

The “Nightmare” of the Great Famine: Guilt-Ridden Paralysis in *Ulysses*^{*}

Hye Ryoung Kil

I. The Shadow/Silence of the Famine

The Great Irish Famine or the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-52 is one of the most catastrophic events in the history of Ireland, which had reduced its population “by 25 per cent through a combination of death and emigration” by the early 1850s (Kinealy 16). The demographic decline continued to the 1900s, which had Irish population come to “approximately half of its pre-Famine size” in *Ulysses*’s time (16). It implies that the emigration of Irish people, one of the major effects of the Famine, continued over a half century after the disaster. James Joyce was himself an “emigrant,” before he was an exile, as Mary Lowe-Evans argues, seeking “greater economic security elsewhere” (3). It is odd against this background that the Famine had been nearly absent from Irish writing, historical or literary, until “the 150th anniversary of Black ’47”—referring to 1847, the worst year of the Potato

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Famine—in the wake of which the interest in the potato blight was “renewed” (Fegan 5). Terry Eagleton thus asks in his 1995 book *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, “Where is the Famine in the literature of the Revival? Where is it in Joyce?” (13).¹

Despite Eagleton’s remark on the Hunger, a series of work—on which this essay is based—focusing on Irish literature and the blight published in the last two decades reveals that the “silence” or “repression” of Irish writing is not entirely true. Above all, there is “a plethora of literature about the Famine” by the Famine generation or its first generation who witnessed the tragic event, only much of it being viewed as “insignificant” (Fegan 9). The Famine literature produced by the first generation, from James Clarence Mangan’s poetry to Michael Davitt’s history of Ireland,² is significant as the literature served as the source of information and imagination for the second-generation literature of the Famine, which includes Joyce’s work. The work of the second generation, those who only heard and read about the horror, however, is quite distanced from the first generation’s. While the first generation wrote compulsively about what was happening during the blight, the next generation, suffering from guilt as the descendants of the survivors of terrible hunger and the death of loved ones, was not able to express as bluntly as the previous generation. The horror of the Famine then, as a “traumatic legacy” (Estevez-Saa 28), is rather alluded to in Joyce, which this essay intends to explore focusing on guilty allusions, and completely ignored in many of the Revival writers. In this perspective, the “silence” of the Hunger, inseparable from guilt or “[a]genbite of inwit” (*U* 1.481)—“remorse of consciousness” (Gifford 22)—was an

1) Eagleton does acknowledge Joyce’s “allusions to the Famine” though, assembled in Chapter 1 of Lowe-Evans’s *Crimes against Fecundity: James Joyce and Population Control*.

2) James Clarence Mangan (1803-49) was an Irish Romantic poet whose famous poems, including “Dark Rosaleen,” “Siberia,” and “Nameless One,” were written during the Famine. Michael Davitt (1846-1906), who founded Irish National Land League in 1879, published *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland; or the Story of the Land League Revolution* in 1904, in which his experience of the Famine as a child is depicted.

Irish reaction to the unspeakable disaster, the shadow of which still hung over Ireland in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The guilt of the later generation for the unspeakable past, effectively silencing it, hints at uncomfortable truths about the Famine, what actually happened to the Irish Catholic majority and the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy during the time of dire hunger. The Protestant Ascendancy, who had nearly exclusively constituted the landed class in Ireland since penal laws, in general, did not suffer as much as the majority of Irish Catholic population during the blight. Despite the failure of the potato crop, which was “the only crop that could sustain the Irish,” who were allotted only “the minimal amount of land” for their own use, “[other] crops used to pay” for the landlord’s rent “remained healthy during the Famine” (Lowe-Evans 16). Furthermore, about “70 percent” of landlords were comprised of “absent landlords,” living away from Ireland, which means that perfectly good crops and cattle were shipped to England every day while starving Irish tenants watched (16-17). This history is repeatedly evoked by the scene of a “drove of branded cattle” moving to “the Liverpool boats” in *Ulysses*, over which Bloom contemplates, “Roastbeef for old England. They buy up all the juicy ones. And then the fifth quarter lost. . . . Comes to a big thing in a year” (*U* 6.385-96, 14.567-68).³ In this sense, “There was famine in the midst of plenty,” as L. Paul-Dubois notes (qtd. in Lowe-Evans 16). Inevitably, many of the Revival writers, who belonged to the land-owning Anglo-Irish Protestants, would not remember the tragic event which their immediate ancestors had survived mostly intact. The cultural nationalists Yeats and Lady Gregory thus ended up ignoring “Ireland’s colonial history entirely,” seeking “instead to base the nation’s claim to identity on folklore and legend” (Dwyer 41), as in *The Countess Cathleen*.

In a different manner, the Irish Catholic majority, to whom Joyce belonged, were not free from guilt for the Famine history either. Notably, they complied with

3) Younghee Kho discusses this image of cattle moving and the Famine in *Ulysses* in her PhD dissertation “*Let Go, Let Fly, Forget*: The Famine, Food, and Regulation in James Joyce and Samuel Beckett (71).

the Catholic Church leaders, who urged the peasants not to abandon conscience and pay the landlord's rent, while they were starving. Here's a quotation clearly demonstrating the case from Davitt's *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*. Davitt in his chapter on "The Great Famine" depicts "John O'Connell, M. P., eldest son of the Liberator," reading aloud to a Dublin audience a letter "from a Catholic Bishop in West Cork, in 1847":

[In the letter] this sentence occurred, "The famine is spreading with fearful rapidity, and scores of persons dying of starvation and fever, but the tenants are *bravely* paying their rents." Whereupon John O'Connell exclaimed, in proud tones, "I thank God I live among a people who would rather die of hunger than defraud their landlords of the rent!" . . . He was not even hissed by his audience; so dead to every sense and right of manhood were the Irish people reduced in those years of hopeless life and of a fetid pestilence of *perverted morality*. (qtd. in Lowe-Evans 20; emphasis added)

The Irish "bravely" paid their rents while they were dying of hunger, which was praised by their leaders such as the son of Daniel O'Connell, who successfully campaigned for Catholic Emancipation in 1829 removing many restrictions imposed on Irish Catholics since the seventeenth century. The Church's inculcation of the scrupulousness of conscience among Irish peasants, allowing for the continuous shipment of produce to the English landlords which could have saved their lives, led the Irish to develop a defective conscience or "perverted morality" (Lowe-Evans 21). They were "so dead to every sense and right of manhood" that they were indifferent to or even complicit in the suffering of others as well as their own. In fact, the moral perversion of Irish peasants, when exposed and contrasted to the noble soul of the Countess Cathleen in Yeats's 1899 play *The Countess Cathleen*,⁴ was what made the angry audience protest it for being "anti-Irish," while Joyce "clapped vigorously" after the performance (Lowe-Evans 21; Ellmann 67).

4) Given the response of the 1899 audience, Yeats kept revising the play, and the final version was published in 1912.

The Countess Cathleen, first staged in 1899 as the inaugural play of Irish Literary Theatre, generated a “splendid quarrel” which demonstrated how sensitive the Irish society still was to the Famine at the turn of the nineteenth century (Ellmann 66). The play, which Yeats based on an Irish legend during a famine, features the countess Cathleen who sells her wealth and soul to the devil to save her starving tenants who have sold their souls for food. Strongly resembling the mystical symbol of Ireland Kathleen Ni Houlihan, also referred to as the ‘poor old woman,’ Cathleen is eventually redeemed and ascends to Heaven. Although *The Countess Cathleen* was set in the legendary time of hunger, the audience found it offensive, as it called forth the recent potato blight. The Irish peasants were made into wicked people who would sell their souls for a bowl of soup, while the landowning countess, representing the land-tenure system which “contributed directly to the causes of the Famine” (Day 114), was presented as a saint who rescued them in the play. As Adrian Frazier notes, Yeats’s play “transvalue[d] the greatest experience of the Irish, turning a Protestant [landlord’s] moral catastrophe into a miracle of benevolence, and one of the world’s remarkable cases of a people’s devotion to a [Catholic] faith into wholesale infidelity” (qtd. in Day 115). The selling of a soul, around which the play revolves, was unavoidably reminiscent of ‘souperism’: many poor Catholics were driven to take the soup on the condition of converting to Protestantism during the blight. And those who “took the soup” were regarded “as traitors to their ancestral faith” even by the descendants of the Famine survivors (Day 113), which is implied when Bloom remembers his father who committed suicide: “They say they used to give pauper children soup to change to protestants in the time of the potato blight. Society over the way papa went to for the conversion of poor jews” (*U* 8.1071-74).⁵ It was only natural that the audience, including Joyce’s friends, raged at *The Countess Cathleen*, no matter what period the play was set in.

But that was one thing about the characteristics of Ireland, the moral apathy or “perverted morality” of the people, that Joyce agreed on with Yeats, who

5) See Kho 67, for the significance of Bloom’s memory in the context of souperism.

represented the Literary Revival. While the Revival writers focused on the folkloric image of Ireland as the ‘poor old woman’ crying for help to save her people, Joyce chose to spotlight “the special odour of corruption” “float[ing] over” the people – recalling Davitt’s phrase, “fetid pestilence of perverted morality,” quoted above – which he intended when writing the *Dubliners* stories (*SL* 79). As in the 1902 play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* set in the 1798 Rebellion, written by Yeats and Lady Gregory in a more nationalistic tone, the ‘poor old woman’ Cathleen, representing an independent Ireland, asks the newly-married young man to leave and fight to recover her home unjustly taken from her. When he agrees and leaves to fight for her, the old woman changes into a beautiful young queen. The mythical ‘poor old woman,’ however, cherished as the symbol of Irish nationalism led by the Revival, did not fit the historical reality of Ireland. Rather, the ‘poor old woman’ image, along with frequently appearing scenes in the Revival literature of “the lone woman keening for her dead family, animal noises in an empty field, and . . . the shadowy figure lying in a ditch” (Cusack 136), served to fix the English perception of Ireland as perpetually struggling in the shadow of the Famine. In this context, Stephen muses over the “poor old woman,” the Revival’s national emblem, as “a third” master – besides “an English and an Italian” – who forces the Irish young man to “[k]neel down before [her],” sacrifice his life for her; she is a “crazy queen, old and jealous” of the other two masters (*U* 1.403, 1.638-41). In other words, the Revival literature’s notion of Ireland as the ‘poor old woman’ – with a heroic youth to sacrifice his life for her – evading the reality of post-Famine Ireland, did not agree with Joyce’s.

Still, Joyce sympathized with the sense of absence and loss repeatedly evoked in the Revival writing, as Yeats’s poem “Who Goes with Fergus?,”⁶) associated with Stephen’s mourning for his mother who “cr[ie]d in her wretched bed” for the words “*love’s bitter mystery*” when he “sang it alone in the house,” appears in the

6) Joyce was so impressed with the lyric, sung in the 1899 performance of *The Countess Cathleen*, that he actually “set the poem to music and praised it as the best lyric in the world” (Ellmann 67).

opening chapter of *Ulysses*, arousing the feeling throughout the novel: “Where now?” (1.239-41, 1.249-54). The feeling of loss associated with an unspeakable past which, say, reeked of the “special odour of corruption” was, in fact, part of Irish culture at the turn of the century; as David Lloyd remarks, post-Famine Irish culture was “constituted around and marked by an unworked-through loss” (qtd. in Goss 80). Joyce shared with the Revival this sense of the presence of an absence, a silenced past. Yet if a silenced past merely broods over the Revival literature, it is suggested as impregnated with guilt in Joyce, as the losses of Stephen’s mother and Bloom’s father and son Rudy all somehow are implicated in guilt (Wurtz 110). As Bonnie Roos argues that the “inability to speak” of a loss serves “as a metaphor for Ireland’s Famine” (160), it can be said that Joyce speaks about the Famine by suggesting that the inability to speak about it links with guilt, that memories of the Hunger are blocked by guilt, which has paralyzed Irish consciousness. Joyce thus defines Dublin as “the center of paralysis,” declaring that with *Dubliners*, he has “taken the first step towards the spiritual liberation” of his people from the paralysis (*SL* 83, 88). In this perspective, this essay will examine allusions to the Famine in *Ulysses*, focusing on Stephen’s paralysis and paralysis-inducing guilt personified by the ghost of his mother.

II. The Famine and Joyce

Before delving into the consciousness of guilt related with the Famine in *Ulysses*, it should be noted that Joyce was familiar enough with the tragic event not to directly deal with it. Many of the Revival writers were “close . . . to the Famine,” for that matter, as their fathers or grandfathers were “central Famine figures” (Whelan 61). For one, Lady Gregory’s husband William was the author of the infamous Gregory Clause or the Poor Law Act in 1847, which facilitated the eviction of small tenants, increasing the number of workhouses and establishing public soup kitchens for the first time since the blight started. The Poor Law

allowed the landlords to evade the burden of relief rates they had to pay for small tenants living on their land by forcing them to “choose between obtaining relief [entering the workhouse] and holding onto their [small tenanted] land” (Kinealy 14). Besides, Lady Gregory, born Isabella Augusta Persse, was “acutely sensitive” to “the Persee family’s reputation as proselytizers” during the blight (Shovlin 36). For Joyce’s part, his father was from Cork, where the blight had begun and where “one of the famous soup kitchens” was located; Cork was also “the most popular port” for the emigrants (Lowe-Evans 13). Cork, especially West Cork, was one of the worst affected areas—as the bishop’s letter quoted in Davitt was from West Cork—for which the *Cork Examiner* served as a “favourite” source of reports on the blight for Dublin and London newspapers (Fegan 54). Thus, little Stephen—representing young Joyce—“len[ding] an avid ear” when his father and his granduncle spoke of “the subjects nearer their hearts,” such as “the [Famine] legends of their own family” from “Cork,” begins to have “glimpses of the real [post-Famine] world about him”; Stephen later detects in the eyes of his college friend Davin, “the peasant student,” “the terror of soul of a starving Irish village” (*P* 62, 180, 181).

Moreover, Joyce was interested in Galway in the west of Ireland, the most blight-destroyed area. Galway was the city where his wife, Nora Barnacle, grew up of course, but it was also where “Joyce’s [ancestors’] country” was located, the Joyce family being “one of the city’s storied fourteen tribes” (Shovlin 2). Joyce was so interested in the story of Myles Joyce, who was “executed by the English hangman” in 1882 while “vehemently protesting his innocence in Irish,” and whose “ghost was believed to haunt Galway gaol,” that he wrote about it in the essay “Ireland at the Bar” in 1907 (Whelan 62-63). Joyce’s attachment to Galway, however, was not only concerned with his personal or family connections but Irish colonial history, which is particularly revealed in the story “The Dead.” The song “The Lass of Aughrim” which Gretta hears at the Morkans’ party reminds her of the young boy Michael Furey who used to sing it, and who “died for [her]” after she left Galway long ago; watching her crying for the dead lover, Gabriel Conroy

thinks "how poor a part he, her husband, ha[s] played in her life"; finally, he decides to "set out his journey westward" while snow falls "upon all the living and the dead" (*D* 217-220). The song associated with the boy who died for love ultimately leads the "West Briton" Gabriel to turn to the west of Ireland, "where dwell the vast hosts of the dead" (185, 220). Significantly, the town of Aughrim, located near Galway, is "closely associated with" the Battle of Aughrim in 1691 which, ending the Williamite war, "sealed English domination of Ireland" (Cheng 143-44). In this sense, "The Dead," with the song calling forth the dead, specifically "the defeated Irish dead" against the background of Galway, hints at Joyce's "deeply felt sense of loss" regarding "moments of Irish catastrophe": the Aughrim battle in 1691, the Rebellion in 1798, and the Famine in 1845 (Shovlin 11). It would be difficult not to assume, then, that Joyce was well informed about the potato blight, which had ravaged Galway.

In addition to his personal acquaintance with the Famine-stricken regions of Cork and Galway, there was a wide range of literature available on the Famine, as previously mentioned, which could make Joyce familiarize himself with the tragedy. For one, Davitt's book, with the "Great Famine" chapter in it, was one of the books Joyce had with him in Trieste (Lowe-Evans 8). Davitt's influence on Joyce is, above all, detectable in their common hostility to the Catholic Church, which exacerbated the suffering of the Irish during the blight. As Davitt blames the Church for making the Irish starve, as in the previous quotation, so does Joyce through Bloom's criticism of Catholic "theology" and "the priests": "Increase and multiply. Did you ever hear such an idea? Eat you out of house and home. No families themselves to feed. Living on the fat of the land"; "the priest spells poverty" (*U* 8.32-35, 16.1127). Another important parallel between Davitt and Joyce, which constitutes the main argument of this essay, is the atmosphere of "perverted morality" among the Irish—also quoted before—particularly demonstrated in the enforcement of the Poor Law leading to the eviction of at least half a million people during the Famine. The Irish were not always victims; as Kinealy notes, "The large farmers who benefited from the availability and sale of

cheap land [due to eviction] were also Irish and, sometimes, Catholic” (qtd. in Roos). Davitt, whose parents were ejected when he was five, thus recalls “[t]hat eviction and . . . the deaths from hunger and the coffinless graves on the roadside” as the root of his political convictions in the Famine chapter (qtd. in Fegan 17). The phenomenon of moral perversion, leading to the indifference of the Irish to their own people’s eviction, hunger, and death, is referred to in “Cyclops” regarding “the citizen” whom “the Molly Maguires” are looking for “to let daylight through him for grabbing the holding of an evicted tenant” (*U* 12.1314-16).⁷ The apathy, paralysis, or absence of conscience in the Irish drives Stephen to profess that he will create “the uncreated conscience of [his] race” (*P* 253).

In fact, these words connoting lethargy, such as “paralysis”—which appears on the first page of the first story “The Sisters” in *Dubliners*—were “readily available in the stock of responses” regarding “events and attitudes surrounding the Famine” (Lowe-Evans 42). For example, Stephen Gwynn’s book which Joyce reviewed in 1903 defines Ireland’s problem as “the lassitude of anaemia” (qtd. in Lowe-Evans 22). More directly, a paralysis as an effect of the blight and continual starvation is vividly depicted by A. M. Sullivan remembering 1847 when “all was lost”: “Blank stolid dismay, a sort of stupor, fell upon the people . . . the cottier and his little family seated on the garden-fence gazing all day long in moody silence at the blighted plot that had been their last hope. *Nothing could arouse them*” (Sullivan 85; emphasis added). According to the folklore, self-entombing within the house was the only way of burial for the starved and paralyzed people, who could not afford a coffin: “when all hope was extinguished,” they got into “the darkest corner and die[d] where passers-by could not see them and the cabin was generally pulled down upon them for a grave” (qtd. in Ulin, “Buried” 208). Bloom is literally right in this sense: “The Irishman’s house is his coffin” (*U* 6.822). These events and

7) The Molly Maguires, originally formed in the seventeenth century, was “almost a generic term for anonymous groups of Irish terrorists” by 1904; Irish groups terrorizing landlords in the land-reform struggles in the latter half of the nineteenth century were often called the Molly Maguires (Gifford 356).

attitudes brought about “psychological changes” in Irish people “that were manifest in an indifference to death and suffering” (Ulin, “Buried” 208).

The psychological condition of paralysis was also contributed to by the implementation of public soup kitchens, established by the Poor Act and lasting for a brief period in 1847.⁸⁾ Public soup kitchens, the most notorious of which was built in Dublin, served as “the final humiliation for many [Irish] nationalists” in a series of the British government’s apathetic responses to the Famine (Fegan 62).⁹⁾ The Dublin soup kitchen, built by the French recruit Soyer near Phoenix Park, fed the Irish “a soup incapable of keeping a newborn cat alive”; “[a]t the sound of a bell, one hundred of the destitute entered and, using chained soupspoons, consumed what was called [the soup]”; “[e]ach cycle took six minutes; a thousand people were fed every hour” (qtd. in Lowe-Evans 18, 19). The government-led soup kitchens all over the country demonstrated “so huge a demoralization, so great a degradation,” that “the feeding of dogs in a kennel was far more decent and orderly”; “never, never would [Irish] people recover the shameful humiliation of that brutal public soup-boiler scheme” (Sullivan 88-89). Seeing people eat as though “animals feed” in the Burton restaurant (*U* 8.652), Bloom thus properly imagines “communal kitchen years” during the Famine:

All trotting down with porringers and tommycans to be filled. Devour contents in the street. . . . After you with our incorporated drinking cup. . . . Rub off the microbes with your handkerchief. Next chap rubs on a new batch with his. . . . Children fighting for the scrapings of the pot. Want a souppot as big as the Phoenix park. . . . Hate people all around you. (8.704-16)

Feeding “in the street,” rubbing the “incorporated drinking cup” with “[one’s] handkerchief,” and “fighting for the scrapings of the pot” strongly evoke Soyer’s

8) See Chap 1 in Kho, which well analyzes the relationship between Joyce’s paralysis and public soup kitchens in examining stories in *Dubliners*.

9) For economic reasons, British Parliament judged that “there must be no interference with the natural course of trade [Famine]” (qtd. in Lowe-Evans 17).

Dublin soup kitchen (Lowe-Evans 18-19). Significantly, Bloom's envisioning reveals how the humiliation of public soup kitchens entails "hat[red]" among the destitute. As Sullivan laments, it would be impossible for the Irish to recover such humiliation as making them hate their own starving people, especially when the British government suddenly decided to close public soup kitchens after a few months. The English feared "creating a culture of dependency" more than the "consequences of hunger" (Kinealy 13). The feelings of humiliation, hatred, and helplessness, incurred by the public soup-kitchen project which demonstrated the way the English treated the Irish, and when added to hunger and diseases, all contributed to a paralysis of Irish conscience.

III. Guilt-Stricken Paralysis: The Ghost of the Famine Memory in *Ulysses*

As discussed so far, it can be safely assumed that Joyce was well informed about the Famine and that, deploying the term "paralysis" as the condition of Ireland, he drew on "a popular and long-standing rhetorical convention" which "gained force and frequency" after the disaster (Lowe-Evans 42). Yet Joyce's paralysis is entangled in guilt, rooted in a sense of responsibility. As early as in the beginning of Joyce's first novel, a feeling of guilt is imprinted in little Stephen's consciousness when his mother and aunt warn him, "O, Stephen will apologize. . . . O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes. Pull out his eyes/ Apologize/ Apologize/ Pull out his eyes" (*P* 8). The little boy does not understand why he must "apologize," why he is guilty for saying that he is going to marry Eileen when they grow up. Even before learning the historical conflicts between Irish Catholics and Anglo-Irish Protestants, which deepened after the Famine, the Catholic boy is assumed to know his responsibility to the Catholic community and admit guilt for (potentially) failing the responsibility by saying that he is going to marry a Protestant girl. In this way, a sense of guilt, originating in

historical responsibility to his Catholic people, is conceived in Stephen who does not feel responsible for the defeated history of Catholic Ireland: he is not "going to pay in [his] own life and person debts [his ancestors] made" (*P* 203). He would not be responsible for the history, specifically the Famine, its shadow still darkening the world around him with "the country full of rotten teeth and rotten guts" and him suffering himself "[h]unger toothache" (*U* 1.412, 3.186), which entails guilt for not being obligated to his own people.

In the beginning of *Ulysses*, Stephen thus appears paralyzed, as if he had "g. p. i. . . . [g]eneral paralysis of the insane" (1.128-29), between the resolution to be independent from the lingering history of the Famine, in order to create the "uncreated conscience" of his race, and the guilt for abandoning the Catholic race, represented by his mother. His mother May Dedalus died from liver cancer after suffering for her whole married life having "[f]ifteen children," "[b]irth every year almost," because otherwise, "the priest wo[uld]n't give the poor woman the confession, the absolution" (8.31-33). Opposing the Church, which taught meticulous morality and, ironically, allowed for its perversion by propagating starvation and death during the Famine, Stephen "crossed her last wish" to kneel and pray at her deathbed, although resenting Mulligan's remark that his mother is "*beastly dead*" (1.212, 1.198-99). As Mulligan ridicules, "He kills his mother but he can't wear grey trousers" (1.122), Stephen's conflict between the desire and guilt of not being subject to his Catholic community and its disastrous history leads to paralysis. Joyce thus notes on Stephen in *Ulysses*, "He has a shape that can't be changed" (qtd. in Ellmann 459).

"History," in this sense, is "a nightmare" for Stephen "from which [he is] trying to awake," yet "from which [he] will never awake" (*U* 2.377, 7.678), "the nightmare [being] the Famine" (qtd. in Wurtz 108). In fact, Stephen's desire to be objective with Irish history, to forge the conscience of his people, parallels Haines's: "You are your own master. . . . We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame" (*U* 1.636-49). It is notable that the Englishman also suffers a nightmare, "raving all night about a black panther .

. . . raving and moaning to himself about shooting a black panther,” which puts Stephen “in a funk” (1.57-61). The nightmare about the “black panther,” symbolizing the Irish Famine, which the Englishman wants to blame on history, signifies both Haines’s and Stephen’s guilt of distancing themselves from the traumatic history. The guilt, “[a]genbite of inwit,” remains “a spot” however they “wash and tub and scrub” it off (1.481-82). No doubt, the “black panther” is imprinted on Stephen’s mind as he recalls it in the midnight scene (15.4930). Guilt-stricken and paralyzed, Stephen asks himself, “What if that nightmare gave you a back kick?” (2.379). A “back kick” is enacted as Stephen is haunted by his mother’s ghost, representing the Irish Catholics who died “unfairly,” throughout *Ulysses*.

The ghost of Stephen’s mother, symbolizing his guilt of not identifying with the unjustly dead, is also envisioned in the beginning of the book, which renders relevant the contention that “*Ulysses* is all about the Irish Famine” (Roos 162). “Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes” (*U* 1.102-05). The horrible image of the “wasted body” of the mother, re-described a little later with nearly the same wording (1.270-72), and appearing again, “noseless, green with gravemould,” with “bluecircled hollow eyesockets” and “toothless mouth” in “Circe” (15.4157-62), recalls not only May Dedalus dying from liver cancer but the Irish starving and dying during the Famine (Ulin, “Famished” 41). T. P. O’Connor records an observation: “In cases succeeding exhaustion from famine . . . the appearances were very peculiar—the fever assuming a low gastric type . . . skin discoloured and sodden . . . a loathsome, putrid smell emanating from their persons, as if decomposition of the vital organs had anticipated death” (qtd. in Ulin, “Famished” 40). The mother’s ghost does appear as one of the “[f]amished ghosts” Bloom imagines in “Lestrygonians” (*U* 8.730). Furthermore, Stephen curses at the ghost, “Ghoul! Chewer of corpses!,” swearing the same in the midnight fantasy, “The corpsechewer!” (1.273-78, 15.4214). Stephen’s remark of the ghost

eating corpses evokes the most deeply-hidden memory of the Famine, as John Mitchell reports on the tragedy that "insane mothers began to eat their young children, who died of famine before them" (qtd. in Ulin, "Famished" 39), which literally re-connects to Stephen's curse in *A Portrait*, repeated in *Ulysses*, that "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow" (*P* 203; *U* 15.4582-83).

The reports that some starving Irish people resorted to eating the dead flesh comprise the most repressed memory of the Famine. In fact, more common were corpses damaged by hungry animals, particularly dogs and rats. Carrion-eating is evoked in many scenes in *Ulysses* as Ulin discusses ("Famished" 34, 38): Mulligan calls Stephen "poor dogsbody" (1.112), implying that he can be food for dogs one day; in Stephen's riddle the "fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush" "with merciless bright eyes scraped in the earth, listened, scraped up the earth, listened, scraped and scraped" (2.115, 2.149-50); and a dog encountering the "carcass" of another dog "sniffed, stalked round it, brother, nosing closer, went round it, sniffing rapidly like a dog all over the dead dog's bedraggled fell . . . poor dogsbody . . . poor dogsbody's body" (2.348-52). The dog "dabbled and delved. Something he buried there, his grandmother. He rooted in the sand, dabbling, delving and stopped to listen to the air, scraped up the sand again with a fury of his claws, soon ceasing, a pard, a panther, got in spousebreach, vulturing the dead" (2.360-64). The dog eating a man's or his "brother" dog's body and the fox unearthing his grandmother's body, especially the panther "vulturing the dead," all recall the time of the Hunger, when everybody was desperate to survive.

In a similar manner, Bloom contemplates the body as meat or food for another life in "Hades": "It's the blood sinking in the earth gives new life. . . . Well preserved fat corpse . . . invaluable for fruit garden. A bargain. By carcass . . . three pounds thirteen and six" (6.771-75). Significantly here, as Ulin notes, Bloom's thought of "corpsemanure" leads to "decomposing" bodies at "[c]harnelhouses": "Turning green and pink decomposing. . . . Then a kind of a tallowy kind of a cheesy. Then begin to get black, black treacle oozing out of them. Then dried up. Deathmoths" (6.776-80). Bloom visualizes the decomposing process in detail, which

calls forth a horrible image of the Famine, particularly the winter of 1846-47, when with the “crowded soup kitchens and the overcrowded workhouses,” “places like Skibbereen became charnel houses” (Coogan 116). Still, the corpse serves as food as demonstrated by an “obese grey rat toddl[ing] along the side of the crypt”; the rats “would make a short work of a fellow,” whose body is “[o]rdinary meat for them” (*U* 6.973, 6.980-81). Bloom’s thinking then turns to people: “A corpse is meat gone bad. Well and what’s cheese? Corpse of milk” (6.981-82). People eating cheese, which is milk gone bad or corpse of milk, are no different from corpse-consuming rats—which love cheese as well—which also refers back to the Famine years when everyone had to fight for subsistence. Bloom is thus fearful when watching people eat as if “animals feed”: “Every fellow for his own, tooth and nail. . . . Eat or be eaten. Kill! Kill!” (8.701-03).

The deadly hunger and accompanying diseases led to dehumanization in Irish life, which subsequently engendered guilt in the survivors. According to folk memory, a hungry mother cherished a potato more than her daughter she had just buried, without a coffin, as she exclaimed holding up the potato, “Well, thank God that it wasn’t you I buried today”; the woman who gave her the potato “never forgot that remark until her dying day” (qtd. in O’Gráda 201). A fever that starving and dying people had was feared as well, so “when a person died, not even his nearest relation would darken his door” (qtd. in O’Gráda 211). Particularly, the following account shows how the survivors felt guilty afterwards:

[My uncle] got the cholera, and he and the entire household succumbed. They perished together. . . . Somebody went to their cottage door, and could see that they were all dead. All they did then was to set fire to the thatch on the cottage, burn it, and knock in the walls. I remember myself in autumn-time how we used to pick blackberries near that spot—because there were lots of bushes where the house used to be—my mother warning us to keep away from the place. “Stay away from there,” she used to say, “or you will be harmed.” (qtd. in O’Gráda 211)

As the narrator’s mother warns the children to “[s]tay away” from the spot where the cottage was burnt down with dead people lying inside, unburied, the survivors feared they would “be harmed.” In other words, they felt guilty because they did not or could not help the sick or bury the dead, even when they were their close relatives. It was common in many places that the dead were not buried properly as people continued to die. A trench was made in the graveyard, which was never closed, and even those “who were not dead at all but close to it” were “let down among the corpses” to “die there” (qtd. in O’Gráda 202).

In this context, the unburied corpse can easily provoke the Famine memory the Irish feel guilty about, which renders them particularly careful with the dead (Ulin, “Famished” 42). Not surprisingly, the funeral or burial of Paddy Dignam makes the central event of *Ulysses*, during which Bloom notes, “Extraordinary the interest they take in a corpse” (6.14). He, the Jew-Irish, has a practical view of burial, as he says, “Bury him cheap in a whatyoumaycall,” or “Bore this funeral affair” (5.15-16, 5.468). It is interesting, though, that his pragmatic mind recalls the common practice of burial during the Famine years, “[s]hovelling [the dead] under by the cartload double quick” (6.515). Bloom even thinks of “a handsome bier with a kind of panel sliding” to let down the dead so as to avoid “a waste of wood” (6.816-17). In fact, Corny Kelleher, the undertaker’s assistant, is seen talking to the “bloody povertystricken Breen,” “trying to sell him a secondhand coffin” (12.1062-63, 12.1082-83), which evokes the desperate time again. By contrast, Dignam’s funeral ceremony is carefully carried out, with Simon Dedalus proudly remarking, “That’s a fine old custom. . . . I am glad to see it had not died out” (6.36), which hints at the time the custom disappeared and the dead were abandoned like animal corpses (Ulin, “Famished” 30). Dedalus takes care to observe the burial ritual, stopping Bloom from showing him the paper while they follow the carriage with Dignam’s corpse to the cemetery: “No, no. . . . Later on please” (6.156). Tom Kernan, too, is sensitive about the burial ceremony, mentioning the pastor “with reproof”: “The reverend gentleman read the service too quickly, don’t you think?” (6.659-60). As Ulin notes (33), while the Jew Bloom considers that it is “[m]ore

sensible to spend the money on some charity for the living” (6.930), the Irish care more about the dead than the living, as Dedalus spends “for a shave for the funeral” while his children are starving (10.699). The Irish suffer guilt for the dead who were not buried properly, whose bodies were exposed and damaged during the Famine.

From this perspective, the ghost of Stephen’s mother reminds him of a sense of guilt he feels for the people who died and were buried “unfairly,” the victims of the Famine (Ulin, “Buried” 111). The ghost, personifying his guilt of distancing himself from the dreadful history, embodies the Famine as the repressed, forgotten past. The ghost, like a “shamewounded” soul (3.422), requests Stephen to “[r]epent” (15.4198, 15.4212), while he wants to forget the memory: “No. . . . Let me be and let me live” (1.279). It is no wonder that Stephen defines a “ghost” as something that “has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners” (9.147-49). The Famine, embodied by the guilt-evoking ghost, “has faded into impalpability” through the “absence” of the memories or through “change of manners” in remembering the tragedy. How the Famine memories were forgotten or perverted is revealed in an account of an old Cork man who recalls the 1870s when he was young:

The people who were old when I was young were never tired discussing how some of those taking advantage of the poorest of their neighbours used to offer the rent of their farms to the landlords and grab their farms. . . . Several people would be glad if the famine times were altogether forgotten so that the cruel doings of their forebears would not be again renewed and talked about by neighbours. (qtd. in O’Gráda 211)

The Irish who feel shame and guilt for what their ancestors did to their own people would rather have the Famine years “altogether forgotten,” which engenders “a version of famine history in which the descendants of those who survived all become vicarious victims” (O’Grada 212). This way, the Catholic Irish, like the citizen in “Cyclops,” recall about the Famine only what they can blame on the

English or Anglo-Irish Protestants: “[T]he Sassenach tried to starve the nation at home while the land was full of crops. . . . Ay, they drove out the peasants in hordes. Twenty thousand of them died in the coffinships” (*U* 12.1369-72). Their own flaws that contributed to the tragic history, such as their submission to the Church to the extent of giving up on everything, including their conscience, which led to hurting their own people, have been forgotten. In this context, the Protestant Deasy notes to Stephen: “I remember the famine in ’46. Do you know that the orange lodges agitated for repeal of the union twenty years before O’Connell did? . . . You fenians forget some things. . . . I have rebel blood in me too. . . . We are all Irish, all kings’ sons” (2.269-80). Deasy is even concerned about “the foot and mouth disease” (2.321-22), the outbreak of which may well lead to another tragic history in Ireland where agricultural lands were turned into “stockyard and dairy for Great Britain” in the early nineteenth century (Lowe-Evans 17). Yet the editor is only “scornful” of the report Deasy has prepared on the disease (*U* 7.619). The Catholics forget their failures as they “have forgotten Kevin Egan” (3.263), an exile in Paris symbolic of the failed Fenian attempt. It is natural that Mulligan speaks of the death of Stephen’s mother, symbolizing the starving and dying Catholics during the Famine: “I don’t remember anything” or “I can’t remember anything” (1.184, 1.192). For him, the Famine is “a beastly thing and nothing else,” which “simply doesn’t matter” now (1.206-07).

The Famine memory which has been repressed and forgotten thus arises as a ghoulish ghost eliciting guilt, as Ulin argues. As a matter of fact, May Dedalus’s is not the only ghost haunting and recalling the Irish’s own failures in *Ulysses*. Charles S. Parnell, the Protestant Home Rule leader destroyed by the Irish themselves—as Joyce notes in “The Shade of Parnell,” “They did not throw him to the English wolves; they tore him to pieces themselves” (*CW* 228)—is rumored to be alive as Wurtz notes: “Some say [Parnell] is not in that grave at all. That the coffin was filled with stones. That one day he will come” (*U* 6.923-24). The cabman affirms the rumor: “One morning you would open the paper . . . and read: *Return of Parnell*” (16.1297-98). In addition, Paddy Dignam appears to one of his

acquaintances who doesn't know "he's dead" and says, "I saw . . . just now in Capel street . . . Paddy Dignam. . . . Sure I'm after seeing him not five minutes ago . . . as plain as a pikestaff" (12.314-24). Dignam, who died from "apoplexy" in a drunken stupor (17.1255), emblemizes the drinking problem of the Irish. They drink excessively as if suffering "[g]eneral thirst," as evidenced by Bloom's reflection on the prevalence of pubs in Dublin: "Good puzzle would be cross Dublin without passing a pub" (4.129-30). The Irish in a state of stupor or paralysis through excessive drinking are as good as the dead, which in reverse renders "[Dignam's] ghost" "no more dead than [his friends] are" (12.326-31).

Ulysses is a Gothic, in this sense, in which ghosts and ghost-like characters cohabit; "the process of becoming-ghost" narrated in *Dubliners* has been "completed in *Ulysses*" (Wurtz 110). The ghosts haunting the Irish, who are as paralyzed as the dead, personify the Irish's own failures and guilt about the repressed and silenced past. Arguably, as Joyce "abandons realism" and enters into gothic fantasy, "allusions to the tragic event [Hunger] become frequenter" (Estevez-Saa 29). In the fantasy chapter "Circe," indeed, the potato blight is more directly alluded to, as Lowe-Evans notes: the "shriveled potato" Bloom carries all day in his trouser pocket is referred to as his "[p]oor mama's panacea," the Irish Catholic mother Ellen Higgins's "talisman," and the "daughters of Erin" chant, "Potato Preservative against Plague and Pestilence, pray for us" (*U* 15.201-02, 15.1313, 15.1952); "Old Gummy Granny" with "the deathflower of the potato blight on her breast" appears to Stephen, who cries, "The old sow that eats her farrow!" (15.4578-83). These allusions and references to the blight, along with ghosts—including those of Bloom's father and his son also appearing in the chapter—representing the shameful past, suggest that there is a gap in Irish history, which is repressed and haunts the Irish. The repressed memories of the Famine, the trauma of which is "so great" that it cannot be "representable within the bounds of realism," remain a gap, "not-fully-processed material," in Irish history (Goss 80).

Ulysses points to this gap of the Famine in Irish history with ghosts, representing the buried past, haunting the Irish who feel guilty about it. The Irish

need to recover the repressed past, remember the Famine, not to repeat the tragedy. Yet the guilt they have for the terrible memories blocks the history altogether or changes it into one in which they were only victims. Inevitably, the Famine memories, as embodied by the ghost of Stephen’s mother, recur as a nightmare, requesting the Irish to “[r]epent” or remember what they have done. If only “trying to awake” from the nightmare, without facing its truth—their own failures involved in the nightmarish history—they “will never awake” from it, as Stephen understands. With the Famine memories missing, Irish history remains a nightmare, like a “disappointed bridge” that cannot reach the past (*U* 2.39). And the Irish remain paralyzed with guilt, not learning from the past. Their history is just “a tale like any other too often heard,” referring to “their land [as] a pawnshop” (2.46-47).

(Yeungnam University)

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Abstract

The “Nightmare” of the Great Famine: Guilt-Ridden Paralysis in *Ulysses*

Hye Ryoung Kil

The Great Famine of the 1840s, one of the most catastrophic events in the history of Ireland, had been nearly absent from Irish writing until the 1990s when Eagleton noted that the Famine was hardly referred to in the Revival literature or Joyce. It can be said that the Anglo-Irish Protestants, leading the Revival and belonging to the land-owning class, evaded the tragic event which their immediate ancestors had survived mostly intact. Joyce, the Irish Catholic, was not free from the historical trauma either, which makes him only allude to it in his work, particularly *Ulysses*. The Irish Catholics were not completely innocent victims but often complicit in their own tragedy. The Church inculcated them with the scrupulousness of morality, which made them starve rather than withhold the landlord's rent during the Famine. Their submissiveness to the Church led them to be indifferent to the suffering and death of others as well as their own. Thus, the Irish feel a sense of guilt for the horrible memories of the Famine, which inhibits them from remembering the history altogether. The memories come back only as a nightmare or a ghost, like the ghost of Stephen's mother in *Ulysses*. The mother's ghost, evoking the starving and dying during the Famine, symbolizes the guilt of the Irish Catholics, as well as Stephen's personal guilt of declining his mother's last wish. Stephen, only trying to awake from the nightmare of his mother's ghost without confessing his guilt, remains paralyzed. With the Famine memories missing, Irish history remains a nightmare from which they will never awake.

■ **Key words** : James Joyce, Great Famine, *Ulysses*, nightmare of history, guilt, paralysis, ghost

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