body shows a healthy sexual response to Frank's temptation. She feels satisfied at the awakening of her heterosexuality while feeling confused by her bodily arousal. Not knowing exactly the hidden motifs behind Frank's suggestion, she agrees to go with him. As the departure date comes around, she feels extremely disturbed and at the quay her psychic frenzy reaches the highest point. Caught in the state of emotional entropy when her closed system was about to explode from within, she looks like an helpless animal caged behind bars. When her mind cannot work properly in a state of extreme tension, she feels nausea. Nausea in this case becomes a highly expressive signifier: her body is telling her something that her mind cannot comprehend. Her body has become awakened as a feminine subject and now it speaks a language of resistance. We therefore recognize that Eveline who seems to continue her vegetative existence has not totally been caught up in the state of living death: at least her body is alive, awakened and is starting to speak its own language. That is the hope of this gloomy narrative.

■ **주제어** : Eveline, escape, indecision, nausea, signifier(이블린, 도피, 미결정, 구토, 기표)